

National rail strikes July 2022:

the passenger experience

August 2022

Summary

On Wednesday 27 July and Saturday 30 July 2022 passengers travelling by train experienced disruption as a result of a strikes by members of the RMT (27) and Aslef (30) unions.

On 27 July many routes were closed completely and those with a service had fewer trains than usual, with first and last services significantly later/earlier than normal. Trains also started running later than usual on Thursday 28 July.

The strike on 30 July affected seven train companies, which as a result provided an extremely limited service if any. Companies not affected ran a broadly normal Saturday service.

It is worth noting that a number of sporting fixtures took place on 27 and 30 July. Among others, twenty-over international cricket (27 July at Bristol), the semi-final of the women's European football championship (27 July at Milton Keynes), the Commonwealth Games (in and around Birmingham from 28 July) and 30 July was the first Saturday of league football fixtures in England and Scotland, and round one of the Welsh Cup.

This report describes Transport Focus's activities and findings relating to the 27 and 30 July strikes.

It is an obvious point, but in overall terms the passenger impact varied significantly depending on whether the route somebody wished to use was or wasn't open, and the times at which they wished to travel. For some the impact was limited, but for others it was significant and this report provides a number of examples in passengers' own words.

In terms of steps the industry should take to further mitigate the impact on passengers during subsequent strikes, we encourage:

- sustained focus on addressing the recommendations we made in our [report](#) published 11 June 2022, among which were that the industry should:
 - consider how to compensate season ticket holders who do not travel on non-strike days because of a late start to the service, or do travel on a strike day (or the day following) but arrive significantly later than normal as a result of a late start to the service
 - clarify in the National Rail Conditions of Travel that if a passenger is entitled to a refund for their unused outward ticket, they can also have their money back on the ticket for their return leg (or vice versa)

- increase efforts to help passengers understand when the service will start later or finish earlier than normal, including on the day following strike action. This should include publicising the last trains back.
- careful consideration of the additional issues highlighted on pages 13, 18 and 19 of this report.

Transport Focus activity

Before the strikes

Transport Focus set out to ensure:

- clarity of information for passengers, including about the trains that would and would not run
- that arrangements to refund or compensate passengers who would no longer travel, including season ticket holders, were fair and clear.

On Friday 22 July we reviewed train company and ticket retailer websites regarding information about 27 July, and on 27 July we did the same in relation to 30 July. We were aware that journey planners might not be correct at that stage, but felt passengers could reasonably expect other information to be accurate. We provided feedback to relevant organisations where we felt that improvements were needed.

On 27 and 30 July

Transport Focus sought to:

- understand the impact of strike action on those travelling and those who could not
- provide useful insight that allowed the rail industry to, where possible, improve the passenger experience and passenger information on subsequent strike days.

We shared a summary of our findings with senior rail industry stakeholders, individual train companies and other organisations. We updated the dedicated area of our website, highlighting key issues and activity. We supported this with social media updates.

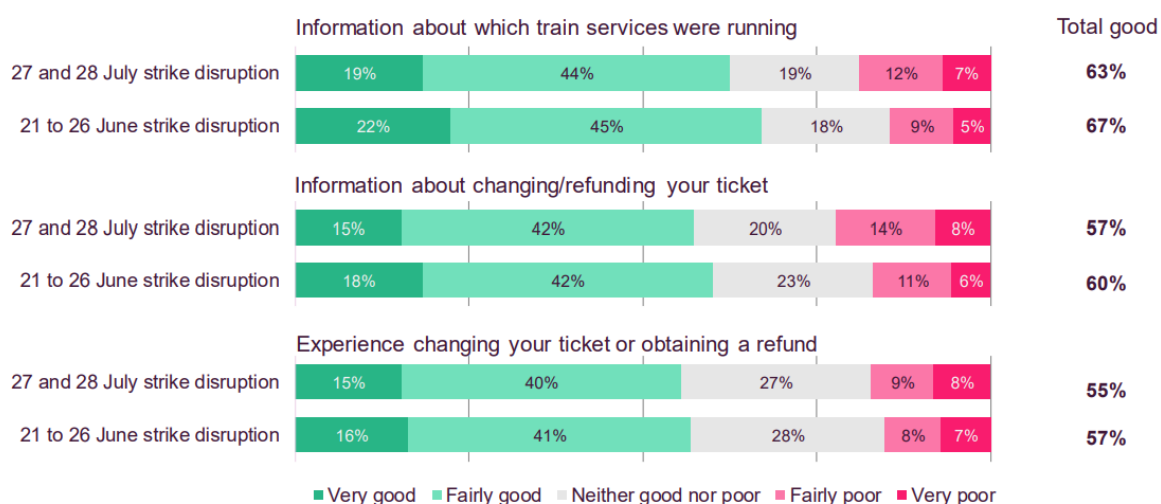
We repeated and published findings from another pre-strike intentions and information survey, and from our survey of experiences on 27 and 30 July among those who did and did not travel.

Insight

We gathered insight in five ways.

1. Between 22 and 24 July we surveyed over 2000 people to understand their [travel intentions for 27 July](#). We shared the findings with industry on 26 July and published the following day.
2. We obtained feedback through the week from people across England, Scotland and Wales who were intending to travel by train on 27 and 30 July.
3. In relation to both dates, we asked members of our Transport User Panel about the impact on them and, if they had travelled, asked them to report back about their experiences.
4. Our staff provided extensive [feedback from stations across England, Scotland and Wales](#).
5. Between 29 and 31 July, we [surveyed 2000 people about their experiences during the strike on 27 July](#) (published on 3 August).

Ratings of information about train services and arrangements for refunds/ticket changes are similar to June



27 July rail strikes: passenger experience and information survey. Asked of those whose travel went ahead as they had planned, intended but did not use the train as a result of the strike disruption. Excludes those who said: 'Don't know/Not applicable'. Base sizes from top to bottom = 242, 401, 207, 341, 155, 280.

What did we find?

Although improvements are still needed in some areas, with Government confirming similar arrangements as for the June strikes the refund and redress arrangements generally felt reasonable. We found that information on websites was slightly better than during the June strikes (and it had been good then). Nevertheless, in our pre-strike survey we found that slightly fewer passengers felt the information was good than in June.

- It was a mixed picture in terms of the refund process – for some it was simple, others not.

“I was going to my office for work. I bought Advance singles so emailed to request refund a week before the strike, which came through promptly.”
Intended to travel by train on 27 July but did not

“Had purchased tickets long before strike announced. Trainline were excellent and efficient at refunding money for ticket.”
Norbiton to Bournemouth, intended to travel by train on 27 July but did not

“Two Advance Firsts from Wigan to Euston as 1st leg of a business trip from Heathrow. Cancelling was a pain as the Avanti website won't allow so I had to write and it took ages. I still haven't received the money!”
Wigan to London, intended to travel by train on 27 July but did not

- It was clear that many people had heeded the message to travel only if necessary, although we got a sense that the railway was slightly busier than during the June strikes. On 30 July, although a significant proportion of the railway was unaffected by strikes and running normally, it appeared that many were deterred from using trains even on unaffected routes. With Aslef no longer in dispute with ScotRail, this is an example of a journey that probably could have been made without difficulty:

“I had planned to travel from Alness to Beauly to watch the Macaulay cup semi-final between Kingussie & Lovat, two of the top shinty teams this year. Just to south of Beauly Belladrum was on so using the buses was not an option due to traffic congestion. As I could not be sure that the trains would run and in particular getting home I cancelled my trip. Kingussie won 1-0
Intended to travel by train on 30 July but did not

- While there was crowding in places, capacity appears to have generally met demand on the routes that were open. The exceptions tended to be on Saturday 30 on routes where one operator was running trains but another wasn't.

"Trans Pennine was cancelled so had to travel on Cross Country without reservations. Extremely busy."

Newcastle-York, 30 July

"The train did run almost to time but was heavily overcrowded due to West Midlands Trains being on strike and running no trains. Many people did not get seats and trains were very unpleasantly full."

Wellington to Birmingham, 30 July

- We detected that some people are losing faith in the reliability of the railway generally, perhaps only partly related to the strikes.

"I had not bought tickets and the train operators involved were not on strike, but as the system is not exactly robust at the moment I decided not to risk it. It was purely for leisure. I went somewhere else by car. The railway needs to up its game if customers are to be retained."

Intended to travel by train on 30 July but did not

The passenger impact

As during the June strikes, it was clear that for many passengers the impact was minimal – they could either work from home or defer a trip with few consequences – but that for others the impact was severe.

We have included some of the feedback received below, grouped into categories. For reasons of space, we have not included the large number of 'I travelled and it was fine' or 'I just changed my plans to another day' type of comments that we received.

Impacts on work

"Had no impact as I stayed at home and used Zoom."

Intended to travel by train on 27 July but did not

"Unable to get to work. Had to take a day's holiday which is impacting on my holiday entitlement."

Intended to travel by train on 27 July but did not

“Travel was planned from Bath to London for a business meeting. Instead of travelling on the 27th I travelled on the 26th and home on the 28th, having to stay in a hotel for two unplanned nights.”

Bath to London, intended to travel by train on 27 July but did not

“Should have been at work...had to lose a day's pay at my minimum wage retail job!”

Intended to travel by train on 27 July but did not

“I had planned to go into work that day for a big project. So many of the attendees were impacted by the strike that we postponed the whole event to the following week”

Intended to travel by train on 27 July but did not

“Couldn't get home from work, had to walk 4 and a half miles as couldn't afford a taxi.”

Intended to travel by train on 30 July but did not

“I had a shift at the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham. Luckily I hadn't purchased my tickets. I had to replace a 10 minute train journey with 1 hour on two buses which meant a 5:30 start not impressed.”

Intended to travel by train on 30 July but did not

Impacts on personal business

“Was planning to travel to Liverpool. Merseyrail was not on strike but affected by Network Rail strike. This time there was a very limited service which did not stop at either of my local stations. The Arriva buses are also on strike so there was no public transport at all here. The bus strike (since 20 July) has not been mentioned but it means we are marooned here.”

Intended to travel by train on 27 July but did not

“Had a hospital appointment with my Consultant. Couldn't get there. Appointment will have to be rearranged.”

Intended to travel by train on 27 July but did not

“I was attending the Euro 2022 Semi Final and wanted to catch the train to avoid the traffic and make more of a day of it with my daughter.”

Intended to travel by train on 27 July but did not

“I had tickets to Goodwood races and I couldn't go. I was extremely disappointed”

Intended to travel by train on 27 July but did not

"I had planned to visit an elderly relative on that day - she is living independently but is over 100 years old so we try to visit as often as possible. There was no other realistic alternative of getting from Rochford to Earls Court so I was unable to go."

Intended to travel by train on 27 July but did not

"Plans were to see a show at the theatre (Jersey Boys). Obviously we had no means of getting there and were not able to see the show. I've applied for a refund online for the train tickets (5) but obviously lost the ticket money for the show. As yet I've heard nothing from TPE for the ticket refund of the train."

Thirsk to Leeds, intended to travel by train on 27 July but did not

"I had to go to Edinburgh for a few days and planned to travel on Wednesday afternoon after dialysis, which I managed to change from my normal afternoon session to the morning. I managed to book a bus, but all the direct buses were full. I got a later, stopping bus and arrived mid evening"

Intended to travel by train on 27 July but did not

"I had planned to go to Birmingham to watch the 11am Commonwealth Games T20 cricket, it was not possible to do the journey so I lost the cost of my match ticket."

Intended to travel by train on 30 July but did not

"Was due to travel for a football match in Darlington but didn't risk it in case the trains that did run were too full."

Intended to travel by train on 30 July but did not

"I would have travelled to a Welsh Cup football match somewhere in Wales (there were numerous possibilities, reached via either GWR or TfW services) but in view of disruption I was forced to abandon those and remain local in Cardiff"

Intended to travel by train on 30 July but did not

"I was attending the Commonwealth Games but I couldn't get into Birmingham in time. I wanted to travel by train as I don't drive and the bus would of taken me far too long so I had to miss events I have paid for"

Intended to travel by train on 30 July but did not

Trips requiring alternative means of transport

"I cycled the distance (10 miles) instead"

Lancing to Brighton, intended to travel by train on 27 July but did not

"I needed to get to Manchester airport for a flight. Instead of buying rail tickets I had to drive for three hours in horrible traffic."

Malton to Manchester Airport, intended to travel by train on 27 July but did not

"The strike had a great impact on my journey as it took me almost 3 hours each way, taking several buses and taxis at the end. It was also very costly. I would have spent 20 pounds, instead I spent over 45."

Birmingham to Kidderminster, intended to travel by train on 27 July but did not

"I Intended to travel from Widnes to Urmston by train and catch a bus from Urmston station to Old Trafford to watch a cricket match. As there were no trains on the Widnes to Urmston route I drove from Widnes to Partington and caught the 255 bus to Old Trafford. This obviously took longer and was inconvenient as I prefer not to drive."

Widnes to Urmston, intended to travel by train on 27 July but did not

"I was intending to travel to London from Taunton on the 26th, and return on the 27th. I cancelled both journeys and took my car to London instead."

Taunton to London, intended to travel by train on 27 July but did not

"Had tickets for T20 cricket international and accommodation booked. Travelled by National Express coach."

Birmingham to Bristol, intended to travel by train on 27 July but did not

"I had Intended to travel from Romsey to my home near Inverness. Although SWT stated their trains were running, the main journey from London to Inverness was cancelled by LNER. They offered a refund, no problem. I anticipated this and booked an EasyJet flight from Luton to Inverness"

Romsey to Inverness, intended to travel by train on 27 July but did not

"Planned to travel from Warrington Bank Quay to Leicester (via Birmingham) to the FA Community Shield game. Had to drive to Leicester instead, as unable to get the return from Warrington to Birmingham. Ticket purchased for the Birmingham to Leicester leg but unable to cancel as that journey went ahead therefore I lost the ticket fee of around £16."

Warrington to Leicester, intended to travel by train on 30 July but did not

Long-term implications when passengers try other modes

We received some comments from passengers forced to use alternative modes, who reported their experience to have been preferable to travelling by train. This is worrying for the railway in the long term.

“Planned to travel by train - changed plans and went by car, turned out really well!

Intended to travel 27 July

“I was visiting a friend for a special birthday in Hastings and had planned to take the train from Blackheath. I drove instead. It was quicker, more comfortable, and cheaper than if I'd taken the train! I won't bother with the train again for this journey in future!”

Blackheath to Hastings, intended to travel 30 July

Impacts on passengers after a strike has finished

“Was late for a meeting on the Thursday because of limited service. They said on the day it was a Sunday service but it definitely wasn't!”

“I had actually planned to travel on Sunday 31st July as I knew there would be no trains on 30th. However, First Great Western cancelled ALL trains on the Oxford to Hereford route on 31st - blaming disruption caused by the strike on the previous day. This makes no sense.”

“I am a Birmingham 2022 volunteer but my shifts were cancelled due to the strikes. On 31 July my shift was not cancelled but I was still unable to get to it due to knock on impact of the strike the previous day.”

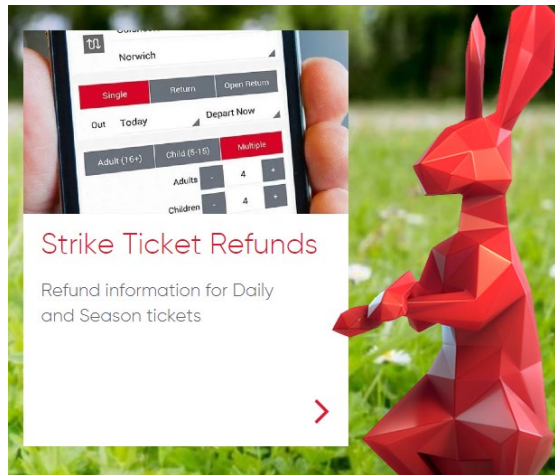
Information online

Our website observations showed that, overall, information online had improved slightly from an already good position during the June strikes.

That said, we drew some organisations' attention to issues they had corrected in June, but had again overlooked this time around. Three of the areas we pushed on were:

- ease of navigation to refund/compensation information
- signposting alternative public transport options
- stating explicitly that if you bought two single tickets to make a return journey (on different dates) and one day is affected by industrial action and the other not, you can claim a refund on both unused tickets.

Greater Anglia had a prominent link to refund/compensation information from its website homepage, which we consider to be good practice.



Regarding alternative options, passengers said:

“More information around alternative modes of travel that could help support my journey could have been done with prominent signage and posters in front of or near the entrance doors ways, possibly having signs to nearby public transport locations. For example, Thameslink trains were still operating so advising the customers to take a bus to Chatham where they could then get a train to London.”

Maidstone to London, intended to travel 30 July

“I would like the operator to highlight alternative transport options on their website or work with other train companies/transport providers to arrange extra services and accept tickets on their services on strike days.”

Painton to Digby & Sowton, intended to travel 30 July

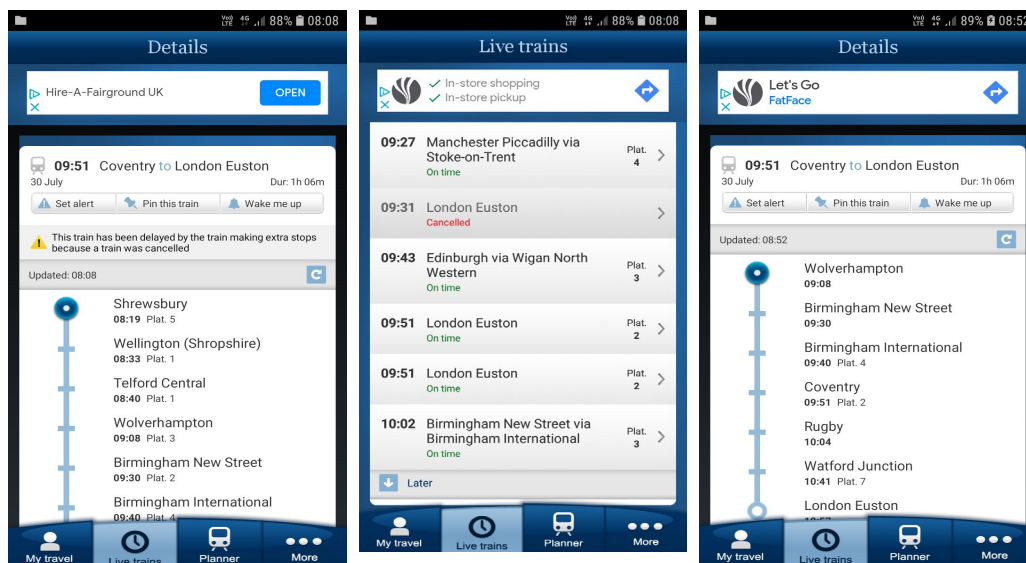
Problems with timetable data?

There was some evidence that timetable information in journey planners may have been wrong after the point that revised timetables were/should have been in downstream systems.

“I checked on the revised National Rail Planner - it indicated that the 09.46 from Edenbridge Town to Uckfield was running. When I got to the station it was completely closed. I called Southern and National Rail the next day - they confirmed that the said train wasn't running. They are investigating as to why the National Rail Planner at 08.30 that morning said it was.”

Edenbridge Town to Uckfield, intended to travel by train on 27 July but did not

We saw examples of trains that were duplicated on live departure boards. In this case, on 30 July, the original schedule (train starting at Shrewsbury) and the revised schedule (train starting at Wolverhampton) were both showing.



We also saw seemingly rogue trains showing on information screens; in this case a service from Disley to Buxton on 27 July.



And on routes where no trains were running, it appears that some passengers did not notice that the trains showing in journey planners were for the day *after* the strike. A Transport Focus staff member at Bolton reported:

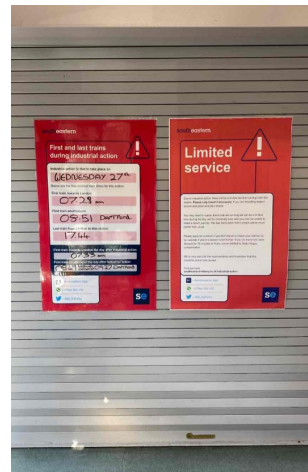
"I had got to the station about 8.45am and there were about 7 people stood outside waiting for the station to open. A couple of people told me there is a train running just after 9am – when they showed me, I noticed that they were looking at a time for tomorrow 28 July, not today, suggesting the website was not clear."

We encourage the industry to consider how it can:

- identify errors in published data and correct them promptly so passengers are not misled and inconvenienced.
- make it more obvious in journey planners when the trains shown are for the day *after* the passenger has asked about.

Information at stations

- We saw evidence that the industry has acted in relation to our previous recommendations – but, frustratingly, only in pockets. There was plenty of good practice, but not universally applied.



For example, information about first and last trains. Some operators made good use of customer information systems and printed information to help passengers understand when first and last trains would run. Others did not.

"I felt I had to find out information myself online about the start and end times for services on my route as this was not effectively publicised on the posters at the station."

Flitwick to Luton, travelled 27 July

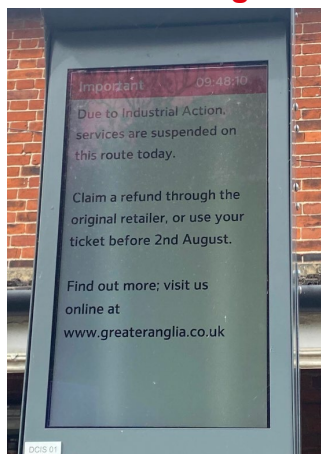
"I believe that the boards should mention when the first and last trains will run. If not for Trainline, I may have attempted travel on the day and realised I had no way to get back home as I would have been travelling after 8 pm and the latest trains in Euston were at 4/5 pm."

Euston to Wolverhampton, travelled 27 July

- Some operators made efforts to caution passengers, before they bought a ticket, to check they could actually get to their destination. Others did not.



Timetable change communications



We saw examples of clear communication of the industry-wide position of 'claim a refund or use your ticket before 2 August'.

However, passengers were frustrated that they did not receive earlier notification of cancellations:

"I had booked ticket to return from holidaying Blackpool. I was told by trainline on Monday [25th] that my journey had been cancelled. Had to return a day early. At the stations it was bedlam!! Trains were cancelled, one was over an hour late due to overcrowding."

Blackpool to Glasgow, originally booked for 27 July

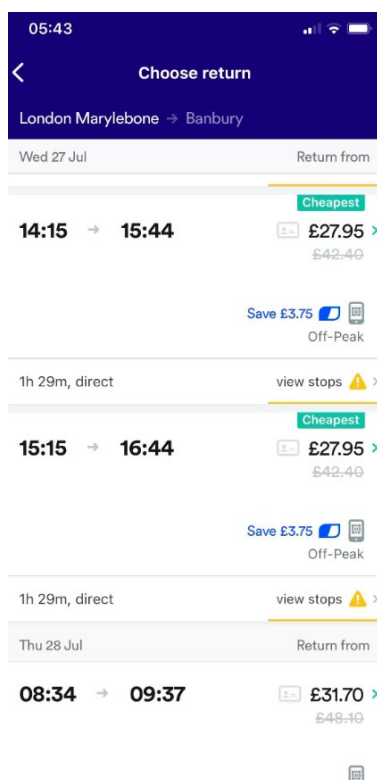
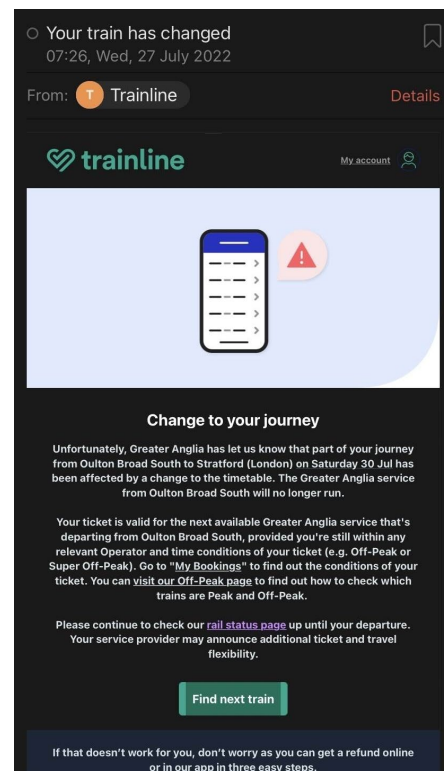
"If another train strike takes place in the future, I think that more notice needs to be given to travellers with the option of a full refund, so they can sort alternative options with more notice. I think it is unfair to expect customers to lose out on an admin fee when it is not the customer's fault the train is not running."

Oulton Broad South to London, intended to travel 30 July and advised of cancellation on 27 July.

"I don't think this strike was as well organised as the previous one. The timetable was only updated on the Trainline app on the Monday, by then I had already made work plans and had meetings booked in and it was too late to cancel. Then the night before the timetable changed again. On the previous strike, there were still trains available from 5pm onwards, meaning I could still get home of the evening. It felt more restricted this time around and I had to pay for a hotel to stay in London."

Banbury to London, travelled 27 July but had to return the following day

This passenger underlined the early last train point by providing a screenshot showing the last departure from London at 1515.



We encourage the industry to consider how it can advise passengers earlier that trains will not run (and that refunds are available), given that strike dates are known at least 14 days in advance.

Ticket refunds and compensation for season ticket holders

As we noted earlier, with Government confirming similar arrangements as for the June strikes, the refund and redress arrangements generally felt reasonable.

One gap we have not previously highlighted is that weekly season ticket holders are entitled to no compensation on strike days, even if their line has no trains at all.

There is an argument that, given the 14 days' notice of a strike, passengers buying a weekly season ticket should have been aware of the situation. But on the other hand, not everybody *is* aware.

Even those who are aware do not necessarily know the extent of the disruption at the point they need to purchase - revised schedules are generally published four days in advance. For some, a weekly season ticket is still the best option, even if they cannot/are dissuaded from travelling on some days.

And then there is the straightforward fairness. Is it right to charge the same price for a week's travel if there are days with no trains? Is it right to compensate those able to pay up front for a month or longer, but not those who pay week by week?

One passenger said:

"I needed to take early train to work which was not running so had to book a taxi to London which cost me £100. I did have weekly ticket already but couldn't claim 'delay repay' because it is only valid for 'timetable of that day'."

Although we haven't detected a clear pattern, it seems that some passengers are ending up paying administration fees when amending tickets or seeking refunds – and others perceiving that fees apply. For example:

"I had intended to return to Manchester on Wed 27 July, having bought my Advance ticket for a specified train before the strike was announced. On enquiring at Deansgate station ticket office, I was told that this ticket was not transferable so I changed my ticket for the Tuesday, 26 July and paid a £10

rebooking fee. I later received an email to say that in fact this ticket COULD have been used.”

We encourage the industry to consider how it can:

- extend to weekly season ticket holders the ‘a day’s money back’ compensation that is available to monthly and annual ticket holders who do not travel on a strike day
- achieve greater ‘cut through’ with passengers that refunds and amendments do not attract a £10 fee if they are as a result of the strikes
- ensure that front line staff correctly understand when tickets can be used and administration fees have been waived.

Other areas for improvement

- On dates when some train companies’ services are affected and others not, passengers would welcome greater clarity about which parts of the railway are operating.

“It would be helpful if the train companies explicitly detailed, when national strikes occurred in some parts of the country, which companies would not be affected by the strike. For example in my area on Saturday 30th July South Western Railway and some Southern services which also cover Havant and Portsmouth are not affected.”

Havant to Portsmouth, intended to travel by train on 27 July but did not

- Train companies should be conscious that, as ticket retailers and station operators, they are often providing a service for passengers of other operators:

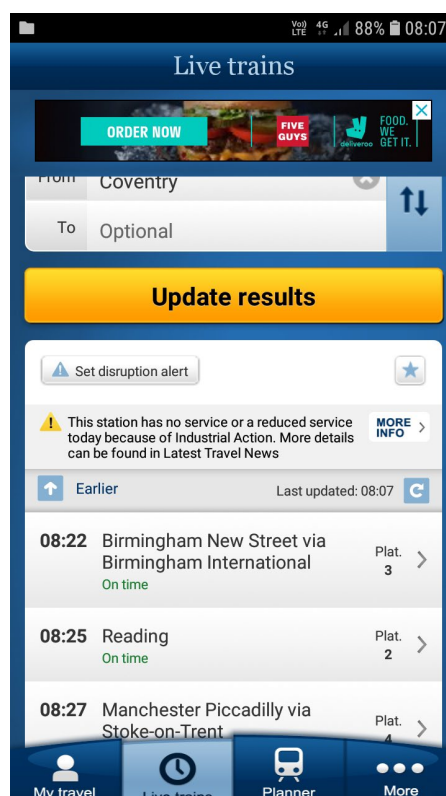
“Like the last strike, it seems that basic information about ticket acceptance was not made available to all staff members. When I purchased my ticket at the ticket office, I asked if my Northern only ticket would be valid on other services today. The correct answer is yes, as there is cross ticket acceptance on strike days. However, the member of staff at the ticket office did not know whether this would apply to Northern as she said she had only got emails regarding the position of LNER (York is an LNER station).”

Leeds to York, 27 July

These information screens, at Paignton on Saturday 30 July, correctly said that there were no GWR trains, but omitted to mention that CrossCountry was running normally.



- Is the message that 'this station has no service or a reduced service' as helpful as the industry can manage? Which is it? Reading that caution, should a passenger trust or distrust the information subsequently presented?



- While an understandable approach, using QR codes on posters as an alternative to displaying the information itself risks excluding some people:



"All the posters declaring strike action advised visiting the Scotrail website or using a QR Code to access the Avanti West Coast Line website. I felt this was unfair to those who do not have smartphones or are not computer literate. There was no information displayed advising of revised timetables, first or last trains or advising which services were not running."

Linlithgow to Edinburgh, travelled 27 July



Transport Focus is the operating name of
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