

National rail strikes: the passenger experience – August update

September 2022

Summary and recommendations

Passengers travelling, or intending to travel, by train experienced disruption as a result of a strikes by members of the ASLEF (13 August) and RMT unions (18 and 20 August).

The strike on 13 August affected nine train companies, leading to an extremely limited service, if any. Train companies not affected ran a broadly normal Saturday service. On 18 and 20 August 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 the day after the strikes.

This report is the third in a series summarising Transport Focus's activities and findings relating to the rail strikes in 2022. It provides examples of the impact of the strikes on people in their own words. It also follows up on some of the issues identified in our reports on the [June](#) and [July](#) strikes. We use evidence gathered from passengers and our own observations to highlight instances where welcome progress has been made since the first strikes. For example, information at stations to warn passengers before they buy a ticket appears more widespread. However, there also remain frustrating pockets of poor practice where information at stations is unacceptable and further efforts are needed.

This report is intended to help and encourage the rail industry to focus on steps that could further mitigate the impact on passengers during future strikes.

We encourage sustained focus on addressing the recommendations we made in our previous reports.

On information

- 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.
- Make it more obvious in journey planners when the trains shown are for the day after the passenger has asked about.
- 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.
- 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.

On ticket refunds and compensation

- 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.
- Give weekly season ticket holders the same rights to compensation as monthly and annual ticket holders who do not travel on a strike day.
- 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).

Transport Focus activity

As for previous strikes, 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 gathered insight as follows:

1. Between 12 and 14 August we surveyed more than 2000 people to understand their travel intentions for 18 and 20 August. The [findings](#) were shared with the industry and then published on 17 August.
2. We asked members of our Transport User Panel about the impact of the strikes on them and, if they had travelled, asked them to report back about their experiences.
3. We obtained mystery shopping feedback from people across England, Scotland and Wales who were already intending to travel by train on the dates affected by strike action.
4. Our staff provided extensive [feedback](#) from stations across England, Scotland and Wales and on information on industry websites. We shared a summary of our findings on 19 August with senior rail industry stakeholders and published this alongside other updates on our website.
5. Between 22 and 23 August we surveyed 2000 people about the information provided about the strikes on 18 and 20 August. We published the [findings](#) on 26 August.

What did we find?

The impact on passengers

As in previous strikes the passenger impact varied significantly depending on whether the route somebody wished to use was or wasn't open, the times at which they wished to travel and how easily they could change their plans. For some the impact was limited, but for others it was very significant. Two notable themes emerged.

Very significant impacts on some people

As in previous strikes the impact on some people, especially those who could no longer travel, was very significant. We heard how the strikes had affected livelihoods, meant additional costs, or caused people to miss life events.

"I had a morning shift and an afternoon shift on that day. I cancelled the morning shift as I could not guarantee that I would be there on time, following the hangover from the National Rail strikes from the day before, and the absence of an alternative on London Underground."

Travelled from Sydenham to Farringdon on 19 August

"I was due to run a theatre production and had to let everyone down. I had bought a train ticket and paid for a hotel room. I will not be paid for the work and the hotel room cannot be refunded, so I have lost around £130 (or more if the train refund does not materialise)."

Had intended to travel by train from Edinburgh to Harrogate on 18 August

"The train to London was on time, staff were available at the ticket office, information was good. We were originally due to return home later that day, but the last train left London at 5.30pm. We could not get back to the station in time for this. So we opted to stay overnight in London and return the next day. This meant our trip to the theatre cost us an extra £300!!"

Travelled from Thorpe Bay to London Fenchurch Street on 20 August

"I was due to attend the cricket Test match between England and South Africa at the Lords Cricket Ground... I cancelled my plans altogether and did not travel at all since there was no other method of transport that I could use. I had not bought train tickets, but of course I had a ticket for the test match which is not being refunded so I have lost £110 on that ticket."

Had intended to travel by train from Rochester to London Victoria on 18 August

“Was going to my grandson's wedding, had to cancel the whole weekend.”
Had intended to travel by train from Brentwood to Torquay on 18 August

Potential long-term impact of the strikes on passengers' choices

We heard further comments from some passengers who, at least for now, appear to have lost confidence in the reliability of rail travel, or report they have tried alternative modes and found it preferable.

“I cancelled my London trip completely as it would have been too stressful and difficult to get there. Theatre trip cancelled and hotel. I will not be booking by train for anything at all in the near future as not a reliable service.”

“I was planning to spend time with my daughter and grandchildren until after the bank holiday. When I went to book tickets I found none were available at a price that I could afford... With not knowing when the next strike will be staying home was the bet for now. I will not travel by rail until the strike action is over unless I have no other choice.”

Had intended to travel by train from Didcot Parkway to Paignton on 18 August

“Having been warned of potential problems with my journey on Network Rail app, I changed my plans and took the bus. Luckily my dentist managed to move my appointment 45 minutes later or I would not have arrived in time. It was the first time that I had used this bus service, but now I may choose to use it again as it was good.”

Had intended to travel by train from Ely to Cambridge on 18 August

“It turned from a peaceful stress free journey into an expensive mess. I had to drive and pay for 5 days parking at the airport... costing me £254 plus diesel vs the £86 rail ticket. I won't be using rail for airports again and will book parking in advance.”

Had intended to travel by train from Heathrow Terminal 5 to Ebbw Vale Town on 18 August

“I travelled by car. I discovered that I could drive in and park for less than the train fare so I will be doing this in future.”

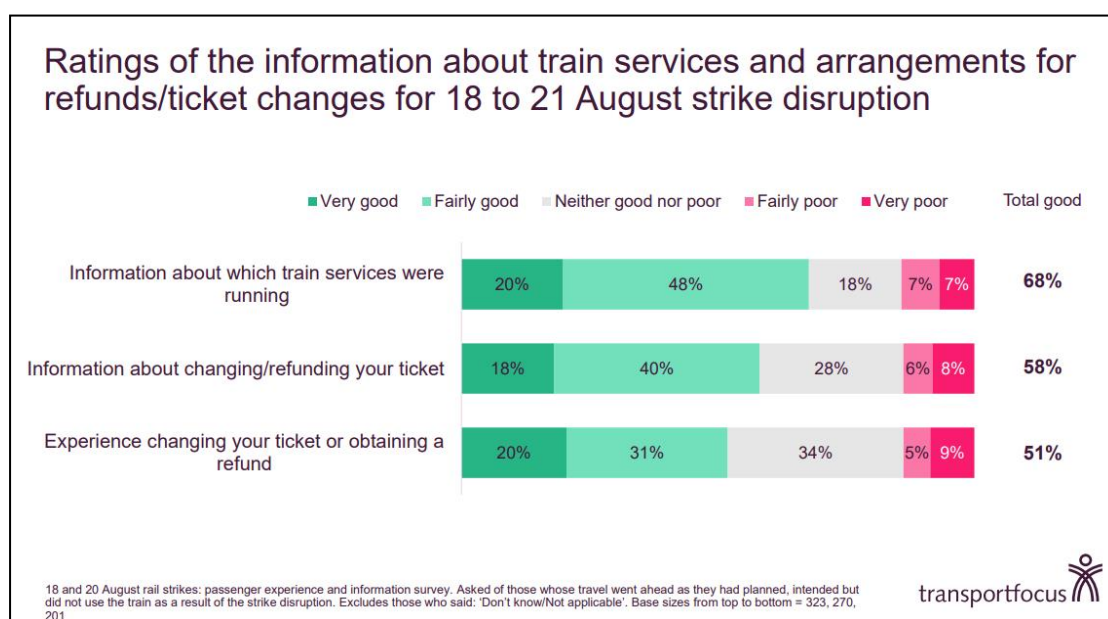
Had intended to travel by train from Lichfield City to Birmingham New Street on 20 August

Information online in advance of the strikes

Transport Focus encouraged industry to provide clarity of information for passengers, including

- about the trains that would and would not run
- arrangements to refund or compensate passengers who would no longer travel, including season ticket holders.

Our [post-strike survey](#) on 22 and 23 August asked those that had intended to travel, or did travel, between 18 and 21 August to rate this information and also the experience of changing a ticket or obtaining a refund.



Refunds and ticket changes

We found 58 per cent of those that had intended to travel, or did travel, between 18 and 21 August rated information about changing/refunding tickets as good, little changed from 60 per cent for the strikes in June. The survey showed 51 per cent rated the experience of changing/refunding tickets as good, a slight reduction on June (57 per cent).

We have encouraged improvements in some areas, but with Government confirming similar arrangements as for the previous strikes, the refund and redress arrangements generally still seem reasonable. However, our survey findings suggest more still needs to be done to improve both the information and the ease of claiming a refund for passengers.

The qualitative feedback from most people who were no longer travelling was also that claiming a refund had been relatively straightforward. However, there remain a minority who encountered problems when it appears they should have been entitled to a full, fee-free refund as a result of disruption.

“I had a ticket through from St Albans to Conway Park using three different operators. Avanti West Coast had the best information - travel any day before the strikes. Thameslink and Merseyrail were less clear and could only travel in the days after the strike so I ended up having to rebuy those legs of my journey. I could have cancelled my whole ticket for a refund and bought again, but as I bought my ticket on LNER website this seems too difficult. As the journey was on different operators the delay repay claim is too complicated. So I'm left £10 out of pocket... More annoying than anything - I never use the trains for my journeys because it's so much cheaper and quicker to drive (I'd prefer to go by train if it didn't cost so much) and the one time I do, it reaffirms that it's easier to travel by car. Shame.”

Had intended to travel from St Albans to Conway Park on 18 August

“I had to cancel altogether. My friend and I had plans to travel to London on the 18th for a concert on the 19th, and returning on the 20th. Both of those days were hit by strikes... We had to cancel all plans, we lost some money on the train fare refunds, and lost a total of £150 on our concert tickets.”

Had intended to travel from Airdrie to London Euston on 18 August

“My journey was to have 3 sections: Windermere – Oxenholme - Glasgow Central -Polmont. Had bought an Advance through ticket via Trainline. I was notified by email Oxenholme to Glasgow Central was cancelled. I (73 year-old) was worried about starting out on my journey with a section "missing" and unsure about other connections. Now Trainline will not refund me although Transpennine say I am due a refund. To get home a relation drove me home.”

Had intended to travel by train from Windermere to Polmont on 19 August

Encouraging improvement to information on websites and apps

On Monday 15 August Transport Focus staff reviewed information on train company websites, National Rail Enquiries and some independent retailers. Overall, most of the information that passengers would expect was showing, was consistent with the agreed policy and had addressed a number of previous Transport Focus recommendations.

Where this was not the case, we approached operators and made suggestions, including where:

- information on using tickets with other operators is too vague or uses jargon
- an instance where there was no information about season ticket holders claiming compensation for strike days via Delay Repay and passengers were wrongly advised there are £10 admin fees for ticket changes.

Examples where our feedback was acted on included:

- Avanti West Coast adding specific details on first and last trains
- Transport for Wales making it clearer that passengers can use their existing ticket to travel with other operators between 18 and 21 August.

We also successfully encouraged operators to adopt Southeastern’s best practice in making travel advice on each day prominent and easier to understand ‘at a glance’. We note it is important to ensure graphics are accessible to those who might use a screen reader, or where this isn’t possible that the content is still also available in an accessible format.

Strike action travel advice and booking information

Last updated 16 August

Strike action is due to take place on our network on the following dates:

- **Thursday 18 August** (between 00:01 and 23:59) – RMT & TSSA unions
- **Saturday 20 August** (between 00:01 and 23:59) – RMT & TSSA unions

Sunday 14th Normal service	Monday 15th Normal service	Tuesday 16th Normal service	Wednesday 17th Normal service	Thursday 18th Only travel if necessary	Friday 19th A.M. Severe disruption, trains start later TfL strikes all day	Saturday 20th Only travel if necessary	Sunday 21st A.M. Severe disruption, trains start later
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We also expect **disruption to services on Friday 19 and Sunday 21 August**, especially in the morning. Customers check before they travel on these days

Wednesday 17 August Usual Service 	Thursday 18 August Do Not travel Industrial action this day	Friday 19 August Check before you travel Trains will start later, disruption expected	Saturday 20 August Do Not travel Industrial action this day	Sunday 21 August Check before you travel Trains will start later, disruption expected
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Timetables are now available for the limited services running 18 and 20 August, they can be found below:

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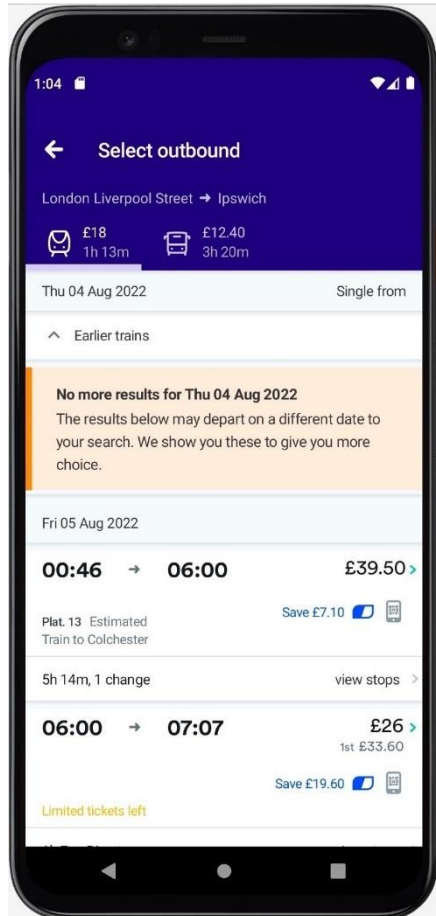
Rail Strike Travel Advice

Use this page to help plan your journey around the rail strikes

We hope we can avert strike action and come to an agreement with the unions. We apologise for the inconvenience.

Monday 15th	Tuesday 16th	Wednesday 17th	Thursday 18th	Friday 19th	Saturday 20th	Sunday 21st
Normal service	Normal service	Normal service	Avoid travelling with us	First trains start later and some morning services cancelled	Avoid travelling with us	First trains start later and some morning services cancelled

Finally, in our report on the strikes in July we highlighted feedback we had received that some passengers purchasing tickets on apps (Trainline was commonly mentioned) on the day of the strikes were unaware that no trains were running. This appeared to be because the app simply showed trains for the next day when services resume. The warning to passengers has now been made more prominent on the Trainline app. Train companies and other retailers should ensure this is clearer on their apps too.



Information at stations

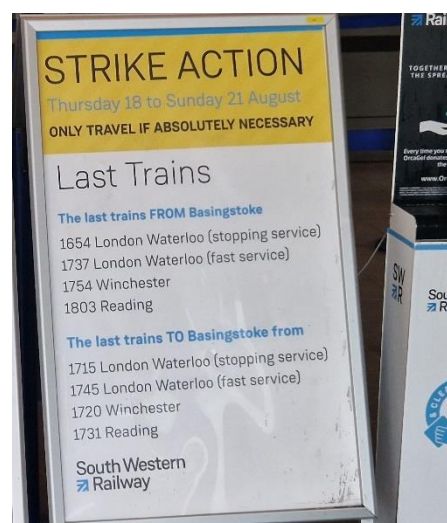
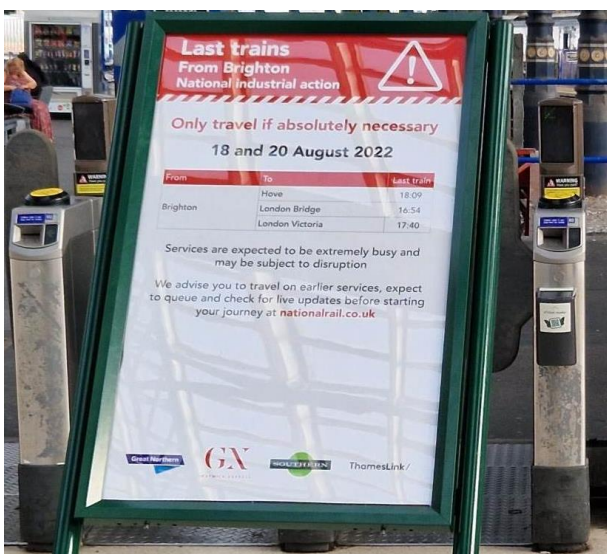
We saw continued welcome evidence from station observations that the industry has acted to implement our previous recommendations. However, our own observations and passenger feedback from 'mystery shopping' still identified some inconsistencies and areas where improvement is needed.

On 18 August we observed:

- Clear warning on ticket vending machines about the strike action at almost all stations visited – welcome evidence a previous recommendation has been addressed.



- More instances where times of first and last trains on strike days are clearly advertised at stations (Brighton and Basingstoke pictured) – again welcome evidence progress has been made implementing this previous recommendation.



- Inconsistencies remain, with some pockets of frustrating poor practice. For example, Stockport station, operated by Avanti West Coast, was closed, with shutters down. Just one small (Northern) poster by one entrance warned of the strikes and there was no supporting information, for example to say when services would resume on Friday.



- Examples where posters are used not only to advise of the strike action or station closure, but to proactively advise passengers of their entitlement to a refund or compensation if they are a season ticket holder. Other operators should adopt this good practice.



The mystery shopping feedback again highlighted a desire for improved information about which stations have a rail service and alternative transport options, for example local buses, to help people make alternative plans.

“The hard part was finding which station was open and had trains running. I found that out from an article in Cheshire Live. Once I knew which stations near to me were open and which train company was operating trains, then I was able to plan my journey easily... I felt there was not sufficient information available about which stations were closed and the location of the nearest open station.”

Travelled by train from Alderley Edge to Manchester Piccadilly on 20 August

“I knew there were strikes but I thought the station would be open to give travellers advice and support on alternatives, or limited trains. I also thought there may have been some information about bus replacement and how often these would run. People at the station were left guessing and having to get taxis.”

Had intended to travel from Sittingbourne to Gillingham on 13 August

“I want some information about alternative travel options to be provided either before the strike through an email, on the app/website or through posters/staff helping at the station.”

Had intended to travel from Paignton to Digby & Sowton on 13 August





Transport Focus is the operating name of
the Passengers' Council

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