



Transport Focus: Passenger views on through trains versus changing trains

May 2022



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Introduction

Project context

Exploratory qualitative research was needed to help Transport Focus and their partners Network Rail understand passengers' views on the advantages and disadvantages of different types of timetable design and of changing from one train to another.

The goal was to provide deep and useful insight on how rail passengers consider the different elements contributing to timetabling - in terms of their own needs, priorities, and assumptions, as well as any potential tipping points that make train services less attractive (in general and versus alternative modes). Elements considered included: range of destinations, frequency of service, direct services versus changing trains, capacity of the network and service reliability. This insight can then contribute to planning of future services in the longer term.

The research audience spanned current rail passengers across a range of journey types, as well as those who are currently making journeys that they could make by train by other modes (potential passengers).

For the purposes of the research, the sample was drawn from areas with access to rail lines that pass through Preston, chosen for this project as it represents a major hub on the West Coast Main Line, at which trains to many destinations are available or pass through.

Respondents were pre-tasked to think about a range of options for their future rail service, and then shown example service models during the session, being invited to imagine similar models being implemented for their local station/the services they use most often. These were hypothetical and designed to elicit preferences, rather than genuine potential changes to the timetable.

This research takes place within the context of two years of restrictions stemming from the Covid pandemic. Questions were therefore oriented where necessary to understand the impact of the Covid experience on their experience and opinions, the extent to which these have changed since before the pandemic and how they might change in the future.

Research objectives – exploring four linked areas in detail

Types of service

Passengers' perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of different types of service design, including:

- That which provides fewer services that run directly to some destinations, and instead offers a more 'metro style' service which is more frequent and reliable but requires a change of trains to reach some destinations
- That which offers direct services to more destinations than now but at a reduced frequency

Passenger views on changing trains

Overall perceptions of changing trains, including positives and negatives

- Whether the requirement for changing trains ever affects decisions to travel
- Whether and how passengers' views on changing trains differ depending on the types of journeys they are planning or making
- Whether the impact of changing trains varies for different types of passengers, e.g., disabled people or those travelling with children
- What mitigations could be put in place to improve the experiences of changing trains

Impact of changes to service design

Would changes to service design make rail travel more attractive (and a genuine option) for those who currently do not use trains?

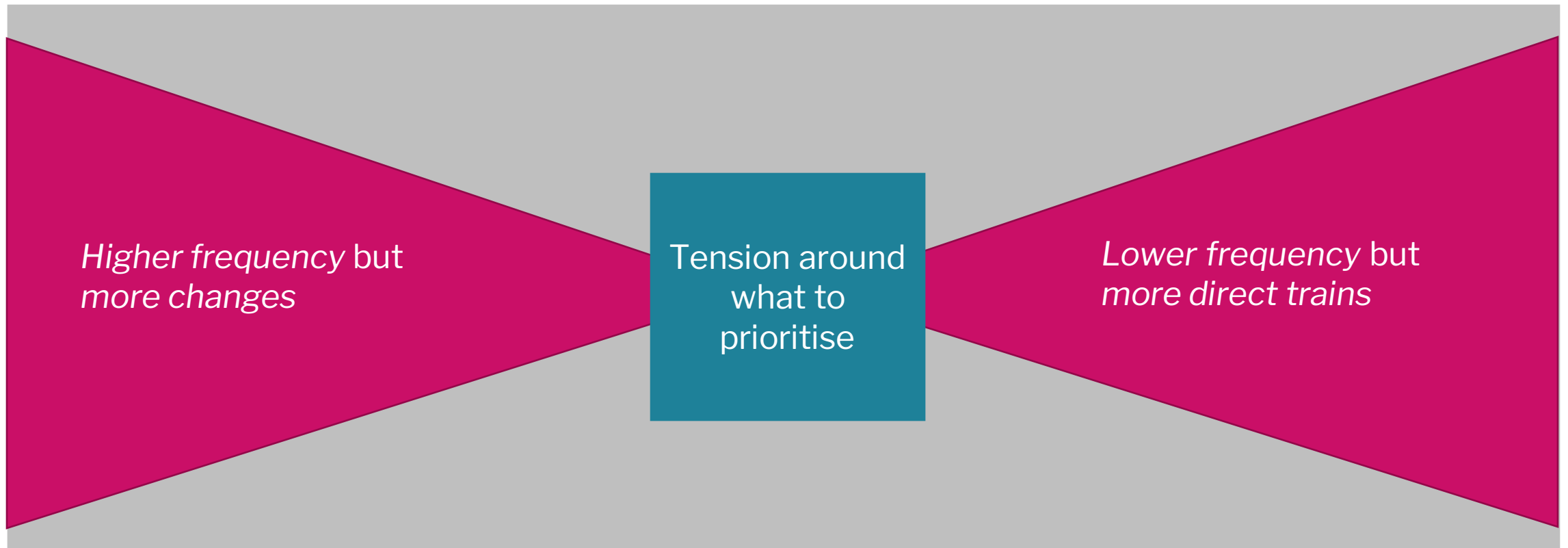
- Which service designs, or elements thereof, help make train travel a more attractive and realistic option?

Understanding of issues

How do passengers conceive of the relative issues driving service design?

- How well do they understand key concepts through the stimulus provided in the research?
- How should/could this change to ensure concepts are fully understood in any subsequent research?

As part of the research we looked at the 'core dilemma' that is the trade-off between two hypothetical service models



It was hypothesised – then borne out by the research – that in an ideal world respondents would like a higher frequency service of more direct trains. We explored the trade-offs between two mutually exclusive models to understand preferences and priorities in the real world.

Method and sample

90-minute sessions via Zoom or telephone; 24 trios with current and potential rail users and 12 depth interviews with disabled people

Routes travelled on, including intermediate stations, via Preston	Journey / passenger type				
	Currently Non train Users (6 trios)	Commuters (8 trios)	Business (2 trios)	Leisure users (8 trios)	Disabled People (12 depths)
Blackpool North	1 x trio	1-2 x trio	2 x trios	1-2 x trio	2 x depth
Blackpool South	1 x trio	1-2 x trio		1-2 x trio	2 x depth
Liverpool Lime Street	1 x trio	1-2 x trio		1-2 x trio	2 x depth
Blackburn	1 x trio	1-2 x trio		1-2 x trio	2 x depth
Manchester (via Bolton)	1 x trio	1-2 x trio		1-2 x trio	2 x depth
Lancaster	1 x trio	1-2 x trio		1-2 x trio	2 x depth
Total respondents	18	24	6	24	12
84 respondents					

All participants were pre-tasked to think about their current journey and what they would choose and why from a number of potential possible changes

Fieldwork took place from the 10th to the 22nd March 2022

Further sample detail on following charts

Method and sample

Further sample criteria

Current Non-train users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those who are able to travel by train but currently choose to travel by another mode (car or bus). Must be non-rejectors of train with potential journeys to include • Spread of time of day and week • Spread of purpose / reasons for journey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All used trains that pass through Preston <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Within this, thorough representation of those who pass through Preston without getting off the train and those who get off at Preston to change trains - This mix represented in each trio (except for those routes where a change of trains is unavoidable) • Start/end destination: Respondents used trains that start or end at the named station; however, their own journey may be between any intermediate stations on direct services between that station and Preston • For Lancaster as start/end station specifically: For those recruited as using these stations, their journeys included those within the North West and not just longer distance trips on the West Coast Mainline (e.g., to Birmingham or London) • Thorough spread of gender across sample as a whole and by journey type and route. • Spread of Social Economic Group • Inclusion of ethnic minority respondents within the sample • Age and lifestage – aged 18-65+ and a spread of independent (no children) and those with children at home
Commuters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those who use the train to get to and from their place of work or education at least twice a week • Spread of time of day of travel • Within the Commuter sample as a whole (18), 4-6 who commute on weekends • To include some who use the train for occasional business purposes 	
Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those who use the train for a business-related journey work at least once a month (business may be commercial, e.g., work-related or personal, e.g., appointments) • Spread of time of day of travel 	
Leisure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those who use the train to for leisure-related journeys (social, shopping, entertainment) at least once every few months • Spread of time of day of travel • Mix of those travelling alone vs with others (adults, children) • Within the Leisure user sample as a whole (18), including minimum 9 who travel for this purpose on weekdays and minimum 9 who travel for this purpose on weekends (note: some will do both) • Within the Leisure user sample as a whole (18), to include minimum 6 who travel for this purpose at night-time • To include some who use the train for occasional business purposes 	
Disabled People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those who use the train for any purpose and have at least one impairment • Spread of age and gender and disability type • Spread of journey type • Within this sample as whole (12), minimum 3 to travel at least sometimes at night-time 	

Stimulus: limiting factors that create a need for trade offs

Participants were provided with information regarding key considerations when planning rail timetables.

Managing 'bottlenecks' on both lines and platforms

- Those who are planning timetables must consider the number of people using stations and the number of trains using different parts of the available track and manage things so that 'bottlenecks' and overcrowding does not occur.

Mixing fast and slow trains on the same lines uses up track capacity

- When fast trains and stopping trains share the same tracks it can lead to problems. Fast services take up a lot of track capacity as they need the lines to be clear ahead so that they don't have to slow down. Stopping trains which are running late can delay fast trains when they get in the way.

Passenger capacity per train not an issue – just add carriages

- There are a limited number of trains that can run, but if more people are travelling by train in the future additional carriages can be added over the longer term.

Higher reliability of train service (and predictability of journey)

- Bottlenecks, where different rail lines converge and interact with one another, give more opportunity for incidents to affect the smooth running of a large number of routes.
- By running trains backwards and forwards over shorter and more 'self contained' routes, and by reducing the number of services running into the bottlenecks this risk is reduced and can lead to a more efficient and less disrupted service.
- However, shorter services may require a change of trains instead of a direct service.

Overview of findings

Overview

'Consistency' in findings

- Different ways of asking questions (placing a specific focus on a principle or issue), prioritising, etc... tended to lead to the same answers for respondents, suggesting they do have a sense of their priorities whether thinking about their own service or looking at hypothetical examples from elsewhere in the North West

Concepts explaining factors driving timetable design were broadly understood

- Some concepts were easier for respondents to understand (bottlenecks, track capacity, passenger capacity) versus others (how reliability increases on captive services – i.e. trains that run on lines which are 'self contained' and which do not intersect with others), but all concepts were grasped within discussion sessions

High degree of realism amongst passengers

- Respondents struggled with 'blue sky thinking' – the task is challenging but also muted or limited by experience
- Across sessions and passenger types, respondents engaged with idea of trade offs rather than seeking multiple priorities that sit in tension with each other

Some overarching themes and trends within principles and priorities

- Irrespective of passenger group, reliability (i.e., the ability to make predictable journey) is the primary need
- Beyond this, there is variance between individuals in terms of priorities
- However, there are 'trends' within different groups of passengers (spanning journey types – commuter/business vs leisure, presence of a disability, current service and 'train confidence')

Clear set of factors that impact personal preferences

- To some extent these are influenceable and can therefore mitigate concerns that might arise from change:
 - Confidence – addressed by information and support
 - Comfort – addressed by support, capacity and (to a lesser extent) station infrastructure

Responses to example models

The pre-task and three hypothetical models within discussion were used in the groups initially to explore how respondents thought and felt about three different theoretical offerings

- When transposed to their own station/situation the current status quo worked for most respondents
- Those who already have to change were more open to changing in the future, whereas those with direct services wanted to keep them – although a sizeable minority of Leisure travellers currently changing would prefer a direct service in an ideal world
- Current frequency was also influential – those with one/two services per hour currently were concerned about what a more infrequent service might look like and tended to instinctively prefer an improved frequency
- Those with a very frequent service currently were more open to reduced frequency if it gave them more direct trains, but again struggled to spontaneously visualise what this might look like

	Direct	Change at Preston
A	<p>In this option, trains on your route to/from Preston:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would be more frequent than they are now (e.g. if they are currently every hour, they could be every 30 minutes) • Would be more punctual and reliable than now (on time more often and fewer cancellations) • Would require a change of train to reach your destination 	<p>In this option, trains on your route to/from Preston:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would be less frequent than now (e.g. if they are currently every 30 minutes, they could be every hour) • Would be the same as now in terms of the level of delays and cancellations • Would offer a direct service with no need to change trains to reach your destination
B	<p>In this option, trains on your route to/from Preston:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would be less frequent than they are now (e.g. if they are currently every 30 minutes, they could be every hour) • Would be the same as now in terms of delays and cancellations • Would offer direct services via Preston as they do now, but would offer additional direct services to more destinations, e.g., as well as direct services to Manchester there would be additional direct services to Liverpool 	<p>In this option, trains on your route to/from Preston:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would be more frequent than now (e.g. if they are currently every hour, they could be every 30 minutes) • Would be more punctual and reliable than now (on time more often and fewer cancellations) • Would still require a change of train to reach your destination
C		
D		

I said option B. For me it's the direct trains. When I was able-bodied I did do a change once, when I went to the concert and it was horrific because of the crowds. Normally I'd expect it to be fine or at least better but now it's not really an option. [Disabled Person]

C works best for me and my mobility, I don't mind about frequency it's the directness of them that is essential. [Disabled Person]

Current service levels set the context for how respondents evaluated the potential alternative models

Overall responses to current model

Respondents were asked to consider a hypothetical example, explained with a map and with a summary like the one below (but with station details) and apply it to their own area

Thinking about the frequency of trains on these routes at the moment, you can see from the map that currently:

- Station A has at least 4 trains per hour:
- 1 train per hour to Station B
- 2 trains per hour to Station C
- 1 train per hour to Station D
- And a train to Station E less frequently than hourly

All 5 trains from Station A run via Preston. There are approximately 12 trains an hour through Preston that could be connected to.

- Again, when thinking about their own station/service, the current example status quo worked for most respondents
- Few thought that the current level of service from their station was inadequate, but spontaneous improvement was typically seen in terms of adding more services rather than reducing them
- Overall, many would like more frequent and more direct services than they have currently (especially those using smaller stations or 'out on a limb' - e.g., Barrow in Furness) but the key concern was reliability more than frequency
- Keeping the current service for those in areas with less frequent service is not likely to encourage current non-train users to come back to rail

It sounds good in principle, just because Manchester is a hot spot to go to Blackpool and vice versa, Liverpool as well, they're both places that are popular for leisure and for work. [Commuter]

I quite like the current model; it doesn't really affect me that much. One or two delays here and there, but I quite like the current model the way it is. [Disabled Person]

Overall, most found the current level of service at the station that they used most often/the routes they travel most often to be acceptable

Overall responses to Model 2 – Lower frequency, more direct services

Respondents were asked to consider a hypothetical example, explained with a map and with a summary like the one below (but with station details) and apply it to their own area

In this example, Station A has 3 or 4 trains per hour:

- 1 train per hour to either Station B or Station C (alternate hours)
- 1 train per hour to either Station D or Station E (alternate hours)
- A train to Station F less frequently than hourly
- A train to Station F less frequently than hourly (the train to Station F alternates each hour between Station A and Station G)
- A train to Station H less frequently than hourly (the train to Station H alternates each hour between Station A and Station G)

All trains from Station A run via Preston to other destinations. There are approximately 10 trains per hour through Preston that could be connected to, but with more destinations than in the current service.

This one is for me. I see changing as an inconvenience so even if I had options for more trains or faster trains, I'd pick the direct one. [Leisure]

- Appeals more to those making leisure journeys, or whose rail use is planned so far in advance that as long as there's still something that will work for them then overall it will make no difference
- Leisure travellers like the idea of being able to reach more destinations directly, whereas for commuters making the same journey regularly this has much less appeal/does not appear to be a benefit for them
- Potential for confusion around destinations alternating by hour
- Commuters tended to be concerned about losing their alternative travel options – what if there's an incident? How long will it be to the next train?
- In each of the discussion groups participants raised questions about how long they would have to wait if they missed their train
- Those currently with only 2-3 trains per hour from their station were more concerned if options on a route would go down to once per hour – feels very inflexible
- Those with 4-6 trains per hour (looking at going down to 3-5) were more relaxed about the change if the benefits were real

Overall, this model appealed to a minority across groups who valued direct services over all other factors but was off-putting to commuters and those with a higher frequency current service

Overall responses to Model 3 - Higher frequency, more changes

Respondents were asked to consider a hypothetical example, explained with a map and with a summary like the one below (but with station details) and apply it to their own area

In this example, Station A has at least 6 trains per hour:

- 1 train per hour to Station B
- 1 train per hour to Station C
- 2 trains per hour to Station D
- 2 trains per hour to Station E
- And a train to Station F less frequently than hourly

4 trains per hour run via Preston to other destinations and 2 per hour terminate at Preston. There are approximately 16 services per hour from Preston that could be connected to.

A train every 10 minutes, all you need to know is when the train is leaving Preston. It is a lot easier to plan your journey with the frequent trains. [Current Non-train User]

- Initially confusing (volume of lines on the map) but when understood became of interest and generated some positive discussion
- Some dissatisfaction with the need to change, but the larger range of options at changing stations (in terms of destinations or trains per hour to the same destination) counters this
- Strong appeal to commuters in particular (though not all respondents)
- Individuals across groups who dislike changing trains tended to be less keen, but some of those (not all) could be reassured if the changes meant that the services would be more reliable (and journey times were potentially brought down)
- However:
 - *Most preferring direct services at the start of the session still had that preference at the end*
 - For those with interest in the model, ideally there would still only be one or (at most, for longer journeys) two changes, otherwise it started to feel like a 'hassle'

Overall, this model created interest for many but with the caveat it would 'need to work well in practice', otherwise it feels like breaking up journeys that are currently direct for little benefit. Therefore, those interested need reassurance and performance statistics.

However, some disabled people, lower confidence leisure travellers or others who value direct services, are less positive about the model. As they want to avoid changing where possible, adding in any changes to a journey feels like it will impact their journey negatively.

Overall, preferences between the three models varied by individual – however, in an ideal world *most* would prefer a direct service

Higher frequency but more need to change

- Tended to appeal more to regular travellers and those changing on their current journey – whether commuter or leisure
- Over the course of the research sessions, as understanding grew there was increased interest in this model from individuals across groups, even from those who had initially chosen direct services in their pre-task – however, very few changed their minds on whether they wanted to change or not
- Important to note that appeal decreases as number of changes increases
- For a minority on the busiest routes there was some sense that they wouldn't be affected as others would have to change before they had to – however, most preferring the model expected to have to change themselves

Lower frequency but more direct services

- Appeals to the less confident and those travelling more occasionally (or outside peak hours)
- Appealed to some less frequent commuters and business travellers, making longer journeys, as they can work undisrupted
- Some would like a high frequency more direct model, but the expectation would be for someone else to suffer for them to have that, rather than for them to suffer so someone else's service improves

What they currently have

- Some level of appeal across respondents – they know and understand the current service
- Stronger appeal for those who already have what they would consider to be a frequent service
- Less appealing to those who might currently have only one train an hour to their destination and would like a more frequent service
- Assumption from a minority that if it was that easy to provide a better service it would already have been done

The different models all had those who preferred them, but they tended to be evaluated through the lens of the service that they already have

Overall, preferences between the three models varied by individual – however, in an ideal world *most* would prefer a direct service

Prefer higher frequency, more changes

The more frequent trains make it easier to plan. It's just better that there's more trains, because going and coming back home, it's just more practical. It's like catching a bus, if they're every ten or fifteen minutes and it's great. [Disabled Person]

I'm not a fan of having to change trains but out of the two, having the choice with the frequency would definitely be my preferred option. [Commuter]

I quite like this: if they can adhere to that then it would be amazing. [Commuter]

Prefer current service

Why are they changing it? I mean, you've outlined some of the problems, but I mean, they're living with it at the moment. The services run by and large quite well. The cancellations, yes they happen, but they're quite few and far between really. Are they hell bent on changing for the sake of it? [Disabled Person]

I'm happy with how it is, I'm quite unbothered by them changing it to be honest. If they did change it all I would just adapt but I don't see the urgency in restructuring it... I can't ever imagine them being super reliable like the Japanese trains. That's just the way it is. [Leisure]

Prefer lower frequency, more direct

The fact that it has opened up more options, because we do travelling back and forth, my family's based all over so it would be good for me. It wouldn't bother me if it was less frequent. [Leisure]

That would suit me slightly better, even though they're not as frequent, less hassle changing direct to Liverpool, I wouldn't have a problem planning my journey. As long as everything ran perfectly that would suit me a lot more. [Disabled Person]

I feel like there's more variables where it could go wrong if you're changing more. You're quite happy on the train from Wigan, but then I've come from Wigan to Liverpool, and I've had issues that have put an hour or two on my journey. [Disabled Person]

I appreciate it might not suit everybody, because if they're doing it for different reasons like work but for me it would be perfect. [Leisure]

I wouldn't need loads of trains, I tend to pick one and stay with it... I don't really just show up and hop on a train. Also with prices being so high I prebook. [Leisure]

Key timetable principles and priorities

Impact of Covid on decision making

Overall few felt that Covid had made much difference to where and how they travel

- Typically spent much of lockdown travelling only when necessary but otherwise keen to carry on as normal
- Some benefit derived from the quieter trains since 2020 – more likely to get a seat, less crowded

In the past when you get to Preston it could be almost full, and Bolton would be the chance for you to get that last seat, but when COVID hit, the trains were initially extremely quiet and now they've started to build back up again, but they're still better than they were prior to March 2022. [Commuter]

However, some have changed their needs and wants from train travel

- Less willing to travel on overcrowded trains than before the pandemic
- Feel that car travel is more hygienic (or less risky)

My opinions on capacity have definitely changed – I'm a lot more anxious these days about full trains. [Leisure]

Others have changed their travel patterns

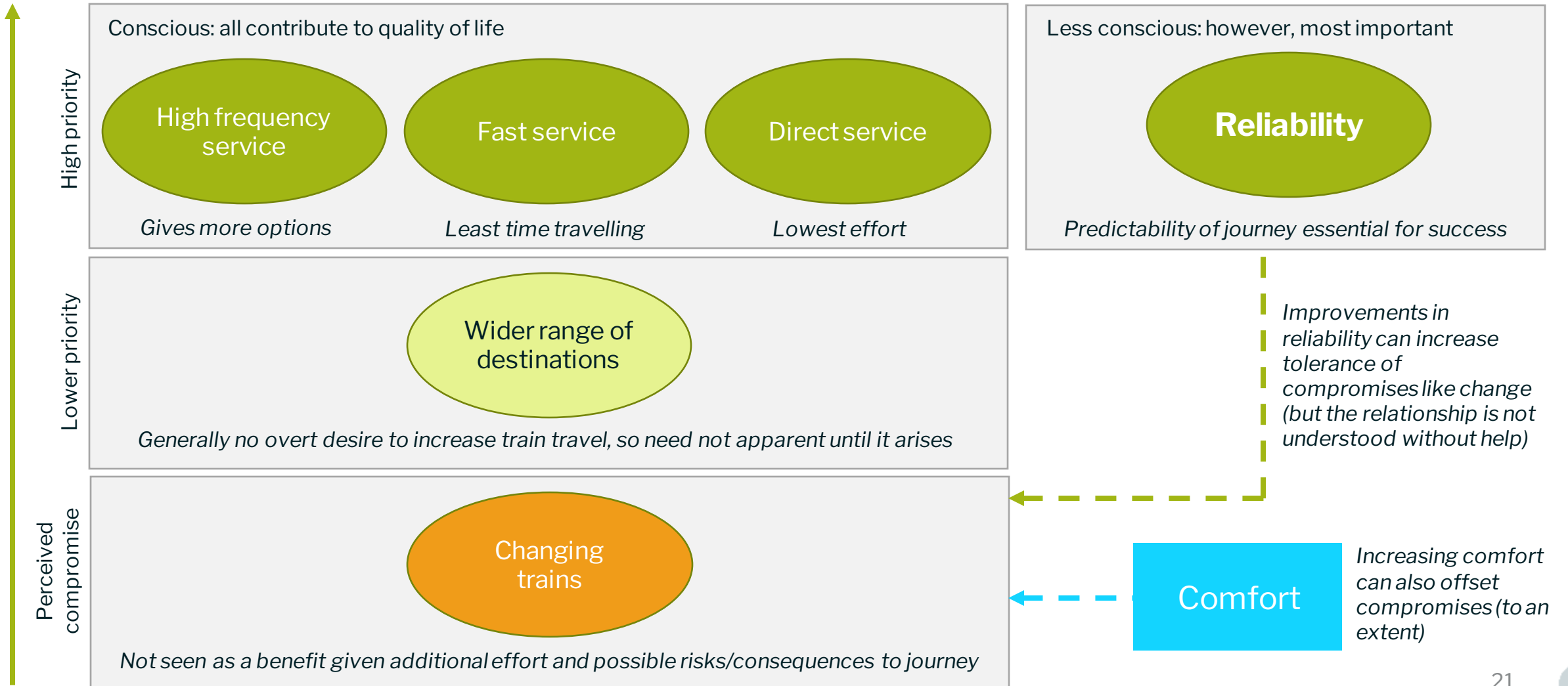
- Not commuting as frequently – e.g., several times a week rather than daily
- More flexible in the hours that they are travelling
- Some Commuters likely to go back to everyday travel, others working from home more permanently

I used to get the National Express to Lancaster, but now I prefer the train, I find they're less busy than the buses and it feels like the air is fresher on the train, even though it probably isn't. I feel like you've got more freedom on a train. [Disabled Person]

I'm only doing three days a week in the office, so it's not a constant daily thing anymore. [Commuter]

Overall, the impact of the Covid pandemic on travel choices and habits appears to be relatively limited, although commuters are typically still travelling less frequently than pre-pandemic at the moment

Factors driving timetabling preferences reflect broadly consistent priorities, irrespective of passenger type and experience – as may be expected ¹



Factors driving timetabling preferences reflect broadly consistent priorities, irrespective of passenger type and experience – as may be expected 2

- The previous diagram illustrates that passengers tend to prioritise the same factors (that drive timetabling) irrespective of their journey types or experience
- It also shows how some factors are interrelated, for example:
 - Increased reliability (which is not understood unless explained) can change how people think about other factors (e.g., what benefits they *really* get from high frequency, speed and directness in a timetable) or how much of a compromise changing is
 - Similarly, higher comfort can also offset those things which are seen as compromises

In terms of passenger priorities:

- Being able to rely on their service is paramount, but it is also a hygiene factor that isn't top of mind – passengers judging other factors in the context of trains arriving and departing when they are supposed to
- Therefore, 'highest priority' factors for passengers include those which are *highest consciousness*: high frequency, high speed and directness – since:
 - Each of those things lead to a better journey - lowest effort, less time travelling and more options
 - And better journeys lead to better quality of life
- Equally 'high priority' but *less top of mind* is reliability, since:
 - Lack of this means that the frequency, speed, and directness are undermined
 - And the lack of predictability that comes from lack of reliability leads to stress and other more practical difficulties
- Lower priority for all is wider range of destinations, since most don't think about additional train travel they *might* make; they only consider train travel as an option if they have to make a new journey
- As might be expected, changing trains is never a 'priority' – rather, it is considered as a compromise

- Several things can offset compromises and increase satisfaction:
 - As noted above, reliability (where people understand this can increase)
 - Increasing comfort (e.g., on trains or platforms, and in sense of control through information and support) to take away more negative aspects of a travel experience can also increase tolerance of compromises

There were also nuances in terms of which ‘high priority’ factors were *most* important for different respondent groups

High frequency service

- Tended to sit first or second for Commuters and Business travellers – who value the options it gives for travel if they have to work late or their plans change
- Less of a priority for disabled people or leisure travellers

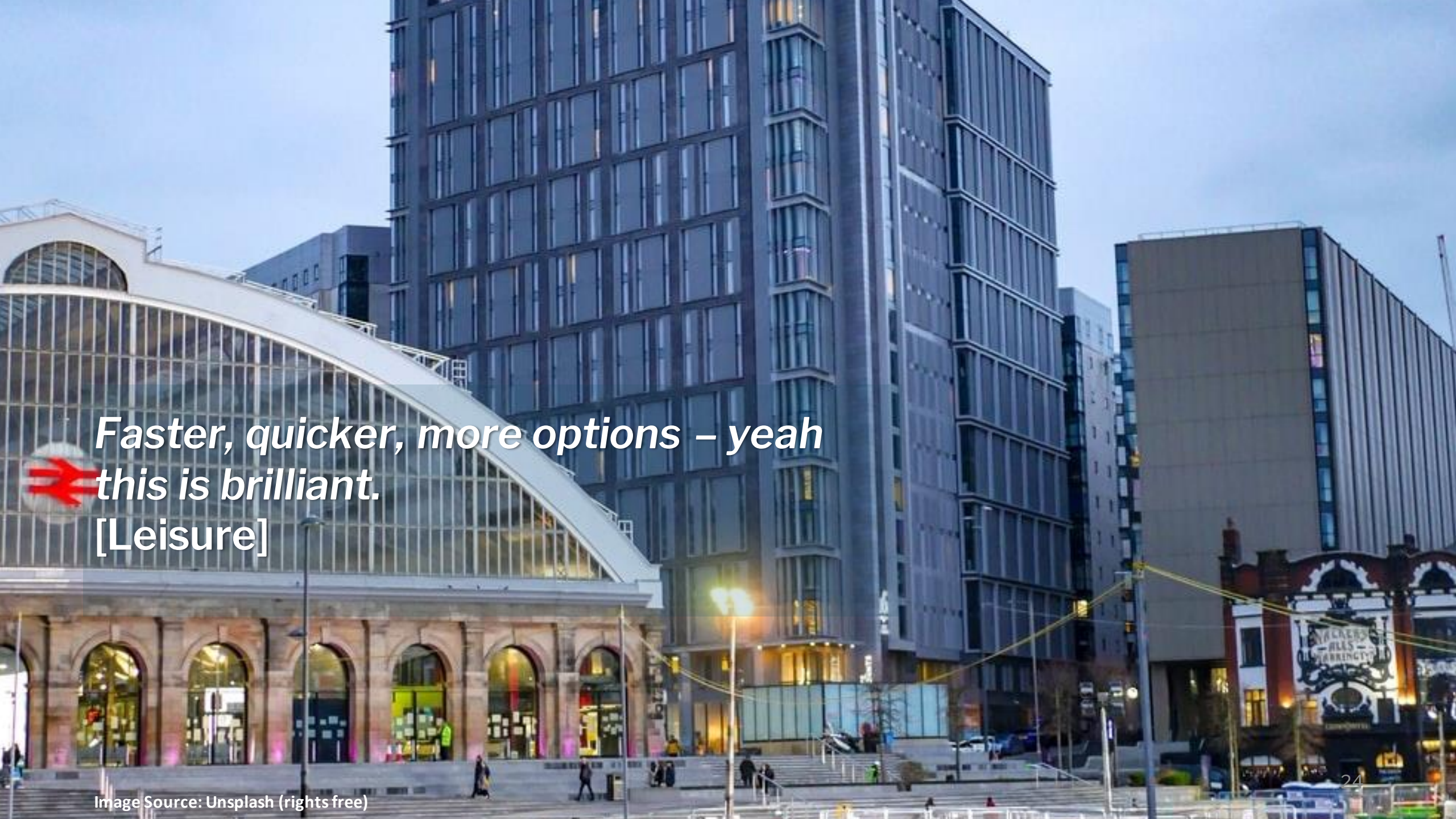
Fast service

- Tends to be of most importance to Commuters and the most regular leisure travellers, especially in terms of the homeward journey
- Second priority for Current Non-train Users, potentially reflecting past experiences and lowered expectations
- Relatively less important for the majority of Leisure travellers, Business and disabled people in this sample

Direct service

- Highest priority for disabled people and Leisure travellers – may have disabilities or be travelling with family, making changing trains difficult
- Also a high priority for Current Non-train users, thinking about how trains compare with the ease/directness of private cars

Overall ranking of the highest priority depending on the needs and practice of the individual, but there were trends by respondent group. All would like a direct train as the ideal.



*Faster, quicker, more options – yeah
this is brilliant.
[Leisure]*

Frequency provides travellers with options

Overview

- Seen by all groups as potentially the sign of a good service
- Provides more options, which is important to those with deadlines
- Provides a 'halo' effect for other groups in terms of building their confidence to travel

Difference by audience type

- Highly appealing across groups, although of most practical use to those commuters and regular travellers who might periodically miss services and want to minimise time before the next one
- Less important to occasional business and disabled people except as far as it suggests that the service is 'good'

The more trains that are available the more flexible we can be with our times and appointments. The train is reliable but on occasions when delayed or cancelled, to re-route is very difficult. The costs related to that are also high as the only other service would be taxis or uber. [Business]

Frequency of service is a big thing for me because I can be travelling one and a half to two hours so if I miss my hourly one I'm way way behind where I should be, so it tends to be a military operation how I plan my morning. [Commuter]

The frequency of service is the most attractive feature – particularly if it is every fifteen mins (30 mins is not so frequent), there is nothing more frustrating than knowing that you have to wait an hour when you only just miss a train. [Current Non-train User]

I think we live in a culture of getting where we want to go quickly and do what you want to do as fast as possible, and I think if they went to less frequent, I think people would choose not to get it. That's just my opinion. [Commuter]

Though most travellers have a favoured service that they want to use, and which fits in best with their plans/needs, the knowledge that there are alternatives if something goes wrong is powerfully reassuring

The desire for a faster journey is common across passenger types as it will minimise travel time

Overview

- Most ideally would like a faster journey, but understand the constraints that mean services can't simply run faster
- Tend to think more in terms of not making things slower
- Speed is trumped by reliability and frequency or directness when directly traded off

I see changing as an inconvenience so even if I had options for more trains or faster trains, I'd pick the direct one. [Leisure]

Faster is a priority for me - I currently have a 2hr+ journey to get home. [Commuter]

The reliability is terrible, that's the reason I don't like using trains. Having a faster journey than I have now to and from destinations quicker is definitely better. [Current Non-train User]

I would like it to be faster [Current Non-train User]

Trains are pretty fast anyway, you can never drive faster than a train, I have never thought I could get there quicker, unless you're changing. [Current Non-train User]

It would be good to be able to get around quicker. [Disabled Person]

Faster journeys are wanted, but sit behind reliability in the mix for most

Directness to their destination is highly valued by some as it minimises effort needed

Overview

- Directness is the ideal – having to change is always a compromise
- Gives confidence that they are ‘on their way’
- Do not have worries about making connections or further opportunities for delay/cancellation
- Directness can be given up by the more confident train users if it means that they might get to their destination quicker, or in increased comfort

Difference by audience type

- Particularly appealing to Leisure travellers who currently must change and non-current train users looking to be won back to train usage
- Directness overall is of most importance to the less confident train users, and to those who have a disability which restricts their ability to move easily around stations

Direct trains are clearly more appealing (from an ease of travelling perspective) than those where you have to change once or more. There is also the issue of the likely time saving to be had from a direct service as opposed to one where you have a layover. However, the impact of a cancellation is significantly greater than it would be if another train were scheduled in fifteen mins as opposed to an hour. [Current Non-train User]

See I just want direct trains, I'm doing it to relax and I don't really like changing that much. It's a personal preference. [Leisure]

A direct train is much preferred. I don't change unless I have to, that happened when I went down south, and it worked fine everything is on time, but that's what I prefer to do. [Disabled Person]

Most would prefer a direct service that gets them straight to their destination without having to change. However, all recognise that this is not possible for all routes, and that changing can sometimes lead to a faster journey – which is an option taken by those to whom it is most important/beneficial

Directness to a wider range of destinations tends to be less valued

Overview

- For those who value direct trains there is interest in being able to access more destinations directly from their local station
- However, across passenger types respondents tended to prioritise more frequent services to the destinations they used most over an extension of services to more destinations
- For commuters in particular, additional destinations tended to be seen in terms of threat to the frequency and regularity of their work-related journeys – and not a benefit to them

I don't really see the value – it's great to have the options in an ideal world... but in practice the slightly smaller stations that we all go to in life, I don't need more options, I just want to go to the ones that I need. [Leisure]

I like the idea of more destinations... do I want to change trains? No. I really don't!! .. why? It's just something I don't want to do on a relaxing day out. I'll avoid it. [Leisure]

I don't need more destinations for commuting. [Commuter]

I don't really need to get anywhere else. [Commuter]

If multiple destinations are included in where I'm trying to get to, and if the choice was having additional places I could go to but I had to change, and there was no other way to get there I would change. [Business]

The number of destinations isn't really the issue as long as it's going to where I want to go. [Current Non-train User]

Most people are commuting to one place, so having the option to go to other places wouldn't be a factor whatsoever. It's about getting to the one place I need to go to. [Commuter]

Realistically, the amount I would use the other destinations would not warrant the need for the change. [Commuter]

For most, direct services to more destinations are a nice to have rather than a key benefit

Reliability is the key consideration

Overview

- The most important factor for all groups, regardless of their frequency of travel

Difference by audience type

- Split (at an attitudinal level) on the extent to which they can currently rely on their local services, but all groups see it as something that they want

Arriving on time

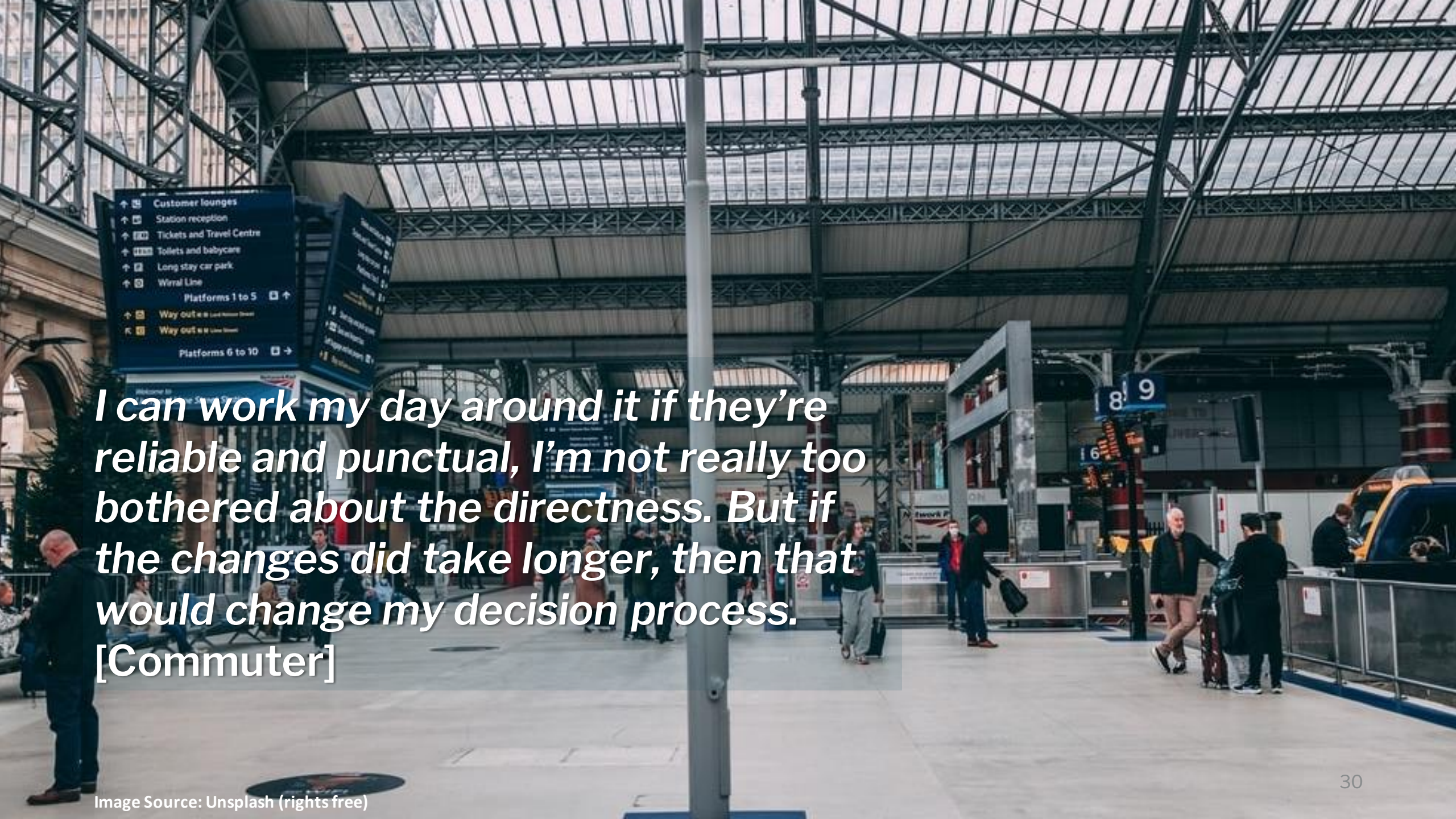
- Of most importance to those on deadlines – and also important to them to have alternatives if something goes wrong
- Less important to leisure travellers who aren't on deadlines, though they are still keen to be able to rely that their preferred train will be on time – for them timings are more important at the planning stage

My main issue is cancellation, you'd be sat there and it's almost a lucky lottery sometimes. It was almost weekly at some points, that something would go wrong, especially the ones that go up to Lancaster, a Manchester Airport train would always get cancelled and that makes you stay forever. It's reliability more than the actual frequency of trains because you can plan your day around it. [Commuter]

You've got to have more reliability, and then more frequent options, because more frequent options will make your journey quicker anyway. [Current Non-train User]

Being on time is really the thing to me, I get really frustrated when the trains are late or delayed. I hate it when it doesn't even say why it's cancelled and depending on what I'm doing I can kind of be stranded if I don't have my phone or I'm out of battery. [Commuter]

Reliability is overwhelmingly important to all passenger types- on the whole most do feel that they can rely on trains to be approximately on time, but the most regular travellers have the most experience of things going wrong



I can work my day around it if they're reliable and punctual, I'm not really too bothered about the directness. But if the changes did take longer, then that would change my decision process.
[Commuter]

Length of journey has an impact on willingness to change trains

Changing is more expected on long journeys

- On long journeys, or those to destinations not on the same line as the point of boarding, there is more of an expectation that changing trains will be necessary

On a long journey it does help break the journey up, but apart from that I don't want to. [Leisure]

But short journeys should ideally be direct

- Over short journeys a need to change starts to create a negative attitude to making the journey – anything under an hour is annoying, and journeys under 30 minutes can create a feeling that the train is a less attractive option

If you're just going 30 to 40 minutes and it's currently direct, then putting a change in to make it more 'reliable' doesn't immediately feel like a benefit to me. [Commuter]

It depends on the length of the journey. [Leisure]

Changing trains is more acceptable on longer journeys than shorter ones (especially under 30 minutes)

What an acceptable overall journey time is if a change has to be made varied by how open the respondent was to changing in the first place

Longer than now

- For less than an hour, ten to fifteen minutes but psychologically struggle with a journey then taking over an hour (which would be less appealing)
- For journeys of over one hour up to 20 minutes extra might be ok
- For over two hours up to 30 minutes might work, though it would still be less ideal than the current timings
- Little variation by time of day, purpose of journey or season, though at night or in bad weather timings are even more important

I'd probably say 20 minutes to half an hour would be acceptable, I'd have to change my plans around if it was more than that, I think. I've had 40-minute delays that have turned my day upside down. [Disabled Person]

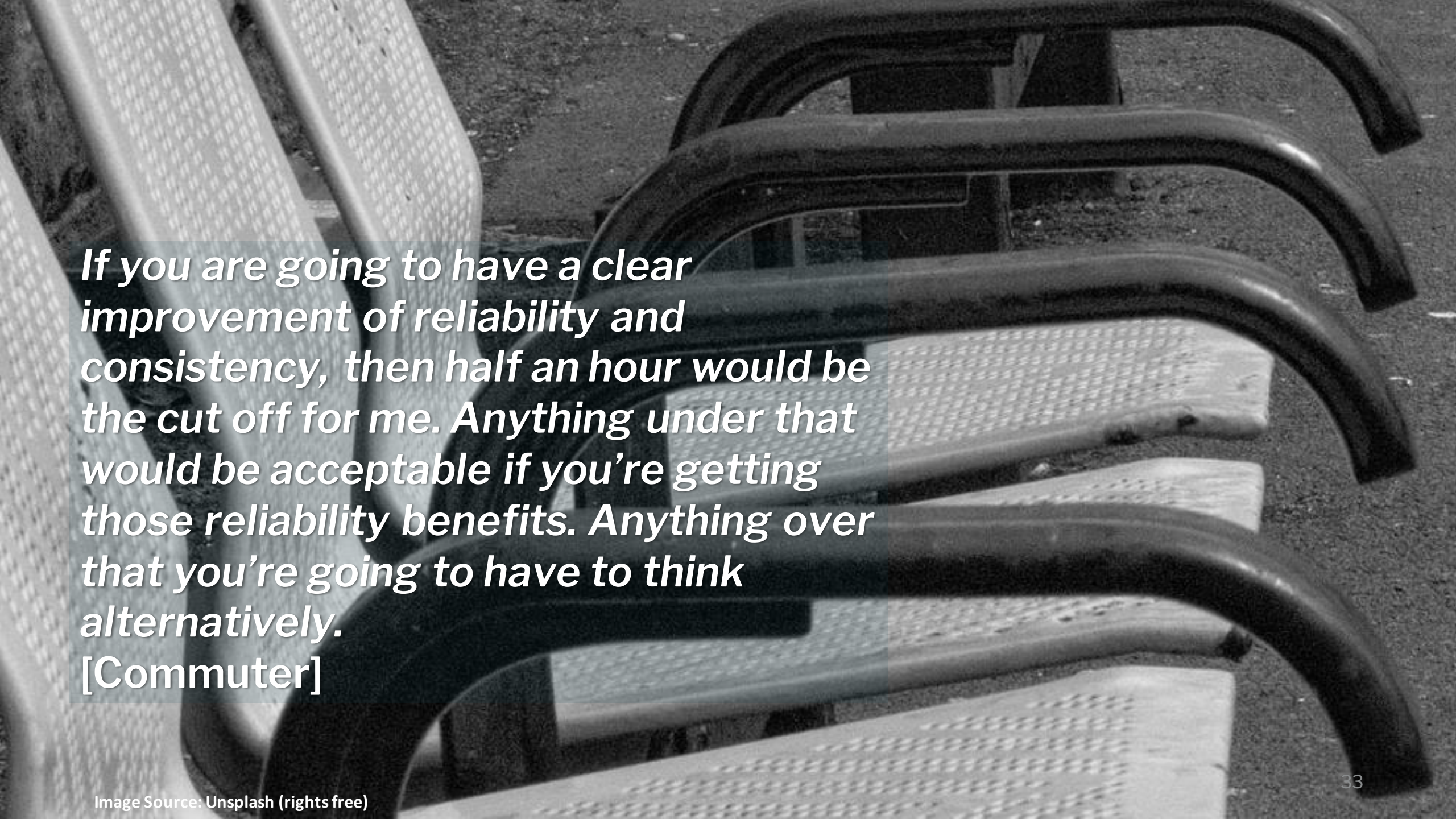
Shorter than now

- Becomes interesting to some passengers once changing might make a journey fifteen minutes or more shorter
- However, triggers worries about then having to rely on the next train being on time/not cancelled and time spent waiting at an unplanned change
- Sense that the 'bird in the hand' being on the current train might outweigh savings unless they are significant
- More likely to consider if on a deadline or wanting to get home after a busy day
- Less likely to consider if travelling for leisure purposes/not in a rush
- Seasonality is a factor – even for a time saving changing may be less appealing if it involves standing outside in bad weather

It's something we are all used to, so if it is made longer you're going to notice that, but if it's shorter you'll say "happy days thank you!". [Commuter]

It depends on what you're doing at the other end. I don't think saving five minutes is anything great, it's not going to allow you to do anything extra. If it saved you an hour, fantastic, but I can't see how changing a train would save you that length of time so it wouldn't be a defining factor for me. [Current Non-train User]

There is interest in changing trains for a shorter journey, but this is offset to a degree by concerns about how reliable the change (and the connecting service) might be



If you are going to have a clear improvement of reliability and consistency, then half an hour would be the cut off for me. Anything under that would be acceptable if you're getting those reliability benefits. Anything over that you're going to have to think alternatively.
[Commuter]

What an acceptable length of wait between trains is if a change has to be made

Clear need for a minimum time

- Majority want at least five to ten minutes to change trains as a minimum, below that it is too much of a rush and some will start to look for alternative transport solutions
- Partly driven by building in a buffer against delays to the first train
- Mostly desired because travellers don't want to be rushed, and would like time to find, board and get settled on the next train without having to run

Maximum depends on a variety of factors

- Overall journey length – once it goes over two hours waits of 30-40 minutes are tolerated by some
- More regular travellers (especially commuters) have confidence built from making the journey many times so tend to want changes of ten to fifteen minutes
- Size of station makes a difference in terms of if there's more to do then the wait can be longer, but even then, the aspiration is for as short a wait time (above the required minimum) as possible ideally

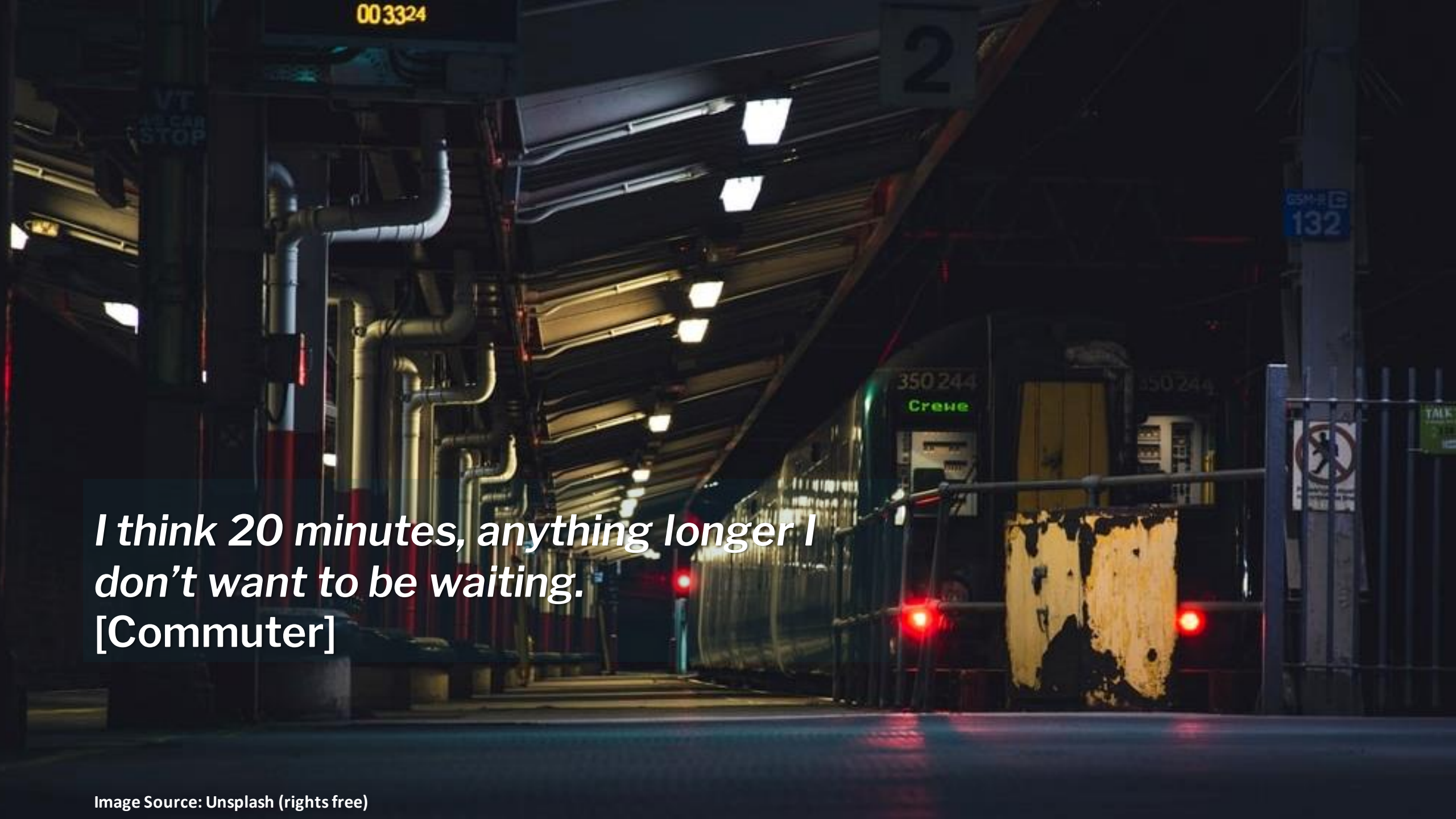
15 to 30 mins is plenty! Any more than 30 feels like forever. Fifteen is best for same platform too. [Leisure]

If you're losing an hour that is a lot, if you're waiting half an hour twice a day that takes a big chunk out of what's left of your evening. So, it would have to be less than half an hour. 15 to 20 minutes sounds ok. [Current Non-train User]

I'd say the sweet spot for me is a ten-fifteen-minute wait. If it's getting towards half an hour, you might as well get on another train. [Commuter]

The quicker the better but with the right waiting facilities...it's probably impossible to match up a system that there's just enough time but not too much time. [Business]

Most were clear that once a change got over 20 to 30 minutes then it would be less acceptable (or cause some to consider other modes of transport). This was particularly the case for commuters, where the time spent standing on platforms would quickly add up over weeks/months



I think 20 minutes, anything longer I don't want to be waiting.
[Commuter]

Expectations of service assuming journey time and getting a seat are comparable to now ... 1

If trains on their journey were *more frequent* but they had to *change trains* to get to their destination

- Most felt that trains would have to be at least every 20 to 30 minutes to work well for them - giving more options can make up for the need to change
- Wait time between trains felt to be a minimum of five minutes and maximum of 20 to 30 minutes
- Service pattern most suited overall to commuters and regular travellers
 - However, feels like a big change from what they're used to and would require investment in information and staffing to be confident
- By contrast, passengers who currently value direct services the most are not inspired by this idea and may feel that trains have become more difficult to use
 - Particularly less suited to disabled people – especially those with mobility and visual impairments who might not be able to cope

Like maximum half an hour, like once every half an hour. I wouldn't want to wait longer than that [Commuter]

Expectations of service assuming journey time and getting a seat are comparable to now ... 2

As long as it's as regular as it is now – every half an hour – then that's ok. More than one train an hour and I'm happy. [Leisure]

Not less than hourly – otherwise you really have to make sure you don't miss it. [Leisure]

I would be ok with slightly longer, maybe once an hour would be ok. [Commuter]

I'd be thinking along the same lines, when you're talking an hour between trains and they're going to different routes, it does make it harder to visualise it being any good. [Current Non-train User]

If trains on their journey were *less frequent* but they had *more destinations* available to them

- For many participants in the discussion groups in this North West sample the absolute minimum expected frequency would be hourly
 - However, views tended to be set by their current frequency, e.g. those with 6 current services per hour would think more in terms of decreasing to 4-5 per hour rather than one, 4 to 3, and so on
- However, for those currently not using trains, hourly felt too infrequent and would not tempt some of them to give up their cars
- Those with a current service more frequent than hourly would still see this as less good than what they have now
- Still an expectation for most of through trains in this scenario to the major hubs that their station currently serves
- Clear benefits to (some) leisure travellers but potentially less so for commuters

Overall, preferences split according to current behaviour. Nevertheless, there were individuals in each audience type who felt they would be best served by one model or the other – on the basis of their destination need, regularity of travel, and attitude to changing trains

Comfort (or discomfort) can make a significant difference

Comfort

- Changing trains becomes more appealing when they know that they will get a good seat on the next train – especially when they have already got one on the first train so clear that they’re not trading down
- Knowledge that they will not be cold and wet while waiting for the next train is also important – otherwise it’s better to stay on a slower train which at least is warm and dry than interrupt that for the promise of a faster one

For me comfort as well at the change, being able to sit down, have shelter, have somewhere to sit and food and drink. Even if they aren't reliable if you've got somewhere to sit it is a bit more bearable. [Commuter]

I find the stations – I've changed at Bolton, Preston – they're quite well equipped, the waiting rooms are good, they've got a TV, it's warm and I'm not waiting a massive amount of time, it's usually 10 to 20 minutes that I'm waiting. [Disabled Person]

The waiting room is probably No 1: comfortable...Wi-Fi that works, warmth. The waiting room at Preston is awful ... freezing compared to Wigan where you're sheltered from the cold and wind. Comfort of where you're waiting, space to work if you need to, charging sockets and seats with a table. [Commuter]

We're in 2022 and Crewe hasn't really changed since 1972. No longer is it a nice to have for a station to be warm. Accessibility should be essential but it's not always the case. [Commuter]

I take the train, I can drive, but it's comfort and it's cheaper, I like to know I can go in comfort. If that starts to make me want to use the car because the train service isn't giving me that, then that would do it. [Leisure]

It would be lovely to travel as the Japanese do or have a pub at every station, but would it make a difference? I think ultimately your first choice is destination and you just plan it online and you take the best, quickest route available to you. But it would be nice to have nice, comfortable, modern areas to wait in. [Current Non-train User]

My biggest priorities are always comfort. It's not a given... like last time I was on the train they had two disabled bays and it was next to the toilets. On top of that people were using it to store their bikes and I was so cramped... [Disabled Person]

It's probably more about where you have to wait than the station size, for me. It's the comfort of waiting. [Commuter]

Comfort is important and can be the difference between a good journey and a less good one. In particular, a station with the right levels of comfort in its waiting rooms and available facilities can make changing trains more appealing

Variations in priorities and needs by passenger type

Although everyone's journey options are different, all start with some experience of train services

Current service(s) colours expectations

- Know what they are offered currently, with all the perceived positives and negatives, and see different potential models through that lens

Experience to date limits how they think about services evolving

- How they use trains currently makes it very difficult for respondents to think in 'blue sky' terms
- Think if there are any big improvements possible (short of adding more track) then these would have been done already

Current non-train users also have experience from the past

- May not have used trains for years, but think they know them
- Talk in terms of old trains, draughty, uncomfortable, jolting track
- Generally unaware of investments in rolling stock, etc..., in recent years – though this does suggest that they could be attracted back if they understood the reality

Given the historical nature of the punctuality and reliability of the train services in my experience it is difficult to envisage a time where I would trust the reliability of any given service. I have had a multitude of experiences with connecting trains and layovers in particular are bugbears of mine. [Current Non-train User]

It just wasn't very reliable, and you've got these old trains that they use round here, which are noisy, draughty, uncomfortable – it just doesn't make you want to try it again. [Current Non-train User]

Unless it's changed since I've last done it and there's more information about where you need to be getting off and which platform you need to move over to, and what time your train is coming, I just don't like the thought of it. [Disabled Person]

Current (and past) experience of rail journeys sets the lens through which respondents talk about timetabling

Confidence cuts across passenger types and depends on a variety of factors

Practical confidence

- Knowing what to do and where to go at stations – having done the journey before
- Sense of routine
- Overall experience of train travel – boosting preparedness to try new routes and take changing in unfamiliar places in their stride

I think I'm quite confident with travelling when I was a bit younger, I was less confident, I felt like I needed to know where things are, I needed time to figure it out and not be in a rush, I think at the start I was a bit more impatient but it's alright now to be honest [Commuter]

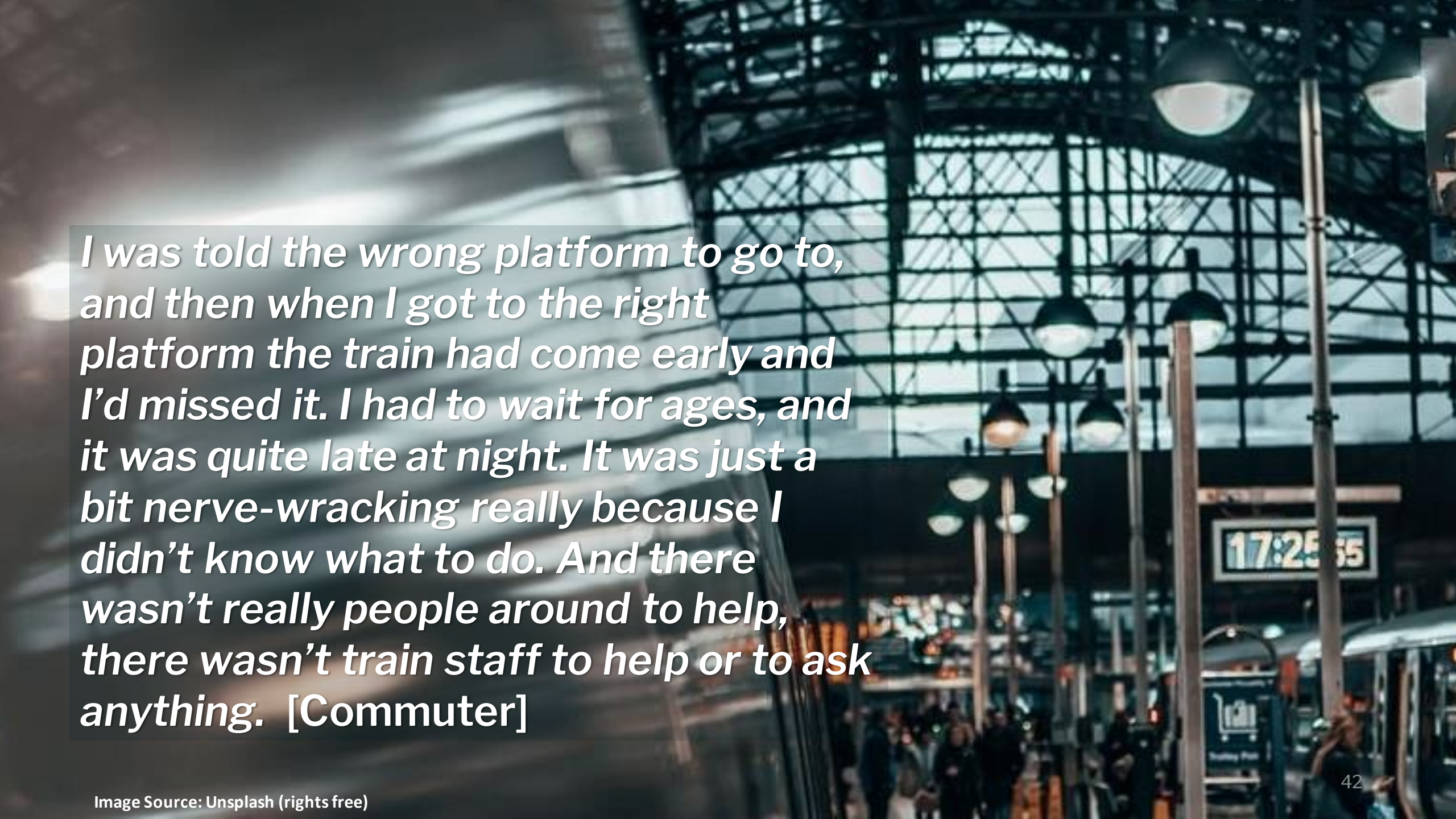
Emotional confidence

- Being uncertain about rail travel or a new route
- Within this the fear of getting lost, of missing the next train
- Not liking stations that are 'too busy' or overwhelming
- Mostly for those not using trains as frequently, but also present for a minority of commuters, especially those who perceive poor reliability on their current service

I like to feel like I have a sense of autonomy and control over the journey, because I get anxious with public transport if I think a train going to be at say Preston for two o'clock and it's delayed and I worry that I'm going to miss that connecting train so for me it creates a lot of anxiety if things are not turning up, or running late, it's that uncertainty that I don't like. That's why I prefer coaches. [Current Non-train User]

Once you're on the train you know that you're on and you're going to get to your destination, whereas when you're changing it's all a bit unsure and I don't like it. You don't know if the trains going to get there on time for your linking train, and I just don't feel comfortable. I've done it in the past and it's been a nightmare, and it puts me off completely. [Disabled Person]

Confidence has a strong influence on how people use a train service

A blurred image of a train platform at night. The background shows a large, dark structure with a grid of lights, possibly a train station or airport terminal. A digital clock in the lower right corner displays "17:25:55". The overall scene is dimly lit, with some lights visible in the distance.

I was told the wrong platform to go to, and then when I got to the right platform the train had come early and I'd missed it. I had to wait for ages, and it was quite late at night. It was just a bit nerve-wracking really because I didn't know what to do. And there wasn't really people around to help, there wasn't train staff to help or to ask anything. [Commuter]

Respondents therefore clustered along scales of what they are currently offered on their most regular journey in terms of how they assess potential changes



Clear preference initially based on status quo for individuals

- Most would prefer a direct journey, but those currently having to change and making more complicated journeys were quicker to consider having to change more for a reliable service
- Those with direct services were less keen on changing, and tended to spontaneously think about improving reliability in terms of making their existing service more reliable rather than putting in an enforced change

By the end of the sessions, respondents could typically see the advantages and disadvantages of different potential models, but they viewed them initially through the prism of what they already have. Despite this, there were clearly some tendencies within different passenger types towards specific priorities

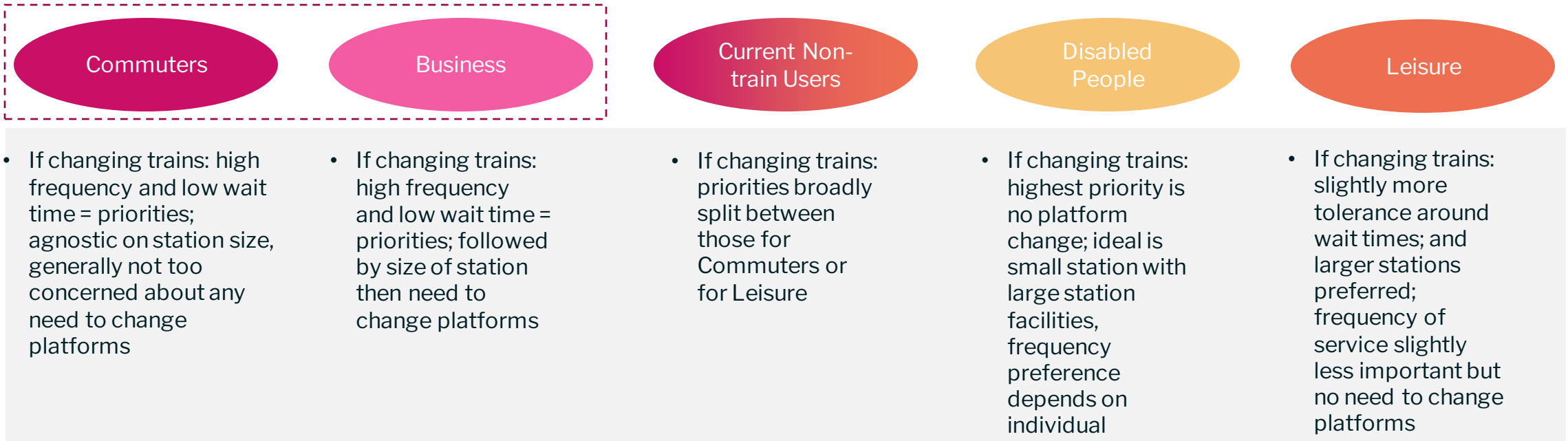
Overview of audience variation

	Commuters	Business	Current Non-train users	Disabled People	Leisure
Pre-task	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Starting preference mixed between direct and more frequent depending on regularity of commute 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very mixed starting preferences connected to individual travel circumstances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mixed starting preferences connected to individual travel circumstances, past experiences and confidence but tending to prefer direct where possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most respondents preferred direct, but frequency can be very important depending on journey type 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mixed starting preferences based on experience/ confidence and overall need
Priorities Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overall priorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faster journeys to reduce travel time Frequency for more options and improved reliability Range of destinations is low priority given fixed journey focus Where preferences evolved, more likely to be towards higher frequency from fewer direct (once educated by model) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Like commuters, overall priorities/aspirations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frequency for more options and improved reliability Desire for range of destinations varies in line with starting preferences Little change during sessions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overall priorities broadly split between those for Commuters or for Leisure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overall priorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Direct, no changes Faster Frequency More destinations Little change during sessions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> one shifted to increased frequency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overall priorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Direct More destinations No change Little change during sessions but some move towards direct for reduced effort

Regular travelling commuters felt confident to change trains, though still would prefer a direct train. Leisure travellers were more likely to plan to achieve a direct train. Other groups depended on their reason for travel for their preferences

Priorities if they had to change trains

Changing



Given changing trains feels like a compromise, low wait time tended to be high in priorities across respondents. While Leisure travellers were interested in station size – potentially because spending time at a station is more of a novelty, frequency was also important to most. Disabled passengers, and Business users tended to be more like either Commuters or Leisure depending on how they use trains

Commuters tended to have an initial preference for frequency and faster services – whether or not involving a change

Why and how they travel

- Regular users of the train for **work purposes**, although outlook on commuting varies by frequency, and complexity of current journey
- **Understand the timetables**, know where they've got to go at different stations to make connections
- **Have strategies** (built through experience) for what to do if something goes wrong – delays, cancellations, missed connections

What is important

- **Arriving on time** – it's not their own time and they need to be where they say they're going to be for employers and clients
- **Reliability** – knowing that they will get to where they want to get to within an acceptable time, i.e., predictability
- For many, a **frequent regular service** beats a less frequent direct one - **gives options for if running early/late, and boosts feelings of control**
- Would ideally like a seat, power socket and WIFI, but travelling at peak times means this isn't always possible – more important to get to work/home

What is less important

- **Direct service – if this also means slower or less frequent** – unless they already have a direct service and have got used to working on the train
- **Range of facilities at stations** – pass through so frequently that there is no novelty value and expected high prices mean they may have come up with alternative sources of products
- **Range of destinations served** – they're doing the same trip every day

I use the train five days a week so I'm pretty confident! [Commuter]

I think getting a seat is important, especially if it's really overcrowded. Getting a nice seat, clean with a plug socket so you can charge your phone, is really good. [Commuter]

A seat and a USB, a power socket – that all makes a difference. . [Commuter]

On time, not too busy, so I can get on and find a seat, it doesn't have to be empty but not squashed and lots of people everywhere. [Commuter]

It doesn't have to be direct as long as it's at a time that works for me. [Commuter]

Commuters have a high need for control and want to keep the impact of travel minimal (in terms of time to travel and time lost in event of travel problems or changes in their day)

Leisure travellers are overall more relaxed than Commuters

Why and how they travel

- For **non-work-related** purposes
- Frequency very variable
- **Spread of confidence with using the trains**, built up by frequency of travel and routes travelled – from low to higher depending on individual
- **Tend to prefer direct services in principle**, though some expect to have to change

Mainly using it for leisure, we have family dotted around the North-West and the Midlands so we're constantly on the trains to visit them. [Leisure]

What is important

- Being able to **get a seat**
- Being **near luggage**
- **Knowing what the route is in advance**
- (For many) **Being able to relax on the train** – not worrying about changes or onward journeys (less stress)

I like if you can get a direct train, because sometimes if you are changing trains it can be stressful. [Leisure]

What is less important

- **Arriving by a specific time** (though this is still an aspiration)
- **Frequency of service** – for those travelling less regularly – as long as their services depart when expected the frequency is less important provided that an infrequent service doesn't lead to a busy train

Using them for leisure, I don't mind the trains being less frequent because I can adjust myself around that. Having more destinations and less changing would make that more preferable to me. [Leisure]

Reliability and punctuality are important, but less pressure than travelling for work means there is less requirement for speed of journey and alternatives/options

Business travellers' attitudes depend on the purpose of their travel from one occasion to the next

Why and how they travel

- **Not routine** travel therefore involves active planning
- **Tends to be outside peak hours** – visiting clients, other offices, etc... – so can be as time pressured as commuters but with a different dynamic

What is important

- As with commuters, they **want to arrive somewhere on time**, however slightly more flexibility and control of their timings
- Being able to **get a seat**
- (For some) direct services as less confident about where and how to change trains at different stations
- Being able to **get easily to multiple destinations**
- **Reliability** – worry about delays because they're not using the trains every day: fewer alternative strategies

What is less important

- **Direct services** (unless faster or more frequent services are not possible, in which case direct becomes the substitute preference)

Occasional users look more like Commuters or Leisure travellers depending on their journey purpose and constraints

I work in sales, sometimes I go to Lancaster, Manchester maybe Blackpool...I don't use trains too often but when I do I get it from Leyland and I change at Preston. [Business]

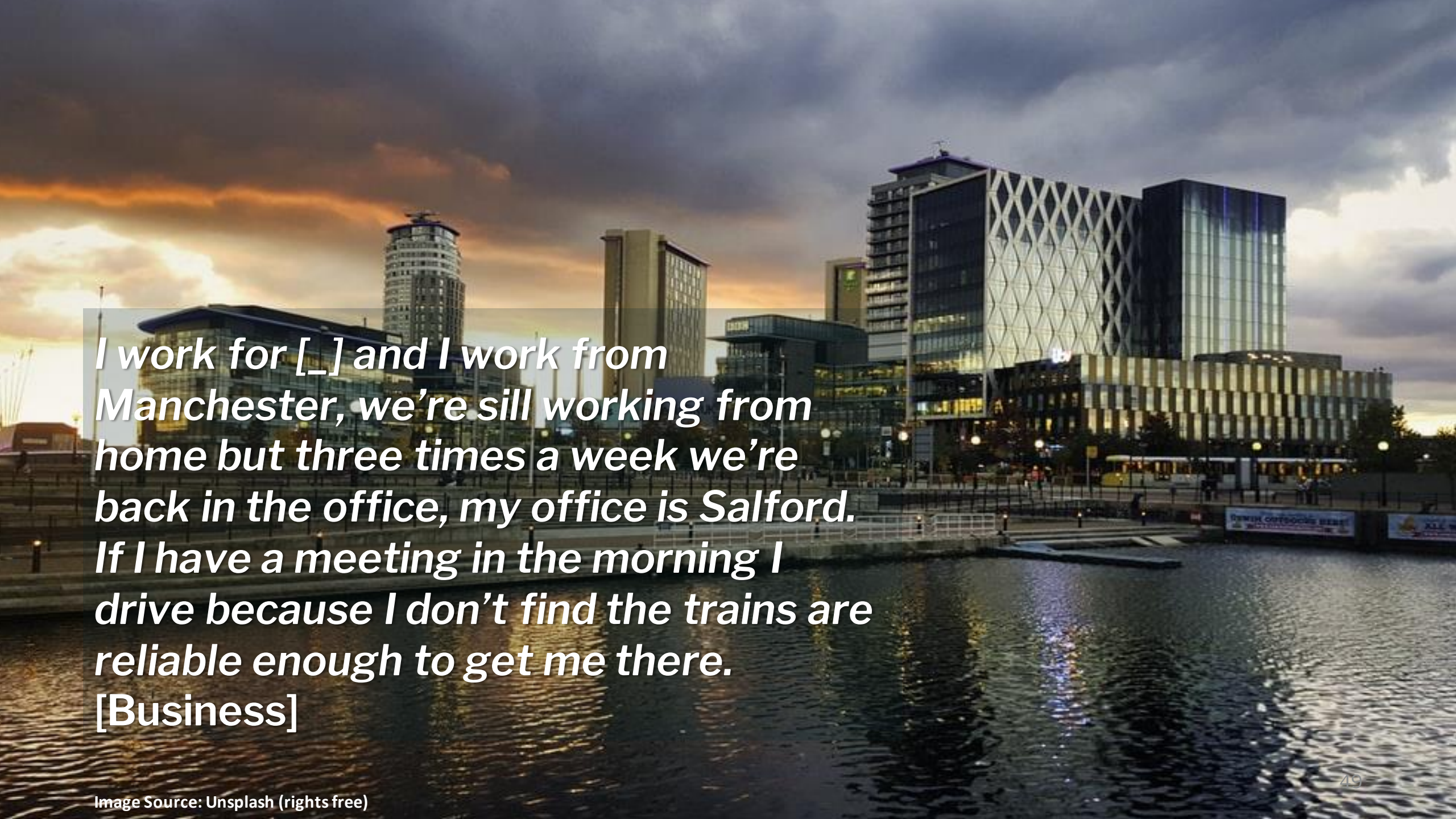
For me, it's reliability. Knowing I'm going to get a train and it's going to be there and it's not going to get cancelled, also a direct train. [Business]

When I go into Manchester by car it's horrendous with the traffic, that's why I prefer to get the train. What could be a half hour on the train could be an hour and a half. [Business]

For me it's train or drive, you could probably get a bus but it might take half a day. [Business]

I change at Preston to get to Blackpool reasonably regularly and 100% a direct train anytime...unless the train is running late I would generally be on time so I'm not relying on them coming every few minutes. [Business]

I co-run an [xxxx] company so I'm always on trains...we do a lot of stuff in Manchester, Bolton, Wigan, Blackpool. It's as much likely to be a Monday morning as a Saturday night. I try and get direct trains because I've always got stuff to do. [Business]

A cityscape at dusk with modern buildings and a body of water in the foreground. The sky is dark with some clouds, and the buildings are lit up. The water in the foreground reflects the lights from the buildings and the sky. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

I work for [] and I work from Manchester, we're still working from home but three times a week we're back in the office, my office is Salford. If I have a meeting in the morning I drive because I don't find the trains are reliable enough to get me there. [Business]

Attitudes of disabled people in this sample reflect both the nature of their disability and the purpose of their travel

Why and how they travel

- **Can overlap with other audiences** (e.g., commuters, or leisure)
- May have specific needs on top depending on the nature of their disability – those with mobility constraints worry about how they get from one platform to the next, whereas some of those with visual constraints think more about navigation
- The ideal is to not have to change

It's for the same reason as everyone else really, but we've had to stop driving because neither of us can see well enough now. [Disabled Person]

What is important

- **Knowing exactly where they need to go at stations and how to get there** (both to the station and within the station)
- Being **able to book assistance** as needed
- Being able to get a **seat**
- Being **near luggage**
- **As few changes as possible** (because changing trains is difficult for some) – and where there is a change, ideally not a change of platform

The big factor for me is I don't have to change. I've got mobility issues and changing trains is a big problem for me. Getting from one platform to another, particularly if I'm short of time, I just can't do it. If I had to change, I wouldn't get the train in the first place. [Disabled Person]

What is less important

- **Frequency of service** (where support is unavailable)

I became disabled six years ago and since then changing trains isn't really an option for me. It's complicated enough, I call 24 hours before to make sure they know I need the ramp. [Disabled Person]

Frequency is not as important as knowing that it will work for you. [Disabled Person]

Disabled passengers may find their ability to move restricted and consequently prefer a direct service. However, some within this sample did not feel they were defined by their disability and shared the same concerns and needs as those without a disability

Experience of changing trains varies by experience of disability

Physical and mental

I do dread it because I get worried about missing my connection and all the hassle that creates. The physical pain of having to push myself to get to the other place, it does hurt. My lower back is disintegrating basically, so it is very painful for me to walk fast. [Disabled Person]

It's very useful with my partner as well because she suffers with MS, so it's ideal to get her on the train and get her sat down, and again, there's toilet facilities there when she needs them. With the station you've got the facilities there, which you haven't got with any other transport. [Disabled Person]

I visit my daughter in St Anne's, and I find it best to travel by train because I have a problem needing frequent toilet visits, so the train setup is perfect for me because there's always a toilet on the train or at the station. [Disabled Person]

If I had to change at a bigger station, I think it would maybe have an impact on my mental health in the build up and planning. [Disabled Person]

Visual

Not that my sight is completely impaired, but if I got off the train and I wasn't familiar with the route the signage could catch me out a bit, so if I knew that I was travelling from a to b and I knew I didn't have to get off, it would be a lot more comfortable for me. [Disabled Person]

I've got to take planning in preparation because of my disability, I can't leave things to chance. If I had to get off the train and I didn't know where I was going, I'd struggle if there was no one about to point me in the right direction. [Disabled Person]

Changing trains is not something that people look forward to, and for some disabled people can be an ordeal

Current Non-train Users see things through the lens of their previous train experience and what they could use trains for in the future

Why and how they travel

- **Typically using cars or buses to make journeys** (cars = more freedom/independence)
- Otherwise, can sit within any of the other audiences
- Most have used trains in the past (lapsed users), meaning that they do **have expectations and (out of date) views about what the experience of train travel is like**, which impact on their behaviours and opinions

The main things I'm bothered about with a local train is being on time and not being cancelled. Also, the actual Northern trains are absolutely freezing, I'm not too fussed about the extras but at least have it heated, that is a basic thing they should have. [Current Non-train User]

What is important

- Being **certain of reliability**
- Knowing that they will have a **pleasant travel experience** (compared with car which is available when they want it, their own choice of music, etc.)
- Strong preference for direct journeys – potentially set by poor past experiences

I'm working from home mainly now, so I don't have to go into office as much, but when I do I prefer to drive because of my experiences at the time. What I mean by that is, there were loads of cancellations, once I got stranded. Also, the train was every hour, so if I started at nine I'd have to leave at seven to get there on time. [Current Non-train User]

What is less important

- **Range of direct destinations depends on the reasons that they would be travelling** – of less interest to potential commuters or those expecting to make regular journeys to the same destination(s)

The problem I did have with it is the infrequency of the trains. I think the last train was generally 11pm, so you're cutting your night short, and if they're every hour you're leaving ridiculously earlier. [Current Non-train User]

Look more like Leisure users or Commuters depending on personal circumstances

Changing trains

Assumptions and expectations

For most, changing trains is just something that has to be done, but there is a spread in overall attitudes towards and tolerance of those changes

Most try and minimise it, even where there are advantages

- The most experienced regular train users do see that sometimes there can be advantages to changing – e.g., getting a faster train – but still don't want to do multiple changes

There's no benefit to changing train, it's a necessary evil but it doesn't cause a massive issue to my day. [Commuter]

Less confident or less experienced of changes hold most concern

- Preference is for direct where possible, but most will change if they have to
- Some concern from all respondents who have direct services currently about how they would feel if they suddenly had to change on those journeys
 - before understanding any reliability/efficiency benefits it can feel like a backwards step, and even when understood some are still against the idea because it feels like a worse service than what they currently have

If you said to a customer, you have to change because it'll make everything more convenient, I don't think people would care, would they? They'd think "well I don't want to have to change to make the service better". I think people would think more selfishly. [Leisure]


Those who don't want to change use different strategies to avoid it

- Plan ahead - to work out the way that gets them to their destination either directly, or with the fewest possible changes, even if it takes longer
- Change departure station – to access a direct route
- Change mode – don't use the train if a change is needed

I find other train stations to go from if I want to go to other places. [Leisure]

I dread them. I do an annual journey to my sister's in Cornwall, and that I can usually get away with one change but that restricts my choice. If I go with two changes I have a much wider choice, but I dread them because I have to look very closely at my connection times to make sure I've got plenty of time to make the journey from one platform to another. [Disabled Person]

Expectations are set by experience (or past experience in the case of the current non-train users) – a minority will not change if they can help it, most will change if it means that they can get to their destination. Overall changing is looked upon as something that needs to be done when using the rail network by most



I think if you told people they had to change twice on their journey to make the service manageable across the whole rail service, I think people would think why should we change to make the whole service better, because it's not really our responsibility? We just want convenience.
[Leisure]

The experience of changing can be affected by multiple factors

Who they're travelling with

- Easiest to move around busy stations alone – adding in young children, or groups of friends, can increase stress levels

For me the changing is impractical with young kids, I've got to carry them, make sure I don't forget things... I could do without all that. [Leisure]

Time allowed for changing at the stopover

- Can make the difference between having to rush, and being able to take their time

If anything, if I was travelling with other people I'd rather not change in general because it's just moving more people about. If you've all sat down together the last thing you want to do is get up and change. [Current Non-train User]

Location of change

- How easy a station is to navigate; number of other trains present at the same time (and passengers joining/leaving them)
- Level of facilities at the station (if waiting long enough to need them)

It depends on the time difference. If you don't have much time to wait, then the smaller stations are better because you can stay on one platform, whereas on the bigger ones you have to run four platforms over. If you have a little bit of time to wait around the bigger stations aren't too bad for it. [Commuter]

Weather/time of day

- How pleasant it is (or otherwise) to be standing waiting
- Within this the season can make a difference – winter can be so cold and wet that some respondents in this sample actively try not to travel during it
- Mostly preferable to be changing in daytime, outside peak (so less busy) but not in the evenings/nights - can feel isolated, at risk

Having said that, Preston's not the best place to stand in the winter because it gets very draughty – we try and travel between Easter and October every year, then just stay at home over the winter. [Disabled Person]

Most visualised their usual station when thinking about changing

Typically larger

- Either the hub station that they travel to from their local station, or for those boarding at hubs, the next hub on their journey
- Sets expectations in the mind that it is going to be busy, multiple platforms
- At the same time, a station that they are comfortable with using, and feel that they know

But some think about smaller stations

- Those with experience of having to change at smaller stations on their usual route
- Those who dislike the busyness of the larger stations and who have the option to change somewhere smaller – e.g., Salford Crescent – so that they can stay on the train longer

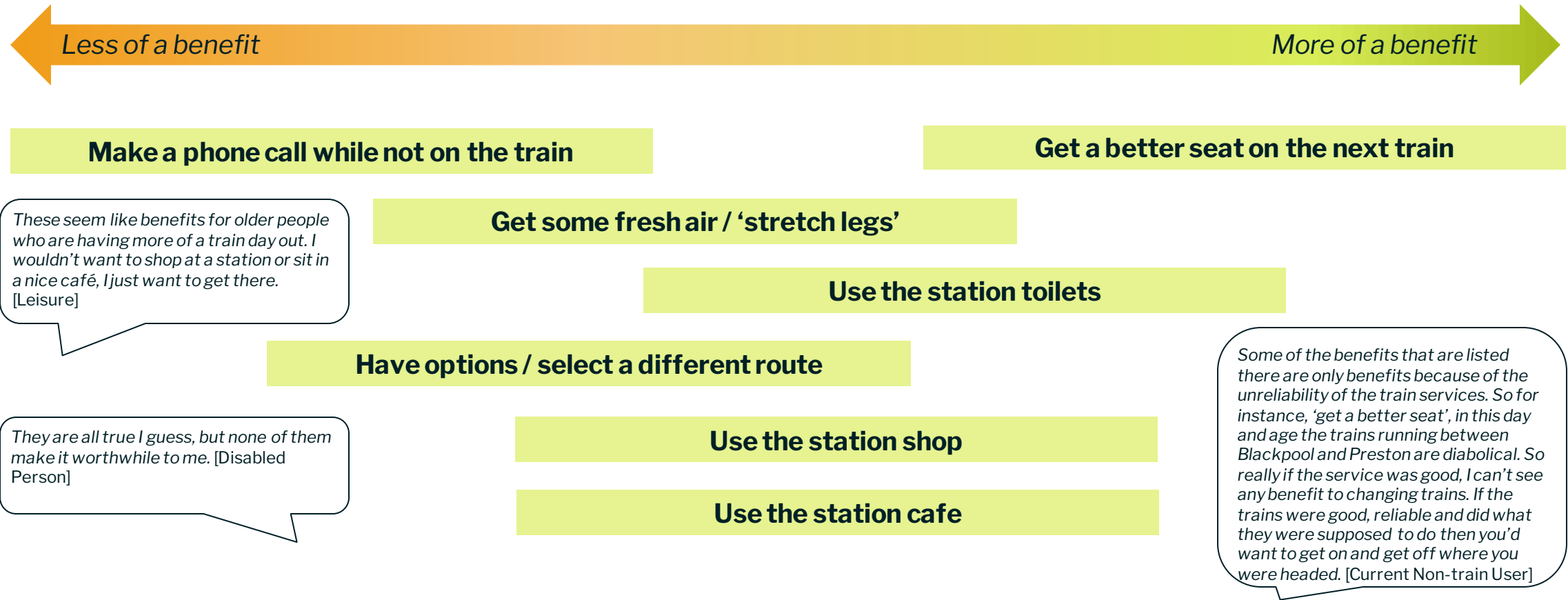
I go from Blackpool North and I have to change, I get the train to Salford Crescent and get off at Salford Central, pass through Preston and I could change at Preston but once I'm on the train I want to stay on as long as I can.
[Business]

Wigan's got a new waiting room that's quite nice and it's much warmer than Preston, that's quite a plus to changing at Wigan because when it's cold and you're waiting for a while it's horrible.
[Commuter]

Now that I've got more used to it I'm fine with it and because I'm very familiar with the station, because I always change at either Preston or Wigan, I know where everything is, I know where the exit is, I know how to get down. [Commuter]

The place where they change most frequently does set expectations for what the experience will be like, with respondents in this sample arranging their journeys to change in one place rather than another – e.g., Wigan rather than Preston because Wigan has a newer, warmer waiting room

Respondents generally did not spontaneously recognise ‘benefits to changing trains’ – when prompted, some aspects had value if *having* to change but none were a reason to want to break up a journey



Overall, changing trains is seen as a compromise which some things can mildly mitigate (rather than offer a ‘benefit’)

More of a benefit

Get a better seat on the next train

- All can see this as a potential benefit – particularly if their current train is crowded
- However, would need reassurance that this would definitely happen – fear at the moment of leaving an uncomfortable train which is going to their destination to get another train which may be worse

The one about getting a better seat on the next train only feels applicable to me if I've had to stand up on the first train. I've experienced that on the train to Leeds and Huddersfield, you look forward to the next train because you'll get a seat. [Current Non-train User]

Use the station toilets

- Benefit for those who prefer station toilets to those on the train
- Minority prefer the on-train toilets because they think poor reputation means fewer people use them – so actually they can be better than those on stations

I'd prefer to use the train toilet because in my head it's cleaner. I feel like less people are using the train toilet than the station toilet, and therefore it's cleaner. [Current Non-train User]

Use the station shop/cafe

- Browsing can help to pass the time
- Can be useful for purchases of food/magazines during long waits
- However, also thought to be expensive – preference to purchase items before travelling or leave the station to go to a cheaper local alternative if there's one nearby

Yeah, the shops are ok, I don't really use them to be honest. I'd use them as a backup, I know that they're there if I need a sandwich but in my head I think they're overpriced and not very nice. [Commuter]

There are potential benefits to changing trains, but these are best viewed as 'things you can do if you have to change trains' - the ideal is still to go direct where possible or have a minimal time window for changing. Any perceived 'benefit' also diminishes with the number of changes – one is acceptable, two at most (for a longer journey) but more than that and trains look unattractive

Less of a benefit

Get some fresh air / stretch legs

- More of a benefit for very long journeys, and even then there is often a preference to put up with discomfort if it means getting to the final destination quicker

Also, if it's a long journey sitting down on one train can be a bit tedious, whereas if it's on two different trains I personally prefer that because it gives me a chance to have a little break and stretch my legs. [Leisure]

Have options / select a different route

- Feels like a benefit in extremis/when something has gone wrong
- Commuters and more regular travellers can see the use – though more as an option rather than a benefit
- Less regular travellers more likely to be thinking in terms of 'I've planned and know my route' I don't want to change it mid-journey

Getting off the train to stretch your legs, I just think, the journeys aren't that long so I'd rather sit on it. [Current Non-train User]

Having options and selecting a different route, when I'm planning a weekend away, I know where my destination is, I'm not getting on the train on a whim, so having that flexibility on a journey which is usually quite consistent isn't a plus. [Leisure]

Make a phone call while not on the train

- Potentially useful for a minority – but even commuters tended to say that they don't really want to make calls while travelling
- Value being able to disconnect from the world while on the train – get more work done or relax, so struggle to see this as a benefit

When I leave I have the route in my mind already [Leisure]

If I'm on the train, then I'm either not going to make a phone call or be discreet – trains aren't the time for phone calls [Leisure]

Three prompted ideas felt like lesser benefits – especially making a phone call as this is something that is actively avoided where possible according to respondents in this sample

Changing Trains

Factors at the station thought to affect or improve the experience

Need to change platforms is a significant barrier

- The ideal (at all stations) would be for the next train to depart from the same platform as the first has arrived at
 - Limits need to move around (especially with luggage)
 - Removes concerns about navigating unfamiliar stations
- If the same platform can't be achieved, then the next best are island platforms where passengers simply have to move from one side to the other
- When crossing the tracks many don't express any preference between bridges or underpasses
 - Underpasses can feel quicker for some – especially where they involve ramps instead of stairs – but others see them as potentially poorly lit and less secure than bridges
 - Disabled people in this sample had a narrow preference for underpasses rather than having to use either stairs or lifts to access bridges

The preferred method of movement between platforms was more linked to the individual than to their audience group – however the most important thing is to understand the layout of the station, and therefore what's coming, in advance where possible



Other factors influencing the changing trains experience

Larger station

- Likely to have a more frequent service
- Staff assistance available (along with lifts) for those that need it
- Range of amenities if a long wait
- But can be overwhelming, busy, difficult to navigate

Smaller station

- Acceptable if the wait time is short but passengers have security worries (especially at night)
- Attractive for some disabled people because likely to be less busy – but also to lack the facilities (e.g., lifts, staff assistance) which they might need
- Potentially an easier change with less platform choice
- Station size comes more down to personal preference but for some disabled people the ideal would actually be a smaller station with a larger station's facilities

Platform lighting

- Key when changing later at night or in the winter
- Contributes to security/reassurance
- Should (ideally) help passengers with navigation around the station – clearly marking platform numbers, exits, etc.

Platform with toilets

- Can make a difference to those with need to have facilities available
- Make a difference to those who prefer not to use on-train toilets (because they perceive station toilets to be more likely to be checked/cleaned regularly)

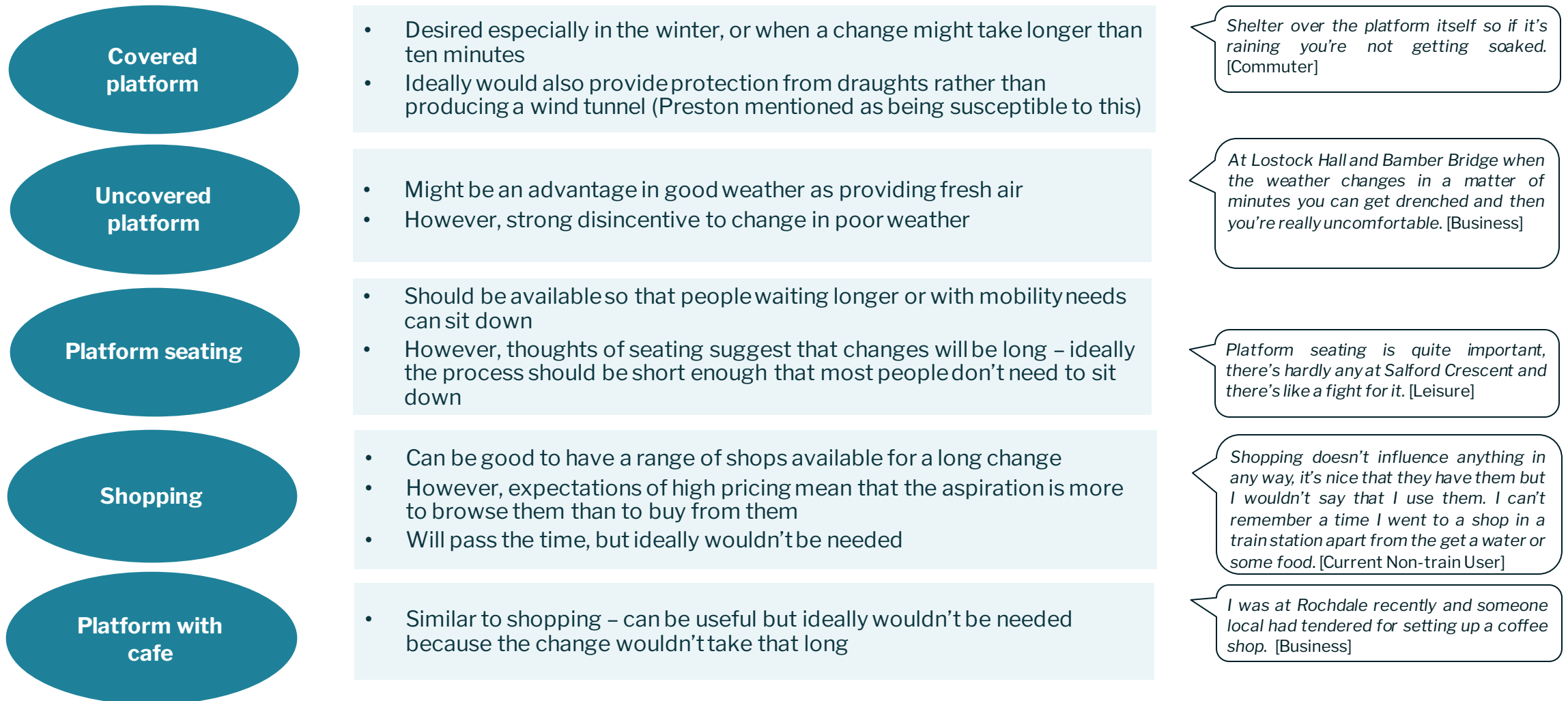
If it's a bigger station, you might be able to get some help if you're struggling to get back. At a smaller one sometimes there's no one there, and if there's delays and cancellations you might not know what's going on. Especially vulnerable people. [Commuter]

I'd have to go with smaller stations but if they included all of the things the big stations did, like toilets, ramps, all things accessible. [Disabled Person]

Platform lighting, if it's dark you don't want to change. [Leisure]

I don't use toilets at train stations, they need sprucing up and more regular cleaning, they're not appealing at all. I've also been at some smaller stations where you need a key to get in and there's no one there to give you the key. [Business]

Other factors influencing the changing trains experience



Security can have a big impact on how happy passengers are to change trains

Cameras can reassure, but staffing is the ideal

- When changing alone, outside the rush hours, it can be intimidating to wait at unfamiliar stations – so clear presence of security cameras, and someone to approach if necessary makes a difference
- Reluctance to change at unstaffed suburban stations at night if it can be avoided – feel threatening and concerns about drugs/drinking/antisocial behaviour

But large stations also have their own problems

- Although there are likely to be more people around in large hub stations, both male and female users believed that they can be intimidating places to be on Friday and Saturday nights with large groups of young people passing through or hanging around, particularly where they have been drinking
 - ideally having staff or Transport Police present as this would be reassuring

There's also more staff at big ones, which is good if you need to know something, I don't know it just feels better knowing people are there. [Leisure]

If I was travelling in the evening or early morning and I had to change there [Roby or Earlestown] I would probably rather wait longer and use a different station or drive instead. Even on the Mersey Rail Network there's a train every fifteen minutes and each station is only two or three minutes from the next one, there are certain stations where I just wouldn't feel safe, some at night, some any time of day. [Commuter]

As a woman, sometimes if you're alone at a larger station late at night there can be crowds of drunk people – especially on the weekends. That can be quite intimidating. [Leisure]

How secure people feel can have an impact on how they feel about changing trains – and where they change. For longer waits, and especially at nighttime, having other people around also waiting to change, and a staff presence, is preferable to being alone

Regardless of station size, provision of information is key

Easy access to information

- The minimum ask would be for trains and stations to display the information passengers need – time of next train, platform it is departing from, whether it's on time
- Current busy-ness of the train would be useful for those on more frequent routes, who could maybe avoid a full service to travel on the next one
- An algorithm on the booking websites to show how busy trains are likely to be at different times would be useful at the planning stage
- Screens on trains – showing progress against a map would be useful for some
- Wherever information is provided it needs to be sizable enough to be easily legible without having to stare – ideally key facts could be taken in at a glance

But it's not all about apps

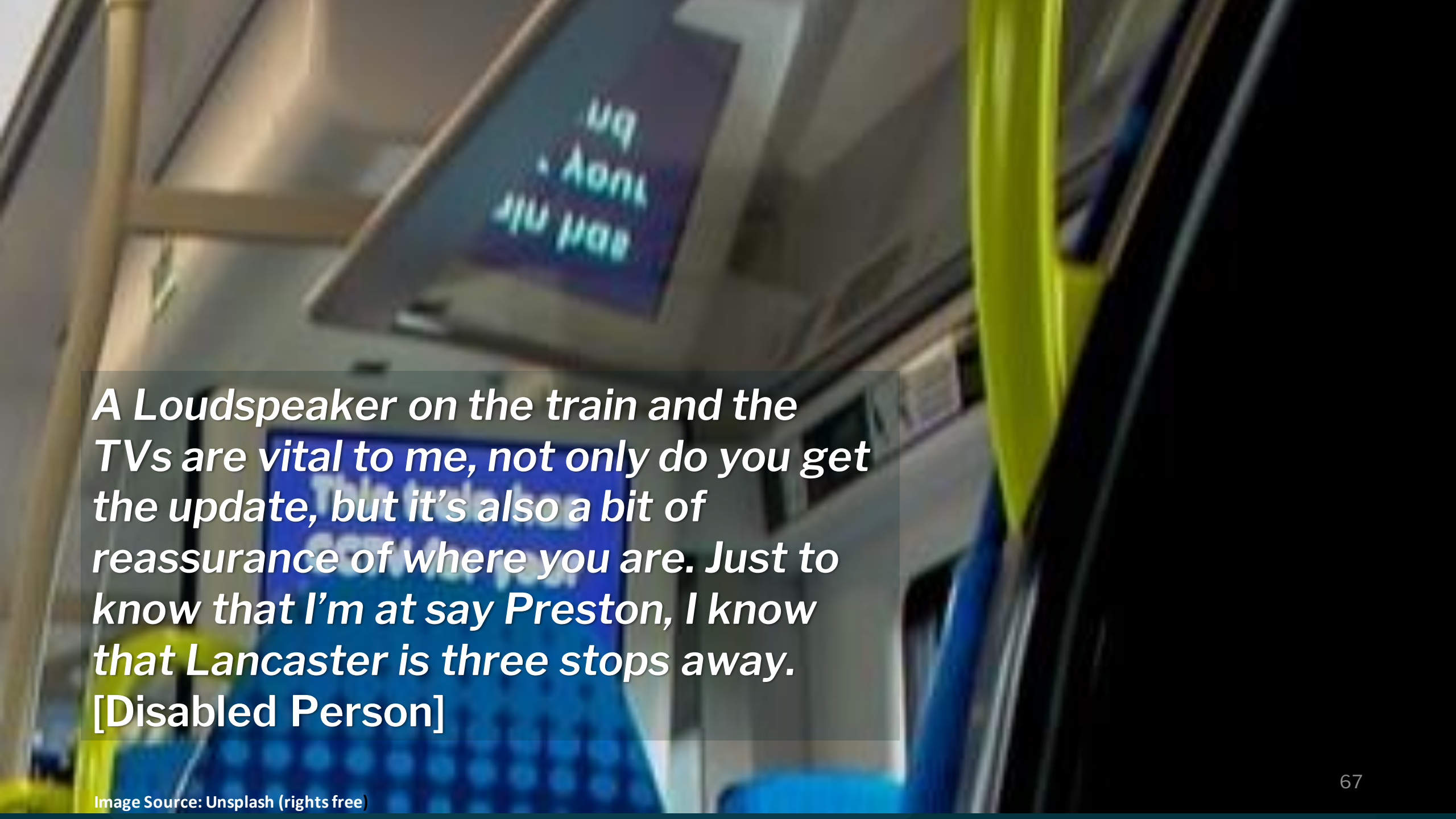
- Many in this sample do have smartphones and use apps, but others don't
- Even amongst smartphone users, there can still be times when phones don't work
- Desire to be able to get the information at least on stations, but ideally on trains too
- In both locations, there should ideally be staff available who can answer questions as needed

When you use Uber in Manchester, in the year 2022 I'd be expecting some form of app that runs with trains so you can see where they are, that tells you where they're coming from and where they're going to. You should be able to log on at a train station and see where you train is and when it will reach you using a tracker. [Commuter]


By the time you get to the station it's irrelevant because you're getting on anyway – but maybe they could show on the app how busy trains are at various times so you can take that into account when you're planning. [Leisure]

For me, I don't like these phone apps, so in my personal opinion I wouldn't use an app. I would not download any app on my phone, I only download apps if I really, really need them. [Disabled Person]

Access to the right dynamic information (updating in real time) can make a big difference in terms of confidence in changing trains

The background image shows the interior of a train. A blue television screen is visible, displaying some text that is partially obscured by the foreground text. A yellow handrail is prominent on the right side of the frame. The overall scene is slightly blurred, suggesting motion or a candid shot.

***A Loudspeaker on the train and the TVs are vital to me, not only do you get the update, but it's also a bit of reassurance of where you are. Just to know that I'm at say Preston, I know that Lancaster is three stops away.
[Disabled Person]***

A photograph of a Network Rail Customer Assistant from behind. The assistant is wearing a dark blue jacket and a high-visibility vest with reflective strips. The vest has the Network Rail logo and the text 'NetworkRail' and 'CUSTOMER ASSISTANT' printed on it. The assistant is walking through a busy train station with other people and turnstiles visible in the background.

A clear information board like in Piccadilly so you can see what the other options are. It's just asking for help, lots of staff and boards, so if you don't have a phone or you're out of data then at least you know what you're doing.
[Commuter]

**Understanding of limiting factors that create
a need for trade offs**

Three of the factors were clearly and immediately understood by respondents when given a basic explanation in the stimulus

Bottlenecks can develop and need to be managed

- Clear why this happens, and found it easy to visualise – but the idea that more trains can run over shorter lengths of line to avoid bottlenecks was confusing
- For those with expectations of a direct service the aspiration can be (longer term) to increase the capacity at stations rather than stop as many trains running into them
- Generally OK with the idea of managing away bottlenecks, but the aspiration would be for someone else to suffer before they do (from loss of direct service) - default is to make their service better, rather than for changes to be made to help other people

Mix of fast and slow trains uses up track capacity

- This made sense across audiences
- General understanding that there are not separate lines between places (though it would be good to keep fast services and stopping services separate)

Passenger capacity per train not an issue – just add carriages

- Clear to all – especially that this could happen over time
- Commuters tended to go straight to ‘my line is busy/full – why can’t we have more carriages now rather than at some unspecified time in the future?’

Higher reliability of train service (and predictability of journey) was more difficult to understand for many

Reliability

- Initially harder to grasp the concept of 'shuttling back and forth' until given an example – really needs to be broken down into elements with (ideally local) specific examples to boost context and aid understanding
- The overall point about avoiding situations where one delay/breakdown/incident can knock on across multiple lines was clear, but the remedy was where audiences tended to struggle
- Some tendency to worry about what would happen if one of the links then goes wrong – how would they make an onward journey
- Have been conditioned by experience to expect things to go wrong, so this can feel like just giving more opportunities for problems to develop – not immediately clear that the promise of greater reliability as a result of the changes can be trusted
- Additional concern that the individual legs might be very short (1-2 stations) so need reassurance that while this might build in necessary changes, there will not be too many of them

See Appendix for stimulus used to explain concepts

The pre-task was clear to most and worked to provoke thoughts around preferences

- The majority found the questions asked in the pre-task clear to understand, and understood what they were being asked to do
- The difficulty came in making the decision on priorities – most had simply never previously thought about their journeys in the terms being asked – they simply take the trains that they are offered and make the best of the services as they exist – from one timetable to the next
- For a minority, even thinking about what they would *prefer* in these terms was a challenge – with some wanting Network Rail to make the decision for them, or at least to pilot different options and allow the public to see whether they were an improvement or not
- However, none arrived at their research session still undecided, and all were able to talk relatively confidently about their choices and preferences throughout the sessions

1. If your current service runs direct to your destination, passing through Preston without you getting off to change trains, please consider variations A and B below. For the purposes of this exercise please assume the time it would take to do the journey is about the same for both variations, and your ability to get a seat is the same as it is now:

Variation A

In this option, trains on your route to/from Preston:

- **Would be more frequent than they are now** (e.g. if they are currently every hour, they could be every 30 minutes)
- **Would be more punctual and reliable than now** (on time more often and fewer cancellations)
- **Would require a change of train to reach your destination**

It seemed straightforward when you thought about it, but when you read them there was more to it than I thought. [Leisure]

It was easy to get my head around it, but it was more complex than I originally thought. [Leisure]

The pre-task was asking people in this sample to think in ways that many were not used to, but they were nevertheless able to do it

Conclusions: Key take outs

Conclusions 1 Overall

'Consistency' in findings

- Different ways of asking questions (placing a specific focus on a principle or issue), prioritising, etc, tended to lead to the same answers for respondents whether thinking about their own service or looking at hypothetical examples from elsewhere in the North West
- While there were nuances between audience types, there was also a lot of consistency in terms of how they thought about and assessed different factors/options

No future model will suit everybody

- While there were significant numbers of individuals who wanted (or needed) a particular model (e.g., some disabled people being unable to change), others had equally strong preferences or needs for the opposite
- Overall, there was support from some for the current timetabling approach, rather than going to either of the extremes in the example models

Warmth to a high frequency, more changes model tended to increase over sessions – though it will not work for some people

- Initially, tendency for some to push back immediately on the need to change, but as the conversation progressed the potential benefits did come to the surface, even if, for most in this sample who preferred a direct service, it didn't change participants' minds
- However, while most people didn't change their mind, more people did change from direct to high frequency preference than vice versa – suggestive of a role for communicating the benefits

With their ideal changing experience, more were supportive of changes

- Although some respondents still didn't want to change trains under any circumstances, more (but not all) would do it if the experience met their ideal
- However, most did not feel that their ideal would be achieved in practice – based on their experience of the railways to date leading them to expect delays and cancellations – and increasing capacity to be difficult and expensive. For some, higher frequency and more changes does instinctively suggest more things that can go wrong

Conclusions 2 The ideal change of trains

At the station

- Know where the train is leaving from and if on time
- Advice on platform alterations
- Help with luggage
- Advice on the best places to make a change

They could have a screen on the train and on the platform telling you where to go for what. [Leisure]

On the train

- A seat near luggage, not too full
- Display current location and next station, with arrival times
- Clear, audible announcements of which station arriving at

Having a seat near my luggage – just to know where that is. [Disabled Person]

When they change trains

- Where the train is leaving from and whether on time
- How to get to departure platform
- Help with luggage
- Clear route, uncluttered, one way at larger stations
- Not too many other people there at the same time
- Station with capacity to handle multiple changes in a short space of time – so no one is waiting long
- Warm, comfortable waiting rooms if there is an unavoidable longer wait

It would also be nice if you had a floor plan of where you were changing. An app might say to go to platform seven, but you still don't know where that is. [Current Non-train User]

It's hard work carrying cases across the station. [Disabled Person]

The ideal scenario for changing trains is about making it as stress free as possible, providing clear information on the connecting services and making navigation at the changing station smooth

Conclusions 3 Communicating the technical aspects of service design to rail users

Overall keep it simple

- Most people could instinctively grasp the concepts being talked about at the highest level – it was going into details that confused them

Tell them more than once

- We found that people were reaching fullest understanding if the basic principles were set out at the start, then covered again at the end of introducing each factor

Illustrations are highly beneficial

- Text, voice and illustrations worked together well to explain the key concepts, but the illustrations can bring it to life and demonstrate what is being said
- Key watch out with the maps was that they can draw the eye first, and then people worry that they don't understand them because they're not reading them in conjunction with the text
- Ideally, introduce the models verbally then use the map as an illustration rather than the other way around

'Shuttling back and forth' hardest to grasp

- Most could see why this would work in principle but have key worries
- Will it work in practice? Rather than improving reliability how can they believe that it doesn't increase opportunities for things to go wrong?
- How many changes would they have to make? How short will each shuttle be? Potential for a really reliable journey that is nevertheless so disrupted by changing that it becomes off-putting
- With this concept people need proof-points and 'reasons to believe' to reassure and build confidence /overcome worries

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