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Old Oak Common Infrastructure Works
Research Debrief
Prepared for Transport Focus

October 2022
Project number: 38776

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Research Background, and Approach

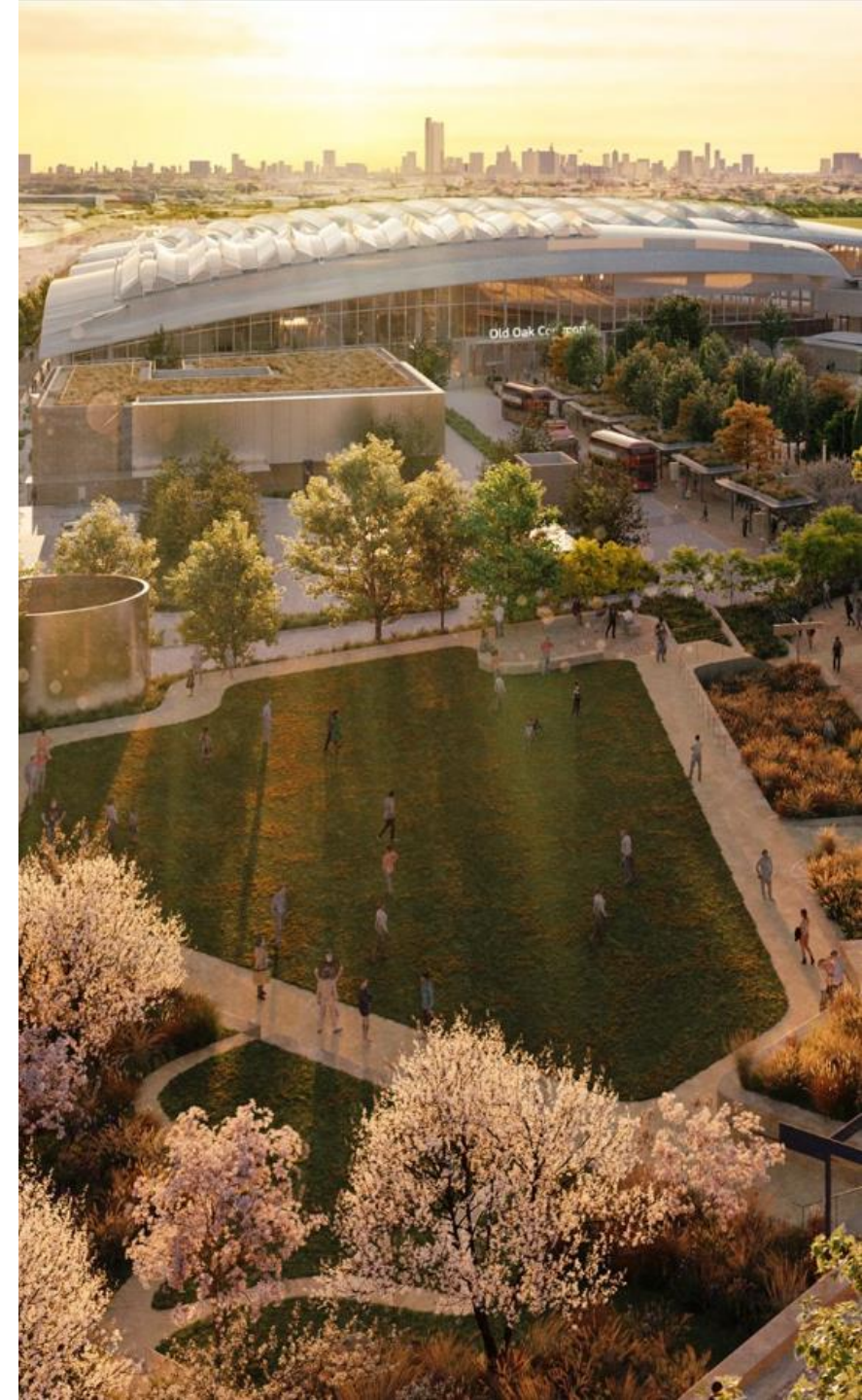
Old Oak Common is set to be the best connected and largest new railway station ever built in the UK

As part of the HS2 development, **Old Oak Common (OOC) will become one of the country's most important transport hubs.** Expected to be one of the busiest stations in the country, OOC will have high-speed rail services to the Midlands, Scotland and the North and access to central London and Heathrow via the Elizabeth line. Passengers will also be able to travel to Wales and the South West.

However, **with these improvements comes the prospect of extensive service disruption** including line closures. At times there will be severely reduced capacity into Paddington and there will be both weekend/Bank Holiday closures as well as longer weekday blockades. **Great Western Railway (GWR) services will be heavily impacted** as will those of **Heathrow Express and TfL's Elizabeth line.**

Transport Focus has an extensive understanding of passengers' needs and expectations at times of service disruption, both at the generic level and in relation to specific infrastructure upgrades. However, each infrastructure project has its unique characteristics in terms of both impacts on passengers and available mitigations. Moreover, the **COVID pandemic has changed – quite possibly irreversibly – many people's attitudes and behaviour with regards to work and travel.** In addition, the proliferation of online travel information sources and planning tools along side the ubiquity of smartphones and other internet connected devices mean that **passengers' information needs and expectations may have evolved quite significantly.**

Against this backdrop, **qualitative research** has been undertaken to explore passengers' expectations and preferences for how the OOC works will be implemented (and to provide potential input to possible future quantitative work).



The research objectives can be split into a number of themes

Understanding the context

- How have travel behaviours and attitudes changed post COVID? In particular, are commuters travelling less frequently and/or at different times? Does the ability to work from home impact views on future disruption?
- What is the current level of awareness of the OOC works and the potential disruption involved?
- What understanding is there of *why* the works are being carried out and the improvements they are intended to deliver? Are there any specific hopes for future service provision?

Understanding views on upgrade disruption

- How do passengers want/expect the works to be delivered?
- What are passengers' views on the timing and duration of works (e.g. weekends/public holidays, overnight, weekdays etc.)?
- What are the arguments for and against conducting major works during traditionally quieter periods (Christmas, Easter, summer holidays etc.) as opposed to normal working weeks?
- What do passengers see as the benefits and drawbacks of longer, more sustained closures as opposed to multiple, shorter closures?

What preferences exist around alternative travel arrangements including:

- Diverted trains on longer/slower routes.
- Rail replacement services and where from.
- Facilities expected alongside rail replacement services.
- Using a scheduled service albeit with changes of train or to a different London terminus
- What can be done to improve rail replacement services (e.g. in terms of vehicle types, express services etc.).
- Access to alternative modes of transport.

Identifying best practice for mitigating the impact of the disruption

- What travel behaviours are likely among passengers during disruption, and how can Network Rail facilitate and work with these?
- What communications about the works do passengers expect?
- What are their views on appropriate timing, content and media for communications?
- What expectations exist around financial or other types of compensation?

Underlying all of the above:

- What differences exist across passenger type, routes used, age, journey purpose, ticket usage, and any differences among those with disabilities or vulnerabilities?
- What hypotheses stand out that could be validated in quantitative research?

The research programme is summarised below

Group discussion programme

Location	Journey length	Journey purpose	Operators
Thames Valley	Shorter	Leisure/ business	Elizabeth line
	Shorter	Commuter	Elizabeth line
	Shorter	Leisure/ business	GWR
	Shorter	Commuter	GWR
West and Wales (Lines to Bristol and South Wales with journeys starting/ending @ Swindon or beyond)	Longer	Leisure/ business	GWR
	Longer	Leisure/ business	GWR
Cotswolds (Lines to Gloucester, Hereford, Banbury)	Longer	Leisure / business	GWR
	Shorter	Commuter	GWR
South West (Lines to Exeter, Plymouth, Penzance)	Shorter	Commuter	GWR
	Longer	Leisure / business	GWR
Heathrow Express**	N/A	Business	Heathrow Express

* **Commuters:** our definition of 'commuter' was designed to reflect the changing nature of work and travel. All used the railway to travel to/ from work but, within this we provided representation of:

- Those who **can work from home** if necessary (but *choose not to*)
- Those who **can work from home** and choose to do so *some* of the time
- Those who **cannot work from home** e.g. working in retail, hospitality, emergency services etc.

** An additional three in-depth interviews were conducted with frequent business users of Heathrow Express

Depth interview programme with disabled passengers

Location	Journey length	No. of Interviews
Thames Valley	Shorter	4
West and Wales (Lines to Bristol and South Wales with journeys starting/ending @ Swindon or beyond)	Longer	2
Cotswolds (Lines to Gloucester, Hereford, Banbury)	Mix	2
South West (Lines to Exeter, Plymouth, Penzance)	Mix	2

Contents

- **Context:** what is passengers' experience of rail travel currently?
- **Trade offs and Underlying principles:** what is the general mindset that informs passenger preferences and priorities as regards planned disruption?
- **Awareness:** what do passengers know about the planned works at Old Oak Common? What is their initial reaction to the plans?
- **Scheduling:** how should the upgrade be scheduled? What are the 'least bad' options?
- **Mitigating the disruption:** what alternative services should be put in place, how should they run and where?
- **Communication and compensation:** what do passengers need to know, and how should they be informed?



Current experience of rail travel and disruption

Views about journeys varied according to journey purpose

Given the wide variety of passenger, journey types and geographic spread, there was considerable variability in terms of passengers' experience of rail travel

- For elective users, rail travel is a conscious choice selected because it has clear benefits over other modes: comfort, speed, time for work or relaxation etc.
- For these passengers, the service is seen as generally reliable, but many have experienced lapses in punctuality or reliability. While these are typically infrequent, they can have a lasting impact on perceptions. Value for money can also be an issue, particularly for some longer distance journeys
- Many commuters acknowledged that they enjoyed a frequent service and appreciated the convenience this brings. However, commuters are more likely to mention problems with capacity and as frequent users, are naturally more likely to experience issues around delays and cancellations. That said, commuters are also mostly realistic and recognise that delays are to some extent inevitable on routes carrying many people into central London.

In addition, there was recognition of recent improvements to rail travel in the area in recent years

- The opening of the Elizabeth line is warmly welcomed by those who have used it
- Other improvements such as new rolling stock, Reading Station upgrade etc. were also cited as having improved journeys

Overall, while there are complaints around value for money, capacity and unreliability (and some 'horror stories') rail services are not seen as fundamentally poor

"I haven't had any problems in ages; I find the journey very straightforward. It's been a pleasurable experience actually. When you compare it to some of the other rail services you use, it's definitely one of the best. I can't complain."

Cotswolds, Longer, Leisure/business

"I have to say Chiltern has been a nightmare the last two months coming in and out, so I've found myself using GWR more from Didcot via the Banbury line into Paddington. The line seems more reliable."

Cotswolds, Shorter, Commuter

Passengers tend to think about disruption in terms of the impact on their journeys rather than its causes

Passengers often do not differentiate between planned and unplanned disruption and similarly don't think much differently about disruption caused by routine maintenance or work on new infrastructure.

- Passengers understand that the railway needs to carry out repair and maintenance work and that this will necessarily sometimes impact their journeys. Similarly (and as will be discussed in more detail) they also broadly accept that work on new infrastructure will entail disruption. Indeed, there is also some tolerance for unplanned disruption that is seen as 'not the railway's fault' e.g. freak weather conditions, passenger action, vandalism etc.

For planned disruption, passengers expect timely advance notice and well thought out alternatives. Experiences are mixed but not wholly negative

- There are reports of work being well communicated and well managed, with impacts on journeys being less bad than expected. Inevitably perhaps, there were also 'atrocious stories' of disorganization at stations, poor alternatives (rail replacement buses often singled out) and poorly informed staff

Unplanned disruption can be particularly stressful, but passengers are realistic and accept that getting things back to normal may take some time. The key priority is information and again, experiences are variable

- Passengers want to understand what is happening, how long it will last and more importantly, **what they should do**. They also want all channels (staff, screens, digital media etc.) to provide a **consistent message**.

Passengers also described a range of mitigation strategies to deal with disruption

- Leisure/business travellers, particularly for longer journeys, will check for planned disruption before they book/travel
- Commuters increasingly look to apps (from TOCs or generic travel apps) social media and general media to keep them informed about both upcoming planned work as well as or in the moment issues
- For some (by no means all) commuters/business users, working from home is now more viable than it was pre-pandemic

"If there's planned disruption then I wouldn't go that weekend for example, but obviously the other disruption you can't really do anything about it because it's a kind of thing where it could happen once you're on the train, do you know what I mean?"

West and Wales, Longer, Leisure/business

"You appreciate that they can't always be in control of everything. I mean, you know, there are things like when there's a person under a train. You're still fed up, but you understand that stuff happens."

Cotswolds, Longer, Leisure/business



Trade Offs and Underlying Principles

Trade-off exercise: what we did

We asked passengers in the group discussions and in-depth interviews to consider a number of trade offs regarding how the railway should manage disruption as a result of major upgrades/new infrastructure

- Passengers did this as an individual exercise to avoid group influence effects and were then asked to explain their answers
- In half the sessions, the questions were administered before passengers were given any information about the work at Old Oak Common. In the other sessions, the questions were administered after passengers were given an initial high-level explanation of the works. That said, it should be noted that awareness of the developments planned at Old Oak Common is very limited

The phasing of the questions had little impact on the overall pattern of response

Passengers' views were not unduly biased towards maximising their own position. That is, overarching principles around fairness and sharing the burden of disruption equitably predominated

* NB given the overall base size of 83 these findings are necessarily directional rather than statistically reliable

QUESTION 2: On balance do you think the railway should...	
A	continue to try to minimize disruption to commuters and business travellers with as few Monday to Friday (daytime) closures as possible?
B	do more of the work Monday-Friday (daytime) so as there are fewer weekend closures?
QUESTION 3: On balance do you think the railway should...	
A	continue to prioritise the 'working week' by doing as much work as possible during holiday periods such as Christmas and New Year?
B	prioritise leisure travellers by doing more of the work during weekdays and avoiding periods like Easter and Christmas/New Year?
QUESTION 4: On balance do you think the railway should...	
A	focus on completing works as quickly as possible but with the likelihood of several multiple-week line closures?
B	try to do engineering work on evenings and weekends, but with the process taking five times as long to complete
QUESTION 5: On balance whose needs do you think the railway should prioritise in terms of minimising disruption...	
A	passengers making longer distance journeys e.g. from London to South Wales or Plymouth to London)
B	passengers making local journeys into London e.g. from Slough or Maidenhead or from London to Heathrow
QUESTION 6: On balance do you think the railway should...	
A	prioritise sustainability (i.e. minimising environmental damage and the depletion of natural resources) when carrying out engineering works even if this means the work takes longer
B	prioritise carrying out works as quickly as possible even if this is less sustainable
QUESTION 7: Thinking about your current and future journeys by train, given the choice, which of the following would you prefer? For the line to be closed for...	
A	Two weeks, including three weekends
B	Eight weekends in a row, from Saturday morning to Sunday night each weekend
C	Don't mind either way
D	Don't know
QUESTION 8: If your normal service was not available, on balance would you prefer...	
A	a longer, slower journey staying on the same train using an alternative train route
B	a quicker journey, but involving a change of trains
QUESTION 9: If your normal service was not available, on balance would you prefer...	
A	a longer, slower journey staying on the same train using an alternative train route
B	a quicker journey, but using a rail replacement bus or coach service
QUESTION 10: If trains can only be run on certain routes and rail replacement bus services need to be used, on balance should the railway.....	
A	prioritise using trains for longer, inter-city journeys and use buses/coaches for local services
B	prioritise using trains for shorter local journeys and use buses/coaches for longer, inter-city journeys

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Notwithstanding passengers' different journey types, there was much agreement about the general principles that should underpin the railway's approach to managing disruption

Higher consensus

'No pain without gain' – Passengers largely accept that work on new/ improved infrastructure will entail disruption and are prepared to accept this *even if they won't personally benefit*

Fairness – While not being wholly selfless, most passengers' views are underpinned by a sense of fairness, even if they might be personally disadvantaged. The overall view is that railway should focus on minimizing the amount of 'aggregate pain'

Trains not buses (or even coach) – Rail Replacement Bus services have a poor image and reputation, particularly for longer journeys. Passengers seldom see RRS as an attractive alternative

Sustainability is important – Although seldom raised spontaneously, when asked, passengers want the railway to prioritise sustainability

The working week should be protected – In spite of the changes acknowledged following COVID-19, *on balance* most passengers still want to see weekday services prioritised over weekends and holidays

The detail can be confusing – There is less agreement about more detailed trade offs in terms e.g. of whether extended closures were better than shorter but repeated closures. Passengers expect the railway to identify the optimum approach from both an engineering and disruption perspective

Lower consensus

"The feeling is although of course it does benefit me in the long term, I do feel that it's been neglected for so long over such an extended period of time that actually when the work gets to be done, it's a lot harder and the disruption is a lot greater."

Cotswolds, Longer, Leisure/business

"I think it needs to be done and as someone put it, there's no good time to do it. I think just try to action things where there's less disruption."

Thames Valley, Shorter, Commuter (frequent)

Passengers accept the case for new infrastructure and are willing to experience disruption for wider gain

Passengers are **mostly rational and balanced** when considering the **impacts of infrastructure improvements**. Wider societal and economic benefits are seen as a reasonable price to pay for personal inconvenience

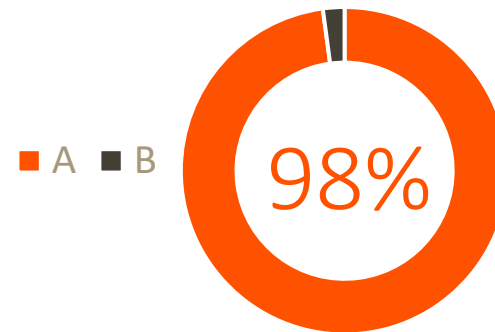
There is **also an element of resignation** - a sense that there is 'always something' happening with regard to public transport infrastructure that causes disruption. This is perhaps particularly so for Londoners/ those who spend a lot of time in the city. The lengthy and extensive Elizabeth line works were often top of mind

Of course, even though the question was asked as an individual exercise, **there is likely to be an element of 'social acceptability'** in the answers

And many concede that 'in the moment' they may well feel less tolerant about disruption than when considering it hypothetically

*Thinking about the disruption caused by work on major upgrades or new infrastructure, which of the following statements best describes your view?**

Even if I won't directly benefit from new infrastructure, I accept that I might have to put up with some disruption in order for the railway to improve overall	A
If these works don't improve the journeys that I personally make, I don't see why I should be inconvenienced by them	B



"I personally look for the bigger picture – these are journeys I take regularly, so I kind of understand these disruptions in the long term will benefit me. I'm okay with these disruptions because I understand. I think there's no way around it, but usually there's a benefit at the end of the disruptions."

Cotswolds, Longer, Leisure/business

* **Caution: the findings are primarily qualitative. Scores should be treated as indicative only (Base: 83)**

On balance, most are reluctant to deprioritise the traditional working week when it comes to disruption

It is widely accepted that working and travel patterns have changed for good, with many more working from home (or with the capacity to do so if needed)

- It is also argued that (regardless of the pandemic) many people's working patterns do not fit the traditional '9 to 5'
- Leisure users also understand that they might personally benefit from an approach to engineering works that deprioritised commuters

As such, many can see an argument for changing the timing of planned engineering works

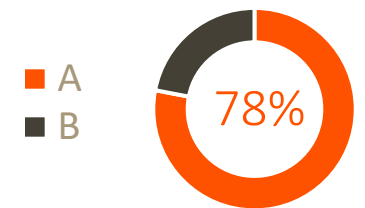
- However, getting to and from work is seen as more important than elective journeys. It is also thought that on days when commuters do go to work (even if not every day) they will do so during conventional peak times
- Many also feel it is too early to say how travel patterns will evolve and do not want to see weekday works prioritised purely on the *assumption* that workers can work from home

"It would be difficult for families, but I do get that they have to prioritise commuters because that's what keeps the economy going."

Thames Valley, Disabled passenger

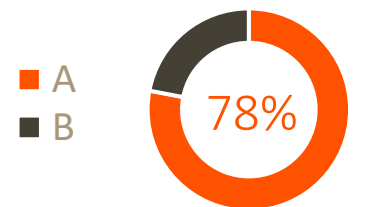
*On balance do you think the railway should...**

continue to try to minimize disruption to commuters and business travellers with as few Monday to Friday (daytime) closures as possible?	A
do more of the work Monday-Friday (daytime) so as there are fewer weekend closures?	B



*On balance do you think the railway should...**

continue to prioritise the 'working week' by doing as much work as possible during holiday periods such as Christmas and New Year?	A
prioritise leisure travellers by doing more of the work during weekdays and avoiding periods like Easter and Christmas/New Year?	B



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There is a strong consensus about prioritising sustainability

For many, prioritising sustainability over speed is simply non-negotiable and the right thing for any responsible organisation

- Moreover, it is often argued that sustainability implies **building better not just quicker** and as such, therefore delivering longer-term resilience
- There are **dissenting voices**
 - Some are simply cynical about the ‘green agenda’
 - Others question how sustainable such a large construction project can be and point to some of the negative environmental impacts of the wider HS2 project
 - A few are prepared to concede that they would simply like to see less disruption even if there are environmental downsides

“I agree sustainability is important, but it’s probably more sustainable getting the work done quicker than taking longer to do it. It might be a bit selfish, but they need to quantify what’s more sustainable about doing it that way.”

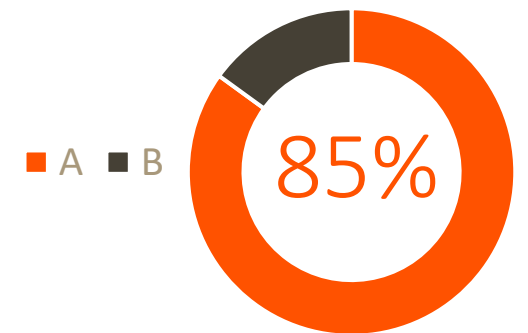
Cotswolds, Shorter, Commuter

“I wouldn’t be happy [if the works took longer] but I would quite understand if I know the reason why it’s taking longer is because they are using sustainable methods or sustainable materials. I’m sure when they do that, they’ll be advertising that. I wouldn’t mind it taking that little bit longer if it’s going to help the environment.”

Thames Valley, Disabled passenger

*Thinking about the disruption caused by work on major upgrades or new infrastructure, which of the following statements best describes your view?**

Prioritise sustainability (i.e. minimising environmental damage and the depletion of natural resources) when carrying out engineering works even if this means the work takes longer	A
Prioritise carrying out works as quickly as possible even if this is less sustainable	B



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Most passengers have a very negative view of rail replacement bus/ coach services

Many passengers had a 'horror story' about rail replacement services (lengthy journeys, disorganisation, poor quality vehicles etc.) in addition to the hassle of changing between train and bus/ coach

- While a coach is seen as a better than a bus, it is not sufficiently better to compensate for the downsides of road vs. rail travel
- Furthermore, the argument that a road journey could be quicker than rail (particularly if it involves travel through London) was often seen as unconvincing
- In addition, for passengers with certain types of disability, transferring to a bus or coach is simply not a viable alternative

Both fairness and practicality considerations come in to play for rail replacement on longer journeys

- A longer bus/ coach journey is simply seen as more onerous than a shorter one
- For shorter, local journeys it is seen as more likely that alternatives will be available

"I've had first hand experience of rail replacement services for the London Underground and it's not a great experience. Also, the ability to work is severely hampered if you're on a coach."

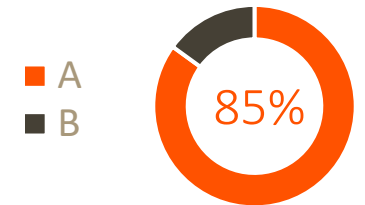
Cotswolds, Shorter, Commuter

"I'd rather go through the hassle of staying on the same train for longer than getting off and getting a bus. I've done that once when I first started my job in this area and I'll never do it again. It was a nightmare."

Thames Valley, Disabled passenger

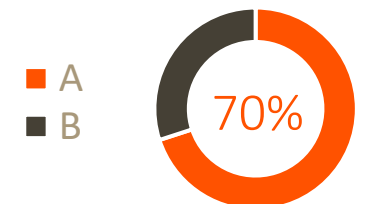
*If your normal service was not available, on balance would you prefer...**

a longer, slower journey staying on the same train using an alternative train route?	A
a quicker journey, but using a rail replacement bus or coach service	B



*If trains can only be run on certain routes and rail replacement bus services need to be used, on balance should the railway...**

prioritise using trains for longer, inter-city journeys and use buses/coaches for local services?	A
prioritise using trains for shorter local journeys and use buses/coaches for longer, inter-city journeys?	B



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There is less consensus about the more detailed timing of works

Some feel that extended closures might be more efficient as they allow for a more focussed programme of activity. Others feel it is better to ‘bite the bullet’ and take all the pain in one go.

- Equally it is argued that spreading out the disruption so that there are fewer total closures at least means there are always some travel alternatives available
- Most passengers could see benefits and drawbacks of different options but not a compelling argument for either one.

Ultimately, many feel unqualified to make a call on these points and think that it is the railway’s responsibility to identify the optimum approach from both an engineering and disruption perspective

“The companies themselves know the peak periods when most people are using the trains. If they use that kind of data to figure out when’s the best time to carry out works, that would be helpful.”

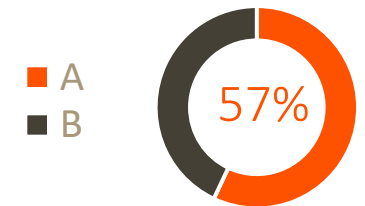
South West, Disabled passenger

“I prefer the engineering works to take place on weekends but as the lady from South Wales said, it will impact people who travel on weekends.”

West and Wales, Longer, Leisure/business

*On balance do you think the railway should...**

focus on completing works as quickly as possible but with the likelihood of several multiple week closures?	A
try to do the engineering works on evenings and weekends but with the process taking five times as long to complete	B



*Thinking about your current and future journeys by train, given the choice, which of the following would you prefer? For the line to be closed for...**

	%
Two weeks, including three weekends	51
Eight weekends in a row, from Saturday morning to Sunday night each weekend	29
Don’t mind either way	9
Don’t know	10

* **Caution: the findings are primarily qualitative. Scores should be treated as indicative only (Base: 83)**

Some trade-offs were more influenced by passengers' own existing or anticipated journey scenario

In some cases there was a tendency for passengers to prioritise their own journeys

- That said, this was by no means a straight correlation between journey type and passengers' choices
- And underlying arguments still tended to be based on some conception of fairness

Those arguing in favour of prioritising local journeys did so on the grounds that *more* people were likely to be making such trips than longer distance ones (including many for work)

- The counter-argument being that there are fewer alternatives for those making longer journeys and the consequences for a longer journey (e.g. an extended bus replacement journey) are more severe

Whether to accept a longer journey or change trains was primarily influenced by the anticipated journey length

- Those making longer journeys tended to prefer not changing – the longer the journey the more likely it is to be seen as a 'sunk cost'. As such, the potential risks and inconvenience of changing are seen as unlikely to outweigh a shorter journey time (unless the time difference is very large)
- Longer journeys are also seen as more likely to invoke additional encumbrances (e.g. luggage, children) increasing the hassle factor of changing
- For shorter journeys, changing tended to be seen as less stressful/ lower risk

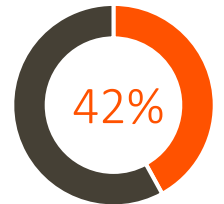
On balance whose needs do you think the railway should prioritise in terms of minimising disruption...*

passengers making longer distance journeys e.g. from London to South Wales or Plymouth to London?	A
passengers making local journeys into London e.g. from Slough or Maidenhead or from London to Heathrow?	B

"I thought passengers making local journeys surely have some other form of transport to use to get where they're going to."

South West, Shorter, Commuter

■ A
■ B



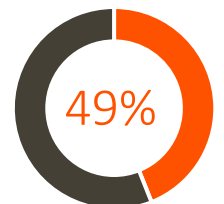
If your normal service was not available, on balance would you prefer...*

a longer, slower journey staying on the same train using an alternative train route?	A
a quicker journey, but involving a change of trains	B

"The more trains you change, the more likely you are to have further delays. You also stand more of a chance of missing a train."

West and Wales, Longer, Leisure/business

■ A
■ B



* Caution: the findings are primarily qualitative. Scores should be treated as indicative only (Base: 83)



Awareness of the Upgrade

What do passengers know?

Awareness of the developments planned at Old Oak Common is very limited

One or two individuals who lived close to the site understood that 'something' was happening (but could offer no real detail on what this was)

A handful were vaguely aware (or guessed) that there might be work related to HS2 (or some thought, the Elizabeth line)

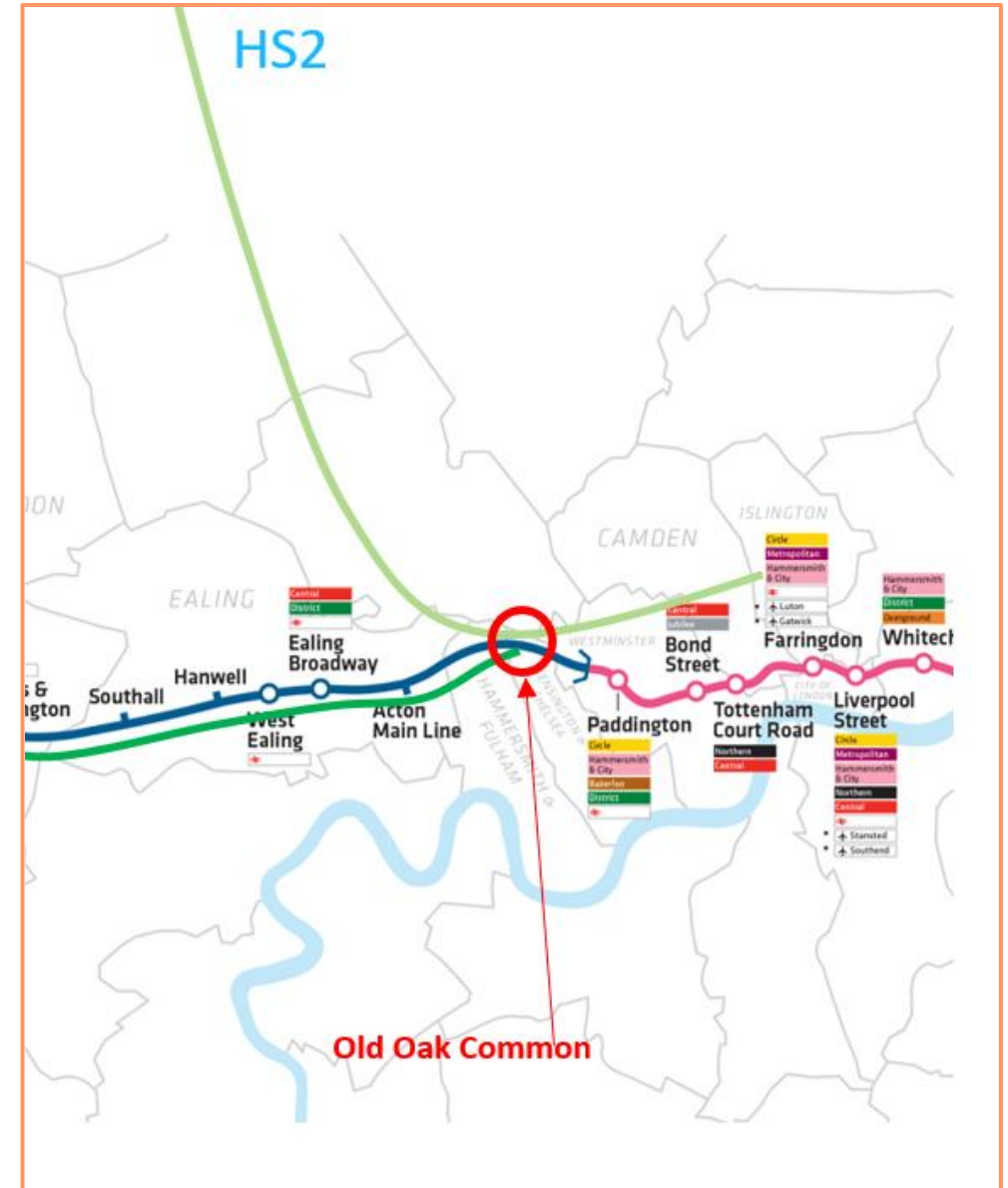
For the vast majority, the Old Oak Common works are entirely new news

"I know there's a massive regeneration project and it might be linked with HS2 but that's all I know about it."

Cotswolds, Shorter, Commuter

"This is quite exciting because it's not too far for me and it connects not just London but the North, South West, when typically you would have to go to King's Cross or Paddington."

Thames Valley, Shorter, Commuter (frequent)



What we told passengers about the Old Oak Common development

- As part of the HS2 development, Old Oak Common will become one of the country's most important transport hubs.
- Old Oak Common will be the best connected and largest new railway station ever built in the UK. The station will have fourteen platforms, a mix of six high-speed and eight conventional service platforms.
- The station is expected to be one of the busiest stations in the country and will provide high-speed rail services to the Midlands, Scotland and the North and access to central London and Heathrow via the Elizabeth line. Passengers will also be able to travel to Wales and the Southwest.
- The proposed site of the Old Oak Common station is to the north of Wormwood Scrubs and the south of Willesden Junction, alongside the existing Great Western Main Line where Great Western and Heathrow Express used to have a depot.



Initial reactions are for the most part positive (or at worst neutral) although some are sceptical

Investment in new rail infrastructure that will improve connectivity nationally is generally seen as a good thing in and of itself

- Many found the idea of **modern infrastructure, new routes and high speed travel exciting**. In this context, the Elizabeth line and railways abroad were pointed to as positive examples of development
- Of course, for some there **were clear potential improvements to journeys they currently make** (e.g. travelling to the Midlands/ North from the West without having to change in London).
- But **many (regardless of whether they anticipate improvements to the journeys they personally make) see robust rail infrastructure as a 'good thing' *per se*** in terms of national economic development. Passengers familiar with the local OOC area also see potential benefits in terms of urban rejuvenation. (That said, **very few are familiar with the OOC site and it is not obvious to passengers why it has been chosen**)
- **Opposition to HS2, in principle, was quite limited**. That said, the case was made that the whole scheme was a 'white elephant' with the costs (financial and for some, environmental) outweighing any benefits
- Regardless of HS2 some simply **question whether this is an appropriate priority for investment** given the many other challenges the country currently faces
- On initial inspection, **the potential for disruption to existing railway services was only rarely raised** spontaneously

"It makes sense. Paddington is madly busy at the moment and I think it's getting worse, probably worse now with the Elizabeth line open. I'm a fan of HS2 – I don't know the intricacies around it, but I like what it's trying to achieve."

Cotswolds, Vulnerable passenger

"It's going to mean a lot of disruption isn't it at some stage, but I think I'm pretty positive about that. I mean, I've been aware living in London in Whitechapel until recently with HS2 and all that stuff. That work has to be done. We have to catch up compared to other countries."

Cotswolds, Longer, Leisure/business



Reactions to the Proposed Works

What are passengers' initial thoughts?

When given an overview of the upgrade (as shown in the adjacent text panel) the scale, scope and length of time of the work were surprising and sometimes concerning

- Many believe that the **actual impacts will be more severe** than claimed. There is a widespread **belief that major rail infrastructure projects 'always' take longer and cost more** than originally planned. The wider HS2 project and the Elizabeth line are frequently cited in support of this view
- **Disruption of the Elizabeth line can feel particularly disappointing** given its lengthy gestation and only very recent opening
- The overview immediately raises **questions about possible mitigations and alternatives. Many are pessimistic**, expecting that any alternative arrangements will be poor/ unreliable
- But **there is also resignation**. Again, acceptance that improvements to the rail network necessarily involve disruption and that in any case, there is 'always something' to cause disruption
- Some are relatively sanguine: **disruption will be 'manageable' as long as sufficient prior warning and advice is provided**
- In sum, **passengers are still mostly (guardedly) positive about the programme** but are eager to see more detail about how their journeys will be impacted

What passengers were shown:

Old Oak Common development impacts

- As part of the HS2 development, the work at Old Oak Common is expected to be completed by 2030 and between now and then, existing railways in the area will experience some disruption.
- The work will impact services operated by Great Western Railway (GWR), including both Thames Valley commuter services and long-distance services to Wales, the Cotswolds and the West Country.
- The Elizabeth line and Heathrow Express will also be impacted.
- As well as disruption to the western/ Paddington end of the Elizabeth line there may also be reduced frequency of service over the central section
- Much work will be done overnight but there will be weekend / Bank Holiday closures as well as some longer weekday line closures.
- At certain times, the four tracks into Paddington will be reduced to two lines meaning fewer services can be run.
- At certain times, the works will mean more limited access for trains to their maintenance depot at North Pole further reducing capacity

"My outtake on this is that I don't drive, and whatever way or means it takes me to get from A to B, I will do it. I expect delays because I'm using public transport. I'm prepared for all eventualities regardless."

West and Wales, Longer, Leisure/business

Revealing more detail (prior to sharing information about mitigations) is alarming for many

When provided with more detail, the timescale, the scale and the variety of anticipated disruption is worrying

- The sheer amount of work can feel **overwhelming and difficult to relate to individual journeys**
- Again, this is against a **base line expectation that the works will very likely take longer and be more extensive than claimed**
- There is also **an initial tendency to ‘catastrophise’** assuming that *all* of the impacts will happen at the same time or in every year up to 2029
- With explanation, the scale of the disruption is seen as more **manageable**, but the general expectation is of **extended periods of very poor service**

Passenger views on how the work should proceed still broadly adhere to the general principles identified earlier (notwithstanding the impacts on their own journeys)

- Again, views are informed by perceptions of fairness, prioritising work journeys, and minimizing the amount of ‘aggregate pain’

“Is it really worth it just to bring more people into London 20 minutes more quickly? And it also raises the question if you're going to basically knock out the Paddington service then for this length of time, and let's face it didn't matter what time they put there, it's going to be another 30% to 50% longer in reality. Look at Crossrail.”

Cotswolds, Longer, Leisure/business

What passengers were shown:

Old Oak Common development impacts

- The rail industry currently expects that the works impacting Old Oak Common will take seven years (up to 2029) to complete
- Over this period there will be significant disruption to the railway while the works are carried out. The exact plan has yet to be finalised but these are the sort of alterations that will be necessary at different times during the works:
 - Closures each Christmas until 2028 ranging from 4 days to 18 days (starting in 2022)
 - At times all four lines into London Paddington will need to be closed completely, at others, only two lines will be closed but this will mean that fewer trains can run
 - A lot of work will be done at night but there could be up to 23 weekends in some years when two of the four lines need to be closed
 - ‘Long weekends’ such as Easter and Bank Holidays allow the engineers access for three or four days at a time allowing them to do more work
 - Most of these closures will take place between September and March meaning less disruption over the summer months
- Some of the work is too extensive to be conducted at weekends. Later in the programme there will probably need to be a couple of extended closures of ten or eighteen days while specific projects are completed

When given more detail, passengers' priorities do not necessarily change significantly

- **Duration of works:** The seven year time scale is initially something of a shock but on reflection, most acknowledge that projects of this type are necessarily long term. That said, for many **seven years feels like a depressingly long time** (particularly since **most see seven years as an optimistic estimate**)
- **Weekday vs. weekend closures:** People travelling for work are seen as having the most important reason to travel and as such, **protecting the working week is generally seen as the right approach**. However, there is also an expectation that the railway will strive for balance. In particular, the **'23 weekends in some years'** of reduced service can seem like an excessive burden, particularly for leisure travellers. It is also argued that weekend disruption could be planned more creatively (and reflecting post COVID working patterns) e.g. 'weekend' closures running over Sunday and Monday, freeing up at least part of the weekend.
- **Holiday closures:** There is more disagreement about holiday closures. On balance, closures on bank holidays and Christmas were (reluctantly) seen as preferable to weekday closures. That said, **Christmas is considered a higher-importance leisure trip than most** and the anticipated annual (and some very lengthy) Christmas closures was disheartening. Disruption at these times, when the transport network experiences heavy demand, is seen as likely to be particularly trying. Similarly, **it was generally agreed that major events (sports, concerts etc.) should be taken into account (i.e. ideally avoided) when planning disruption**
- **Seasonal closures:** Passengers could understand the rationale for minimising disrupting over the summer months. Again, **summer holidays were seen as high-importance leisure trips** (and the South West in particular is recognised as a popular holiday destination) despite. However, to set against this, some passengers **believe that fewer people use the railway during the summer*** (because people are taking holiday and schools/colleges are closed). Moreover, there is a **perception that rail is less resilient and reliable during the winter** and as such, it is important to keep passengers moving as much as possible during this difficult time. Others point out that **shorter days and poorer weather in winter makes travel disruption more unpleasant and less safe.**

"I do like the fact that a lot of the works will be done between September and March. Although I do travel during those months, I can find alternative arrangements. I think the GWR does go to nice places – Bath, Bristol, Cornwall – it does go to holiday venues and I'd be concerned about all four lines coming in being completely closed."

Thames Valley, Disabled passenger

"Twenty-three weekends is quite extensive. It makes you think 'why in this country does everything take so long to complete?'"

West and Wales, Longer, Leisure/business

* This was an assumption that some passengers made but was not based on any information provided to them in the research sessions

Anticipated behaviour (again prior to sharing information about mitigations) during the disruption is largely driven by journey purpose and perceived alternative options

Have alternatives

For longer distance leisure modal switch to car is often anticipated. Again, for shorter journeys in and around London it is thought that sufficient alternatives are already available

Reflecting post-covid shifts in working patterns, working from home rather than switching mode is seen as the most likely response to disruption. Even where alternative public or private transport modes are a possibility, the home working option will often be the more attractive one. For some short distance (primarily London based) commuters, buses, London Underground, Elizabeth line and other rail services sometimes offer straightforward public transport alternatives

Elective

Journey purpose

Non-elective

These passengers are most likely to anticipate simply abandoning their journeys altogether. Prior to seeing any information about alternatives, the prospect of rail travel can seem too difficult

Perceived alternatives

For those working in sectors like retail and hospitality, emergency services, personal services etc. working from home is not an option. Again, some have relatively straightforward public transport alternatives. But for others, the prospects of disruption are highly concerning. They are the group most eager to understand what alternatives will be made available. Many are keen for peak time and week day closures to be kept to a minimum, but for others weekends and holiday periods may be equally problematic

No alternative

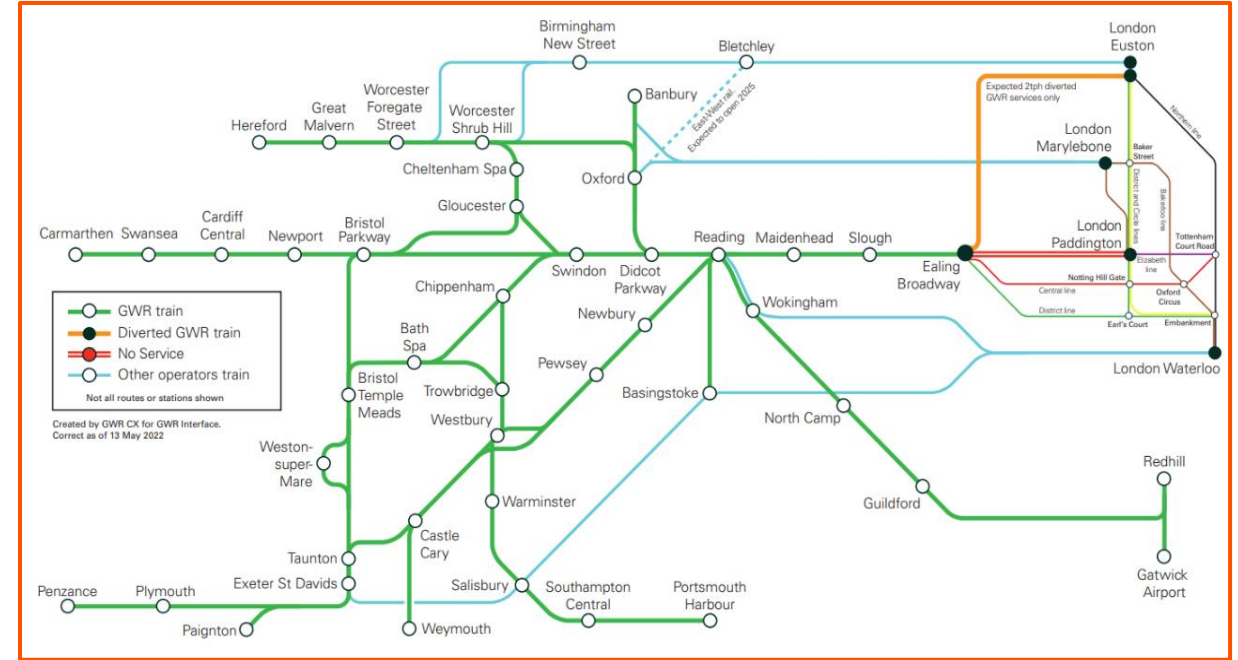
Sharing with passengers the range of potential mitigations provides considerable reassurance

Overall, passengers are both pleased and relieved to see that a variety of alternatives are under consideration

Specific information about how closures/ reduced services will be addressed crystallises some of the challenges that individuals will face. But in many cases these are 'not as bad' as anticipated and they do signal that the railway is thinking about passengers' needs.

On reflection, many begin to reconsider initial assumptions about the viability of using the railway during disruption

What passengers were shown:



"These plans are probably more thought through than anything I've ever seen. Normally it's just 'well, we're closing the line, end of' and you have to make the best of it."

Thames Valley, Disabled passenger

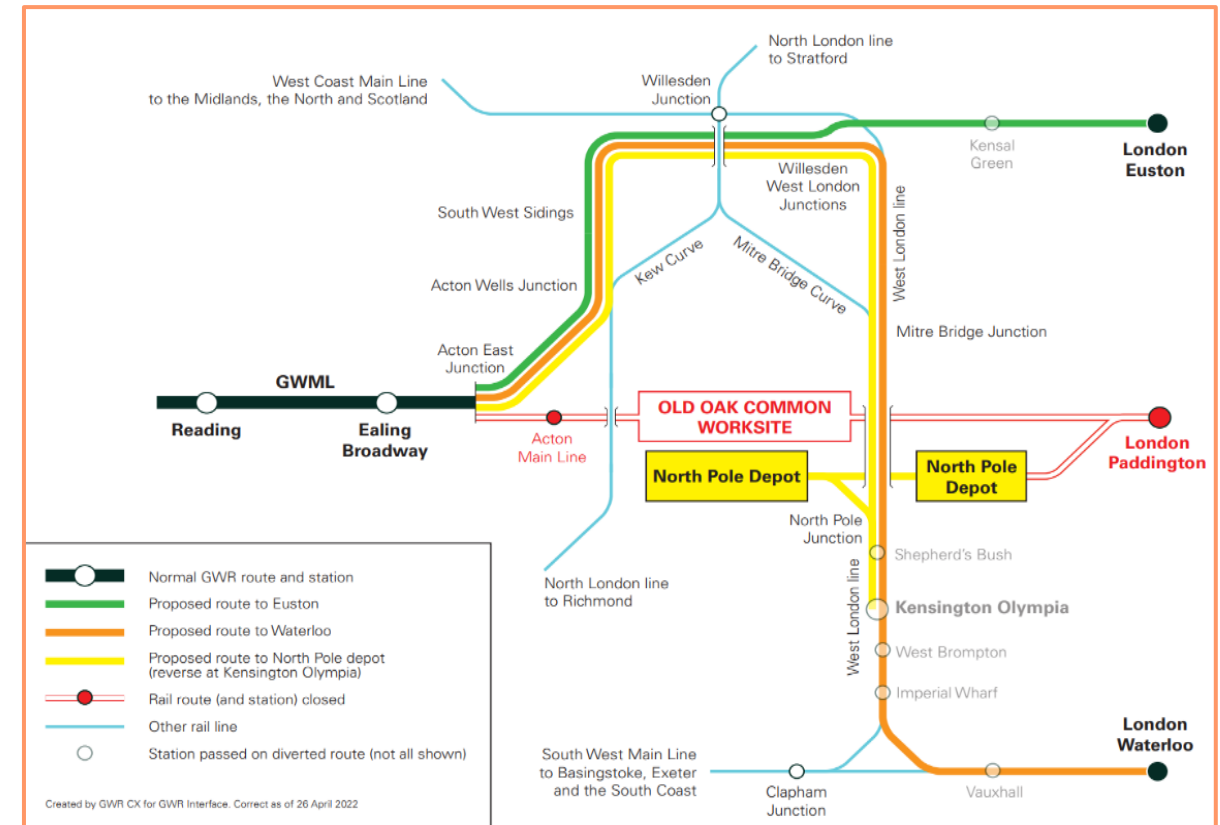
"Looking at this definitely made me feel less pessimistic about it because we have Euston, which has loads of Tube lines, you can get off at Reading and go to Waterloo and get the Tube from there. These other options just need be made clear to passengers."

West and Wales, Longer, Leisure/business

For many of those who travel through Reading, changing to LUL at Ealing Broadway is the obvious best alternative

- Many passengers' ultimate destination (or origin) involves a Tube journey and as such, joining the network sooner (or remaining on it longer) often makes sense. This is particularly the case for frequent users - commuters and regular leisure travellers using Elizabeth line and/ or GWR services. However, for some there are significant barriers to using LUL
- **Unfamiliarity:** not all passengers are comfortable using the Underground (particularly less frequent, longer distance business/ leisure travellers). They would rather arrive at a central London station, or would at least want help and guidance on how to successfully complete their journeys from Ealing Broadway
- **Encumbrance:** for those travelling with children or heavy luggage or with personal mobility/stamina challenges, the Underground can be a challenging environment. (Again, more likely to be longer distance business/leisure travellers)
- Whether or not they are comfortable using LUL, many passengers are concerned about capacity issues at Ealing Broadway and want reassurance about crowding, assistance available, facilities etc.
- There was limited support for the idea of a Rail Replacement Service to a central London hub (e.g. Hammersmith) from Reading or stations such as Slough, Maidenhead or Ealing Broadway. Passengers typically struggled to see any advantages over LUL or rail alternatives and anticipated slow and unpredictable journeys against London traffic.

What passengers were shown:



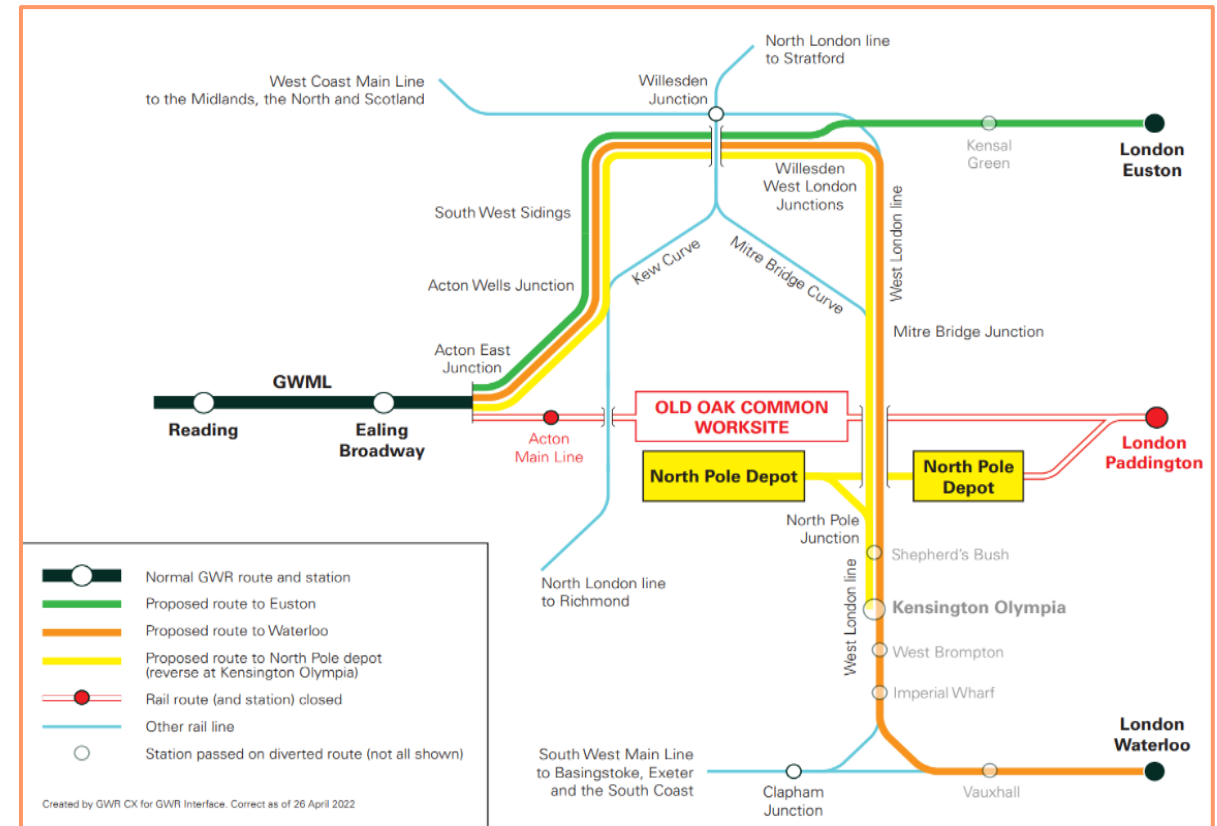
“That’s what I do for work – if I go to London, I get off at Paddington and get the Tube. As long as you can get me on the Tube, it’s fine. Admittedly, I probably have to allow a bit of extra time for the journey, but I know I don’t need to look at a map. It would take a little bit of getting used to.”

South West, Shorter, Commuter

Diverted rail routes into central London appeal to some, but there is no clear consensus on which is optimum

- As noted, for some the option of **diverted routes for longer distance services to either to Euston or Waterloo** was attractive
- **One through-journey can be preferable to the hassle of changing and the anxiety for passengers unfamiliar with the route**
- An increase in journey time is an acceptable trade-off. Here, **passengers tended to think about journey time in terms of proportional increases**. A long-distance journey increasing by 30 minutes (or even an hour) can be coped with and planned for. (Given this, for short-distance leisure/ commuting LUL clearly wins out)
- Preferences for Euston or Waterloo are mostly dependent on **passengers' ultimate destination**. That said, Euston probably fits the 'psychological threshold' of acceptable additional journey time more than Waterloo
- Again, the suggestion of **reduced frequency can raise concerns about capacity** and journey comfort
- NB underlining any consideration of alternative rail routes is that passengers should not suffer any disadvantage in terms of fares

What passengers were shown:



"I think London Euston isn't that far down from Paddington if I remember correctly, it's two more stops away, so it wouldn't elongate my journey that much."

Cotswolds, Shorter, Commuter

Some alternative scheduled services offer quick wins, but others are less obviously attractive

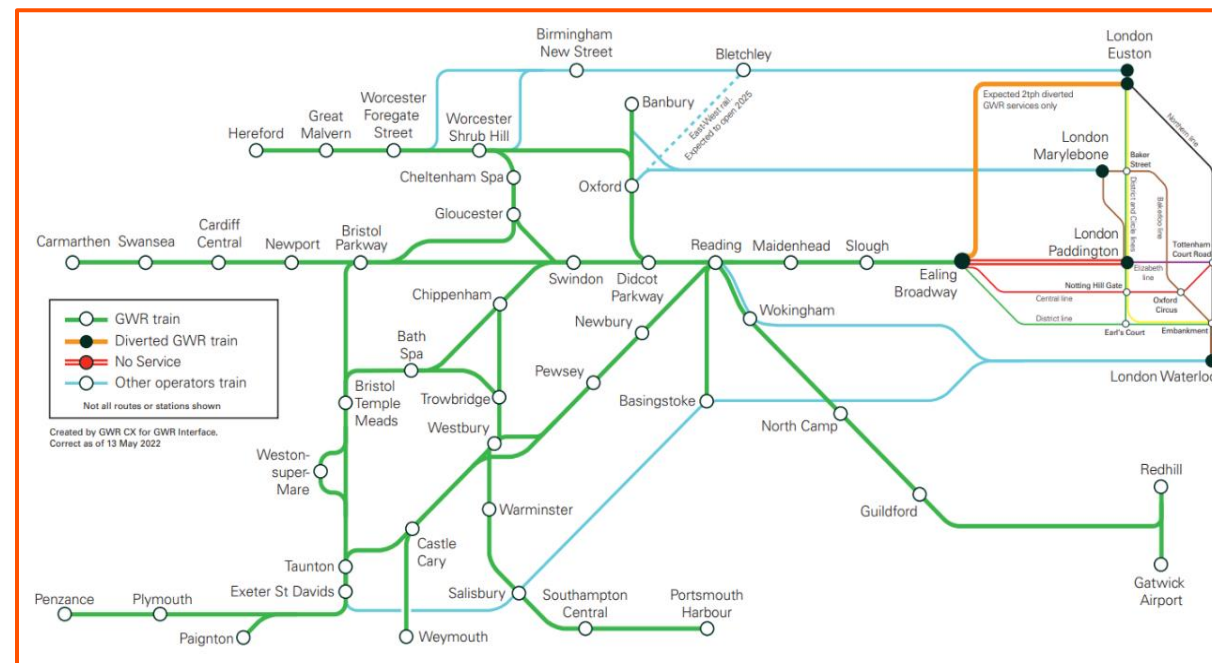
Oxford or Banbury to Marylebone using the Chiltern Line

- This is an obvious route for passengers from/ to Oxford, Banbury and hinterlands. Many spontaneously suggest this as their alternative during disruption (and indeed, many use Chiltern and GWR services almost interchangeably already)
- There are few perceived downsides to using the Chiltern route but again, passengers have concerns about capacity and the ability of the Chiltern service to deal with large numbers of additional people

Reading via Wokingham to Waterloo

- A potential alternative for those whose final destination (or origin) lies close to Waterloo
- However, for most of those travelling via Reading, LUL at Ealing Broadway or an alternative through route to Central London appear to offer quicker and more convenient solutions

What passengers were shown:



"I've always got the luxury of using the Chiltern line from Oxford Parkway; it's very viable. I mean, it's a slightly longer journey now I think than the GWR, but it's not out of the question particularly for leisure journeys."

Cotswolds, Longer, Leisure/business

"The Waterloo option is like a two and a half journey that stops at 4,000 places. I wouldn't want that."

Cotswolds, Disabled passenger

Some alternative scheduled services offer quick wins, but others are less obviously attractive

Cotswolds via Birmingham to Euston

- The obvious downsides in terms of having to change and longer journey times are seen as within tolerable bounds to make this a potentially viable alternative. Again, it is a route that passengers already sometimes use / consider
- In the absence of further detail (or experience) of how well interchange would work at Reading / Ealing Broadway it is difficult for passengers to state a clear preference

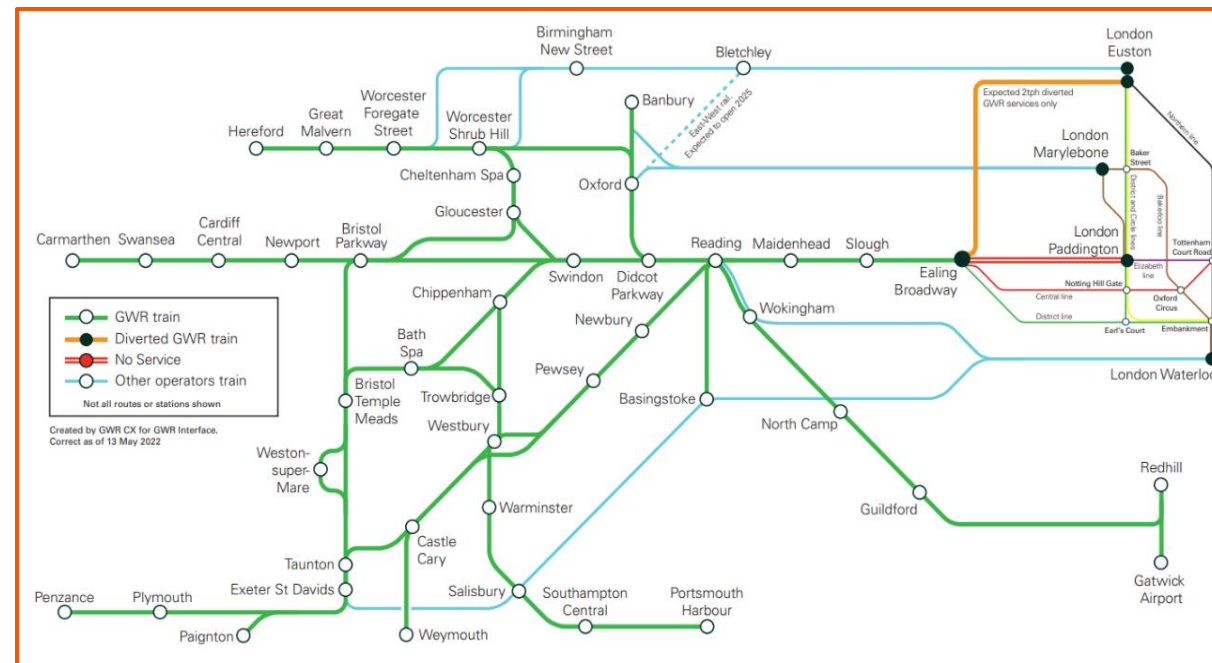
From the Southwest via Exeter to Waterloo

- Again, passengers value the fact that there is a scheduled rail alternative and as with other routes, it may be seen as more or less attractive depending on the effectiveness of arrangements at Reading/ Ealing Broadway
- That said, Exeter to Waterloo is seen as a less clear comparison than e.g. Cotswolds to Euston or Oxford to Marylebone given extended journey time, need to change and service standard

Oxford to Euston using East West Rail

- Difficult for passengers to provide much detailed comment on an unknown quantity, but an additional route can only be welcome and for some, Euston may be more convenient than Marylebone or Paddington

What passengers were shown:



"It's a slightly better picture, but it still puts me off. My thoughts are I'm going to travel less in that particular direction. It's a bit of extra hassle."

Cotswolds, Longer, Leisure/business

"I have done the Exeter to Clapham Junction journey before and I'm not fond of it. There's the option of Reading to Gatwick and then down to the Southwest but it depends on the timetable."

South West, Longer, Leisure/business

Disruption to the Elizabeth line is disappointing but users generally feel that they have sufficient viable alternatives

Users of the Elizabeth line are generally very happy with it

- Passengers are impressed with the speed, cleanliness and efficiency of the new line. For some, it has significantly improved regular journeys and for many it has provided new options within central London and beyond e.g. Heathrow
- Given this, **learning that the line will be subject to considerable disruption is disheartening, particularly given its long-delayed opening.** For some it suggests a lack of joined-up thinking by the railway and can undermine trust in claims about the extent and purpose of the OOC work
- However, **the impact of disruption is expected to be limited.** Most argue that that they have not had sufficient time to be habituated to the Elizabeth line and suggest they will simply revert to previous behaviours. There is a **general belief that for journeys within or through London there is almost always an alternative**
- Of course, over time as Elizabeth line becomes more embedded in passengers' travel repertoire, they may less sanguine about disruption.
- It should also be noted that **at the time fieldwork was conducted passengers were having to change at Paddington and Liverpool St.** but this will not be the case during the works

What passengers were shown:

During periods of disruption there will be a range of impacts on the Elizabeth line. These might include:

- Fewer trains (perhaps half the usual number) running through the central section of the line when the line is completely closed west of Paddington, and a corresponding reduction in services from Shenfield and Abbey Wood
- When the line is completely closed west of Paddington, passengers coming from the east will have to change at somewhere like Tottenham Court Road in order to reach Ealing Broadway (and vice versa for passengers coming from the west)
- On some occasions where there are only two lines operating into/ out of Paddington, Acton Main Line, Hanwell and West Ealing stations will be closed

"If I was using it on a regular basis, travelling from west to east, my argument would be that we just got this new line but now we're closing it and reducing the service. What was the use of building it in the beginning? As a commuter, that's my concern."

Thames Valley, Disabled passenger

"I mean, for me, I've only been using it for a month. I would just go back to my old way of coming in. If I had to go to Canary Wharf, I can just go down to Baker Street and change to the Jubilee Line. So, I mean, it's not a major impact."

Cotswolds, Shorter, Commuter

Similar to Elizabeth line users, Heathrow Express users generally feel that they have viable alternatives

Users of the Heathrow Express (both leisure and business) highly value it for speed, frequency, reliability and comfort (and for some disabled passengers, HEX can also be seen as more accessible than alternatives such as the Piccadilly Line)

Heathrow Express is seen as an expensive option by many leisure travellers, but this is seldom a significant consideration for business travellers

For leisure travellers, disruption to Heathrow Express will be irksome but not disastrous

- Airport journeys are ‘high stakes’. Passengers typically plan well in advance and are likely to check for disruption prior to travel
- Passengers also assume (as they do in relation to other OOC-related disruption) that there will be extensive and timely notification of disruption
- Alternatives such as Tube, taxi or private vehicle are viewed as sub-optimum, but they are available and known quantities. These alternative are seen as having various benefits and drawbacks
 - The Piccadilly Line, while seen as slow, uncomfortable and difficult if burdened with luggage is at least seen as relatively cheap and readily accessible from London
 - Taxis, while expensive, are also seen as reasonably reliable, readily available and comfortable. The high costs is often seen as more bearable for an occasional but important trip like a holiday
 - Use of private car offers similar benefits to taxi. If available, getting a lift from with family/ friends provides all the benefits with little/ no cost
 - Both taxi and private car can be seen as reasonably cost-effective vs. public transport if travelling in a group/ family
 - Coach services (either existing scheduled services or Rail Replacement) are viewed with some scepticism. Many believe they are likely to involve lengthy journeys and be unreliable given London traffic conditions. That said, there was some support for the idea of express services

“The thing is, you know when you're going to the airport, so you can plan in advance. So I personally don't see it having a massive impact.”

Cotswolds, Longer,
Leisure/business

“Ideally, works would take place during off peak times. That won't impact your normal business traveler, your normal commuter and it's still allowing leisure travelers to actually travel by rail. It's important to have that facility for people who don't have cars and to discourage use of cars otherwise.”

Heathrow Express, Business

Frequent business users of Heathrow Express share many characteristics with leisure users

For frequent business users of Heathrow Express, air travel is less emotionally charged and they are generally more relaxed about planning. Given this, they are more inclined to treat Heathrow Express as a ‘turn up and go’ service

- That said, many business journeys are still high stakes and are carefully planned even if not so far in advance as leisure trips
- While seen as generally very reliable, passengers are aware that Heathrow Express is not immune to disruption planned or otherwise
- Some business users have staff to help manage their travel, with part of their job being to be aware of potential problems
- Given all of the above, business travellers think it unlikely that they will be ‘caught out’ by disruption to Heathrow Express

Where business travellers differ most from leisure users is in likely alternatives

- As costs are typically a business rather than personal expense, speed and comfort are more important considerations
- Taxi (or for some their own vehicle) are much more likely to be used than public transport

“In the office, we have a transportation team that will notify everyone in a big channel about any disruption that’s happening over the next month – they keep track of it all. It’s really helpful for me and notifications are super helpful for preparing for that kind of thing.”

Heathrow Express, Business



Both business and leisure travellers feel that disruption to Heathrow Express may make the airport a marginally less attractive alternative

Passengers take into account a range of factors in their choice of airport. Issues such as the **choice of destination and cost of flights are likely to outweigh the cost and effort of getting to the airport**, particularly for leisure travellers

Business travellers are more likely to have preferences for particular airports based on proximity and amenity, but again, destinations served, time of flights and (to a lesser extent) costs are also important

For some, (both business and leisure) **the proximity of Heathrow means that alternative airports are rarely preferable**, even if disruption to HEX means getting to Heathrow is more difficult than usual

That said, **where there is a perceived choice of airports, time and costs of getting to the airport come into play**

Many feel that disruption to Heathrow Express will be more of a problem on a return journey

- Less planning is put in to the return journey and there is more likelihood of being taken by surprise by the Heathrow Express not running.
- However, it is also conceded that a more difficult homeward journey is inconvenient but is less high stakes than potentially missing a flight and that there will always be an alternative mode available at the airport

"I don't like taking the Piccadilly Line as it takes so long. It's not so much a problem going there, but when you're coming back, it's just a nightmare."

Cotswolds, Vulnerable passenger

"I rely on the Heathrow Express to get to the airport for both work and personal trips. I'm going to have to pay for a taxi instead which will cause a bit of a nuisance. I definitely would look at flying from somewhere else to make it easier, but if not then I'd have to look at other options."

Heathrow Express, Business

Disabled passengers tended to think about the disruption resulting from the Old Oak Common works in the same way as passengers who were not disabled

In line with other passengers, those with long-term health conditions knew little about the proposed works but were broadly positive about investment in new infrastructure

- Indeed, as well as wider national economic benefits disabled passengers feel **that a more modern railway is likely to mean (or should mean) a more accessible railway** with better facilities for those with additional needs
- That said, the scale and duration of the works can seem particularly daunting for passengers with additional needs. Passengers with disabilities tend to **plan journeys (often meticulously) to ensure they have the energy, resources and time to complete them successfully**. Additional challenges brought about by disruption can quickly bring in to question the viability of making the journey at all. As such, needs around communication, mitigation and assistance follow the same themes as for other passengers, but are significantly dialled up.
- **Changing trains or changing from train to bus can be particularly challenging** (time to make the connection, barriers such as steps, how far to walk etc.) and these passengers want reassurance about feasibility of making a change, the availability of assistance in the form of staff and clear signposting. As noted, for passengers with certain types of disability, transferring to a bus or coach may not be viable at all
- **Amenities at stations can be more important** for passengers with additional needs: seating, accessible toilets and refreshments may all be part of this
- Congestion can be very concerning. For many of these passengers, **the need for a seat is more pressing**
- Minimising **on-platform waiting is another priority**, particularly in winter when some long-term health conditions may be aggravated
- **Reassurances around the punctuality of trains** (regardless of frequency) is also important to help vulnerable passengers plan their journeys and avoid unnecessary waits
- Communications in terms of media and message need to be mindful of those with additional needs

“Because I look ‘fine’, I think it’s hard for people to understand that maybe you’re not fine. I have got mobility issues as well, but a lot of my health problems concern my heart and things like that. But because people can’t see it, they don’t understand that you might need some help or you might need to sit down and things like that.”

Thames Valley, Disabled passenger



Compensation and Communication

Passengers identify a number of principles that they believe should inform any approach to compensation

The issue of compensation is sometimes raised spontaneously but questions around mitigations and alternatives are much higher priority

- By and large passengers' expectations of compensation are limited, although they do feel that it is justified
- Compensating season ticket holders is seen as important, given their heavy investment and long-term commitment to the railway
- Passengers believe that price should reflect mode: there is a general expectation that replacement road services should cost less than a train
- Passengers are clear that they should not be penalised for using alternative routes. At the least, fares should be the same if not cheaper
- Financial compensation in the form of discounted fares is seen as the most appropriate approach
- Non-financial benefits (refreshments etc.) may have a role to play but need to be positioned carefully to avoid seeming tokenistic or gimmicky

"I think the only people that should get compensation are the season ticket holders because obviously their journeys will be disrupted and they've paid a lot of money. Otherwise, I wouldn't expect any kind of compensation because you're providing, I'd say, above and beyond what I would expect to get me my journey that I paid for."

Thames Valley, Disabled passenger

"I think Virgin Trains gave compensation many moons ago when they were upgrading the rail network from London to Manchester. They did compensate you with either a meal voucher up to the value of £20 or sometimes it was just a voucher off your next ticket. That kept me happy at that moment."

Cotswolds, Shorter, Commuter

Passengers believe that effective communications are essential to helping them successfully navigate disruption, but messaging should also address some wider contextual issues

Communications have a trust deficit to address

Perhaps reflecting high profile coverage of HS2 and recent experience of the Elizabeth line, there is an assumption that rail infrastructure projects *always* fall behind schedule and therefore so will the OOC works. There is a suspicion that the industry may be presenting the 'best case' scenario. As such, passengers need reassurance that the work can be successfully delivered

Communications should give passengers a sense of incremental improvement

The prospect of a improvements at the end of seven years can feel distant. Part of keeping passengers on side should include updates highlighting what has been achieved. This will help to improve trust and reinforce the idea that the works are worth the disruption. Similarly, problems should be acknowledged. Passengers are pragmatic about the prospect of delays but expect an open and honest approach. Ideally, communications should 'under-promise and over-deliver'

Communications should establish a sense that someone is in control

The railway industry is opaque and confusing for most passengers. Passengers are unaware of, and uninterested in, the relative roles and responsibilities of TOCs, Network Rail, HS2, DfT etc. To build trust communications from different organisations need to have consistency in terms of message (and perhaps even in terms of identity) and to reinforce the idea that there is a clear plan

"I would want to know as early as possible. I would say the Trainline app – all the main apps people use – should push out notifications. If most of these companies have people's email addresses from when they previously booked tickets, they should email to let you know. People are going to need to be constantly reminded that this is coming."

South West, Shorter, Commuter

"I'd want a combined effort between Network Rail and GWR."

Thames Valley, Disabled passenger

What do passengers expect in terms of communications

Passengers describe a number of underlying principles that they feel should inform any communications programme

Omni-channel

- Passengers want to see messaging spread across as many channels as possible
- They are aware that what works for one individual may not work for another. They also acknowledge the need for repetition and reinforcement. As such they see the need for the railway to take every opportunity to get the message across

Proactive

- Passengers expect the railway to use digital channels to provide up to the minute information and advice
- Push notifications via email, text and social media and ideally, linking in to travel planning apps like Citimapper should be integral to the programme

Advice & information

- Providing information about travel alternatives during disruption is seen as only part of the job
- Passengers also want advice about *how* to use these alternatives: *‘What are the pros and cons of different options? What is my optimum journey?’*
- For less frequent passengers and/ or those less familiar with travel in and around London, detail about **how** to complete their journeys is needed. The London transport network can feel overwhelming and these passengers want support

Consistent

- Passengers understand little about (and have little interest in) how the railway industry is organised. As such, they don't have any firm views on who communications should come from
- However, there is a view that communications should be consistent in terms of messaging and perhaps also in terms of identity

Broadcast & narrowcast

- Information that will help them manage their journey is the priority for most passengers.
- However, passengers also want to understand the context: *why* something is happening and what the ultimate outcomes will be

There is a hierarchy of information that passengers expect across the upgrade lifecycle

While passengers want to see messaging spread across as many channels as possible, some channels are particularly valued for specific messages

What should be happening in the next few months

What is the plan, and what is the rationale?

} Paid and unpaid broadcast media (TV, Radio, Press)
Out-of-Home advertising
Email/ newsletters (e.g. if signed up to TOC website)

As work approaches (three months to a couple of weeks ahead)

What is happening when? What will my alternatives be?

} Out-of-Home advertising
Station leaflets, posters
Advertising on trains
Info on rail websites (TOCs, NR, ticket buying sites etc.)

When work is about to (or is) occurring

What are my options today?

} Push notifications (email, text and social media)
Coordination with travel planning apps
Station signage
Station and train staff

On an ongoing bases

How is it going? Revisions, feedback, lessons learned

} Paid and unpaid broadcast media (TV, Radio, Press)
Station leaflets, posters
Email/ Newsletters

"The information should be available to the public, like at stations, posters, announcements, when you go on the GWR website – just as many places as you possibly can. I'd want to not only know what's happening but why and for how long."

Cotswolds, Disabled passenger

"Use plain, simple language across many different platforms, on website social media feeds. Let people know when in advance and they can plan, they can mitigate."

Cotswolds, Longer, Leisure/business



Conclusions

Summary and conclusions (1/3)

What do passenger know?

Passengers know very little about the work planned at Old Oak Common, but when the project is explained, they are broadly supportive

Whether or not individuals anticipate improvements to their own journeys, investment in modern infrastructure, new routes and high speed travel is generally seen as a good thing in terms of wider societal and economic benefits

How do passenger want the works to be delivered?

Passengers accept the case, in principle, for new infrastructure and are willing to experience disruption for wider gain and there is broad agreement about the general principles that should underpin the railway's approach

- Passengers accept that work on new infrastructure will entail disruption but are prepared to accept this *even if they won't personally benefit*
- Most passengers' views are underpinned by a sense of **fairness**: the **railway should focus on minimizing the amount of 'aggregate pain'**
- Passengers **seldom see RRS as an attractive alternative**
- Although seldom raised spontaneously, when asked, **passengers want the railway to prioritise sustainability**
- In spite of working life changes following COVID-19, **passengers still want to see weekday services prioritised over weekends and holidays**
- **The detail can be confusing**. Passengers expect the railway to plan to the correct principles when it comes to the more detailed questions of timing of work



When given more detail, passengers' priorities remain broadly consistent

- Most acknowledge that projects of this type are necessarily long term. But **seven years can feel like a depressingly long time**
- **Protecting the working week is generally seen as the right approach**. However, there is also an expectation that the railway will strive for balance i.e. can weekend disruption be planned more creatively to protect some of the weekend?
- There is not a complete consensus about holiday disruption. **Closures on bank holidays and Christmas were (reluctantly) seen as preferable to weekday closures**. That said, **Christmas is considered a high-importance leisure trip** and disruption at these times is seen as particularly wearing. Similarly, **major events (sports, concerts etc.) should be taken into account** when planning disruption
- Similarly, **passengers could understand the rationale for minimising disrupting over the summer months, with summer holidays seen as high-importance leisure trips**. However, it is also was argued that fewer people use the railway in summer. Moreover, there is a perception that rail is less resilient and reliable during the winter and as such, it is important to keep passengers moving as much as possible during this time. Some suggest that shorter days and poorer weather in winter makes the experience of disruption more unpleasant.

Where there is more disagreement about potential trade-offs, quantitative research may be useful to provide further validation

Summary and conclusions (2/3)

What are passengers' preferences around alternative travel arrangements?

The timescale and both the scale and variety of anticipated disruption is worrying for many passengers. This is against expectations that the works will very likely take longer than claimed. Furthermore, the sheer scale of the works can seem overwhelming and can make it difficult for passengers to relate all the various aspect of the programme to their individual journeys

Sharing with passengers the range of potential mitigations does provide reassurance and many begin to reconsider initial assumptions about the viability of using the railway during disruption.

- For many of those travelling via Reading, changing to LUL at Ealing Broadway is the best alternative. But for some there are significant barriers to using LUL, including lack of familiarity with the network, travelling with luggage, and concerns about capacity at Ealing Broadway
- The option of diversionary routes for longer distance services to Euston or Waterloo was attractive for some and on balance, Euston appears to be the better option
- Some alternative scheduled services offer quick wins, but others are less obviously attractive e.g. Oxford or Banbury to Marylebone via the Chiltern Line is an obvious route but Exeter to Waterloo is seen as a less clear comparison given extended journey time and the need to change
- Disruption to the Elizabeth line is disappointing but users generally feel that they have sufficient viable alternatives
- Similarly, Heathrow Express users generally feel that they have alternatives, although disruption may make Heathrow a marginally less attractive choice of airport

The above needs to be understood in the context of the research environment that allows for the staged release of information and a considered evaluation of alternatives

- Our respondents' views are therefore quite likely more pragmatic than will be found in the real world. While effective communications can help win 'hearts and minds' passengers 'on the ground' are still likely to be more frustrated and less sanguine when these alternatives are put into place.

Summary and conclusions (3/3)

How can the railway best mitigate the impacts of disruption?

Passengers' expectations of compensation are limited

- Discounted fares are seen as the most appropriate approach for compensation
- There is also an expectation that replacement road services should cost less than a train and that fares should be the same if not cheaper if passengers have to use an alternative route.

Passengers see effective communications as essential in helping them successfully navigate disruption, but messaging should also address some wider contextual issues

- There is a trust issue to address since passengers assume that rail infrastructure projects *always* fall behind schedule. They need reassurance that the work can be successfully delivered
- Seven years can feel like a long time. Part of keeping passenger on side should be updates highlighting what has been achieved
- To build trust communications from different organisations need to have consistency in terms of message and perhaps even in terms of identity

A number of key themes inform passengers' expectations around communications

- They want to see messaging spread across as many channels as possible
- They expect the railway to use digital channels to provide up to the minute information and advice
- Passengers want to know not only what alternatives are available but also advice about *how* to use these alternatives effectively
- Passengers also want to understand the context: *why* something is happening and what the ultimate outcomes will be



Illuminas
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Old Oak Common Infrastructure Works
Research Debrief
Prepared for Transport Focus

October 2022
Project number: 38776

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