



Midland Main Line Electrification (MML3)

Findings from Qualitative Research: October 2022

Contents



Background and objectives



Reactions to 'planned disruption' and the programme of electrification



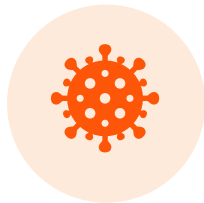
Alternative travel options when there is planned disruption



Communication, communication, communication!



Summary of key findings



Context



Closure options



Making replacement buses more acceptable



Specific needs of disabled passengers

Background and Objectives

transportfocus 

 BVA BDRC

Background

Network Rail is preparing to complete the **electrification of the Midland Main Line** from London to Nottingham and to Sheffield via Derby

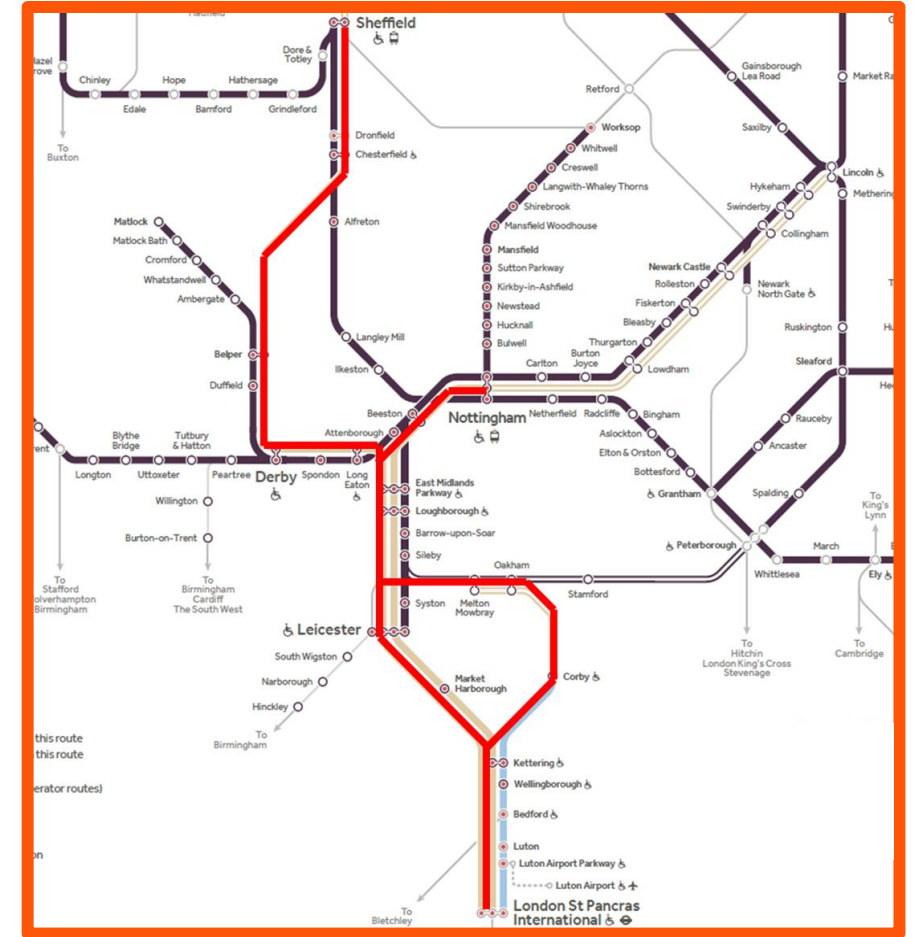
‘The wires’ currently extend to Corby via Kettering and work is underway to extend them to Market Harbour and on to Wigston South Junction

The programme to complete the works to Sheffield (known as “MML3”) is under development including ‘access planning’: arranging line closures to allow engineers to undertake the work and necessarily leading to disruption to passengers’ journeys

Transport Focus is partnering with Network Rail to ensure passengers’ needs and expectations are met in designing and implementing the works programme

As such they wanted to **explore passengers’ expectations of, and reactions to, the mitigations to be offered during any disruption to normal services**

In essence, they want to understand **what passengers would like** (and **what they would tolerate**) in terms of **diverted trains**, the use of **rail replacement services** (buses or coaches), or using **alternative routes** involving a change / changes of train or **other modes of transport**



Objectives in more detail

Transport Focus and **Network Rail** were keen to explore:

- ✔ Behaviours and perceptions towards rail travel **now that the pandemic is over / in an endemic phase**
 - To what extent is hybrid work now embedded and what does this indicate with regards to weekday travel patterns and ticket purchasing
- ✔ How 'planned disruption' is understood by travellers and what, if any such disruptions are they aware of on the EMR/CrossCountry networks?
- ✔ Responses to the electrification programme:
 - What do they perceive or hope the benefits will be on completion/does the programme resonate with them/their values?
- ✔ When should planned disruption take place:
 - Time of year / over Christmas / Bank Holidays / during or out of term time etc.
 - Preferred periods of disruption (other than overnight) – weekends vs long weekends (Fri – Mon) vs longer blocks of closure (e.g. 16 continuous days)
- ✔ Likely behaviours during planned disruption or to avoid planned disruption:
 - What will they do? To what extent would they use solutions put in place by Network Rail / train operators or will they find their own solutions, or simply not travel?
- ✔ Attitudes towards alternatives; diverted trains vs using other operators vs replacement bus services
 - In particular, how can replacement bus services be made more tolerable?
- ✔ How, when and where should planned disruptions related to MML3 be communicated?
- ✔ What, if anything, could lessen the impact, or at least 'sweeten the pill?'
- ✔ Any key differences between types, e.g.: leisure vs business users, disabled passengers, etc.

Methodology

12 x 90 minute focus groups with commuters and leisure travellers and 10 depth interviews with disabled travellers

Group No.	Main reason for travel	*Using trains departing from...	...or through from other branches
1	Leisure	Sheffield / Chesterfield	
2	Commuter	Sheffield / Chesterfield	
3	Leisure	Derby	
4	Commuter	Derby	
5	Leisure	Derby	Matlock / Crewe
6	Commuter	Nottingham	
7	Leisure	Nottingham	
8	Commuter	Nottingham	Worksop / Lincoln
9	Leisure	East Midlands Parkway / Loughborough	
10	Commuter	East Midlands Parkway / Loughborough	
11	Leisure	Leicester	
12	Commuter	Leicester	

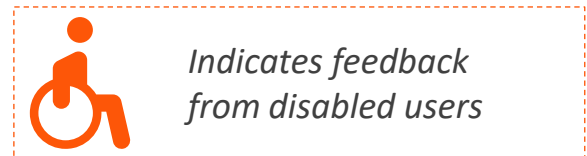
Fieldwork was conducted between 13th September and 10th October 2022

Six passengers were recruited for each focus group and attendance was generally good (only five non attendees across the 12 groups)

*All verbatim comments in this report are labelled according to this column which shows the geographical focus for each group

Depths with **disabled passengers** covered a range of health issues, including those with: visual impairment, deafness, autism, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, mobility problems/needing a wheelchair, mental health issues. They travel from a mix of the core stations.

Groups and depths were mixed by sex and covered a spread of ages and social grades



Context:

Indications regarding the longer term impact of the pandemic on travellers

Indicatively, some changes in behaviours and attitudes persist

But how long will this 'new normal' last for? It's hard to discern which changes are permanent

Passengers reported:

- Less commuting
- Less business travel for non-essential meetings that can be done on Teams or Zoom
- More leisure travel
 - Costs of petrol / parking etc.
 - Wanting to be more social / get out and about more
- More reported UK based travel / breaks - seeing the country by rail
- Though for some, perceived rise in prices was making them think twice about leisure trips, or trying to book further ahead for deals

But reports on attitudes and future behaviours were mixed

- Some businesses have closed larger offices and expect / encourage hybrid working
- Others are moving into new premises and are trying to coax and cajole people to show up
- Some consider the pandemic 'over'
- Others remain nervous of crowding or even sitting next to someone on a train; using apps to find out which trains and carriages are less busy
- Some can be more flexible about which days they work from home / take a later train / flexitime
- Others have fixed days in the office or need to travel to work (e.g. retail, cleaning, hospitality)
- Currently there is a labour shortage and the employee is king - able to demand flexible / hybrid working - but there is no certainty that this will continue beyond the end of 2022



It doesn't quite feel 'normal' yet

Some thoughts from passengers about travelling now versus travelling in 2019

“ Since COVID, I'd say **we probably use the trains a lot more**. Wanting to get out there a bit more after being locked up or, you know, not being able to travel. We've seen a lot more of the UK (Derby, leisure)

“ I agree with the situation like **it is going back to the way it was**. But for me, it's a bit like, I'm quite wary of that situation, because **no one's talking about COVID right now**. But it's still around. So to have someone in your face, like you did have in 2019, like you would literally be standing somewhere next to someone with them breathing over you and stuff like that. For me, that's quite scary still (Leicester, commuter)

“coming back in and **feeling confident to use the train**. I found it quite useful. I've got the **Trainline app**. And I found that quite useful because it actually gives a live stream of what's on time, it can always then tell you whether certain carriages are busy (Nottingham, leisure)

“ It feels like we're back to normal. But in terms of work, **most people, like most of my friends, their jobs are all flexible with working from home** and going into the office still (Nottingham, commuter)



“ There seem to be more cancellations. I've got a trip at the end of October and it now says there's likely to be disruption, so '**check nearer the time**'. But that's not much good to me, as if I leave it until then, there will be **no good deals left** (Nottingham to Newark, visually impaired user, leisure)

Commuting behaviours appear mixed

There has been a move towards hybrid and flexible working, but some people still need to commute regularly

“ I just get daily tickets just because I'll be honest, my work since the pandemic has actually changed to more to **having to commute because businesses is booming. In the cleaning industry, obviously, since the pandemic, a lot of businesses and domestic people are just needing more cleaners to a very high volume.** So I'm having to commute a lot more now since the pandemic than I did before. And I'm getting a hell of a lot more business now (Nottingham, commuter)

“ It's only relatively recently that there's there's been kind of set days. You know, I think probably the past I don't know six months of actually going to **my workplace anyway, encouraging people back into work** (Nottingham, commuter)

“ My company went from spending a million pounds a year on expenses to practically zero due to COVID and they really don't want to go back there. So **you've got to justify why you go in and definitely getting rid of people in cars, they'd rather you go by train** if you're going to go anywhere. You know, and it's into the big cities like London and Birmingham for me. And it's easier on the train. If you can justify it, it's easier. You know, they'd rather you do that (Sheffield/Chesterfield, commuter)

“ **Working in recruitment, when we are reaching out to people for jobs, pretty much everyone expects a role to be fully remote or hybrid.** There's not really anyone that doesn't ask if it was Monday to Friday, full time in the office. So on that side of things, I would probably say that is the new norm (Leicester, commuter)

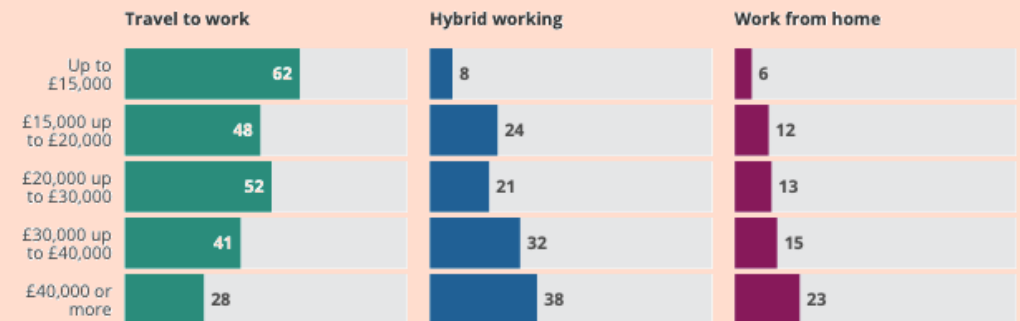


Predicting levels of future demand based on attitudes and behaviours in September 2022 is challenging

- The pandemic isn't quite over; in people's minds at least
- Currently there is **still pressure on businesses to be flexible and accommodating** in order to attract and retain staff in a difficult labour market
- The **economic pressures / cost of living crisis etc. are top of mind** [during the research, there were frequent comments around the cost of rail travel / whether they could get discounts during periods of disruption]
- Some large employers (e.g. NHS) are still **encouraging use of remote working**, until pandemic numbers subside

Hybrid work was more common among higher earners

Percentage of working adults, by income, Great Britain, 27 April to 8 May 2022



- Hybrid working is widespread, but it tends to be **more widespread amongst higher income groups / white collar workers**

NB: In part due to the online methodology used for this research, blue collar workers / workers needing to travel for work were somewhat underrepresented

Source: Office for National Statistics – Opinions and Lifestyle Survey

Indicatively greater use of digital services

Passengers reported increasing usage of apps, both to check services and timetables and to purchase tickets

Wide range of apps used

- National Rail
- Trainline
- EMR (other operator sites)
- But also a plethora of split ticketing sites – (endorsed / highlighted on the Money Saving Expert site such as Red Spotted Hanky, TrainPal, Tickety Split, etc)
- This is equally true of disabled customers

Greater use of digital tickets / phone wallets

Indicatively:

- Less purchase of weekly / monthly tickets
- Low enthusiasm for flexible season ticket options
- More purchasing of flexible tickets

Whilst some (particularly leisure travellers) use apps and websites to book tickets in advance, others are using apps as a ‘portable ticket machine’; purchasing tickets as they arrive at a station

“ *But also **split ticketing** as well as the way that I save a lot of money. So there's various websites where you can check different journeys and buy split tickets (Nottingham, commuter)*

“ *I prefer to buy the ticket when I get there. Because again, it's quite last minute so if I'm working Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, those are the days I choose, I'll just wait till I get there, park my car and buy while you wait on the platform (Nottingham, commuter)*



“ *I use TrainPal. If you book in good time, you can get 1st class, as when you're vulnerable you don't want to be rushed, or to be on a train that's chocker (Nottingham to London, mobility issues - lymphedema, leisure)*

Commentary on the context:

- What was true in the autumn of 2019 may not be true in 2025 (or beyond):
 - Ongoing monitoring of both **attitudes and perceptions** (via qualitative research) and **big data** (recorded passenger behaviours / ONS data) will be required
 - Passengers said that they expected the railway to use all available data
- For example:
 - With labour shortages, staff (and applicants) are able to dictate to employers with regards to hybrid / flexible working
 - A recession might easily shift this power balance in favour of employers, some of whom may require more in office working (more commuting)
- The **wide range of online ticketing services and apps** being used presents a **communication challenge** with regards to planned disruptions
- *NB: The research team noticed that one split ticketing site was not highlighting scheduled industrial action (whereas EMR and the Trainline site were)*



A scenic landscape featuring rolling hills under a clear sky. In the foreground, a blue and red high-speed train travels along a track on a grassy slope. The middle ground shows a town with a large, multi-story building, surrounded by trees with autumn foliage. The background consists of more hills and a valley. The overall scene is bathed in warm, golden light, suggesting late afternoon or early morning.

Reactions to 'planned disruption' and the programme of electrification

This is what we shared with passengers

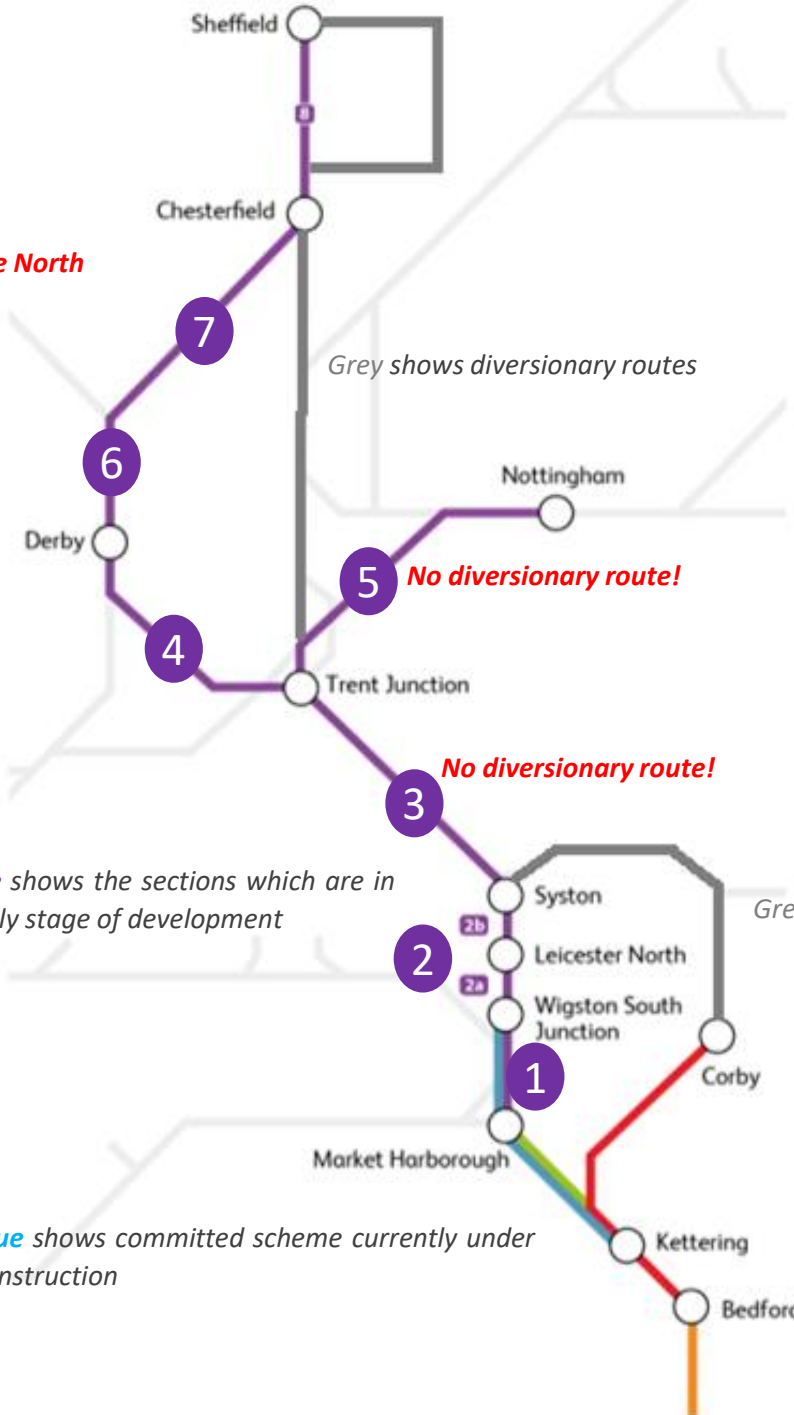
Stimulus 1:

The government has instructed the rail industry to **decarbonise by 2050**, meeting this requirement means **an ambitious programme of electrification** across the network. The Integrated Rail Plan for the Midlands and North commits the industry to the full electrification of the Midland Main Line (London St Pancras to Sheffield and Nottingham) as a part of its plans. **So far the line has been fully electrified as far as Kettering and Corby**, a project which entered into service in May 2021. Network Rail is currently committed to electrification from **Kettering to Wigston**, just south of Leicester, and has already begun construction works in that area.

As well as this, Network Rail and its industry partners are beginning to develop what an electrification programme for the rest of the Midland Main Line would look like in terms of **what work needs to be done**, the **cost and timescales**, and **how to keep line closures to a minimum**. In some places the network has diversionary routes which would mean trains still run during closures but by **different, and possibly longer, routes**, but in others there are **no diversionary routes**. Network Rail does as much work as possible **overnight** in 'Rule of the Route' periods (times when the timetable has no trains running to allow for maintenance and construction), **but some of the activities involved in electrification require longer periods of access**. This could be **a weekend or a longer period**. We recognise that this is disruptive and challenging for passengers and do everything we can to mitigate against this. This study is designed to help us understand passenger needs and wishes better which we will use to inform the development of our electrification programme and how it is delivered.

Stimulus 2:

No diversionary route North



Grey shows diversionary routes

No diversionary route!

No diversionary route!

Purple shows the sections which are in an early stage of development

Grey shows diversionary routes

Blue shows committed scheme currently under construction

Red and orange show electrification already done

These were their reactions...

What does, 'planned disruption' mean to passengers?

There is **good understanding** of the difference between **planned** disruption (engineering works) and **unplanned** (some kind of system failure, breakdown or weather event)

- But some also consider **strikes** to be planned disruption as these are signalled in advance

“ *Something predetermined that leads to a change in the regular schedule (Derby, leisure)* ”

“ *It's something I know that it's going to happen, they're going to do it for a certain reason. That's why they're doing it (Derby, commuter)* ”

“ *I've seen it on like the Nottingham Forest, Facebook or Instagram page, like the social media page. For example, when we played Everton in the summer, it was in August and it came up 'planned disruption'. I think that was the rail strike weekend. So it basically let everyone know that there were no trains that weekend (Nottingham, leisure)* ”

Unprompted, the topic of planned disruption elicits:

- **Station closures** (both Derby and Nottingham stations have been closed for a period in recent years)
- **Yellow triangles** on the app warning of disruption
- **Routes that are particularly difficult** / long if disrupted - e.g Sheffield to London
- **Replacement bus services...**



“ *Planned is pre-arranged engineering or other works communicated in advance. Unplanned is you're scratching your head not knowing where the train has got to. Some stops are unmanned, so you don't know what's going on, and the screens aren't up to date (Long Eaton to Nottingham, deaf user, commuter)* ”

Planned disruption = the replacement bus ☹️

Most experiences reported were bad and these put passengers off booking if they know there will be a replacement bus

“ I've been in that situation before, they haven't even sorted out **the buses**. **They aren't there**, or there's **loads of passengers**, so **the bus is full**. And if that happens, and it's **late or dark**, it's cold, that's really miserable. So that would be useful to know. But one of the main things for me, and this has happened quite often when I've had any kind of delay, whether it's planned or not, is **no one really knows where they're going and you're in a new station that you don't normally get off at**, and you know, **traveling on your own at best is a little bit frustrating**, especially if it's busy (Nottingham, commuter)

“ I've just tried to book a trip to New Street for the end of October... there are literally no trains coming back into Derby because of engineering works, and **it's a rail replacement bus, which I don't fancy going on really**, because I think it's **an hour and 45 minutes**. So I'm actually buying a single ticket from Derby to Birmingham. And then I'm going back into Litchfield, Trent Valley, which is about half an hour from my house (Derby, leisure)

However, some feedback could be more about **perception of likely inconvenience** than actual experience, as one spoke extremely highly of how well the closure at Nottingham had been managed:



“ When Nottingham shut, there were loads of coaches and it was brilliant, a slick operation. There were announcements about it for ages, so you knew it was coming and it was really well handled ... You'd get a drink and pastry in the morning ... Never underestimate the power of a bun and a drink – it goes a long way. It shows 'we know it's a pain but we do actually care' (Long Eaton to Nottingham, deaf user, business/leisure)

But immediate reactions to the electrification work are positive

People are well aware of the shift away from fossil fuels and accept that this is a worthwhile investment

“ *It's better for the environment; there will be fewer emissions, fewer diesel fumes, and less usage of diesel (Sheffield/Chesterfield, leisure)*

“ *When you're in St. Pancras when it's under cover, and those diesels are running, you can almost taste it, I mean, it's pretty foul, and we're watching them inside the station chugging away. So, I think, you know, there's got to be a bonus as to the air quality in the environment, generally, with regards to electrification (Leicester, commuter)*

“ *That's quite a good message, because we should be working towards that. I think we're probably a little bit behind in the UK, and so I think that's positive: 'Okay people, be a bit more understanding, knowing that it's to help the environment' (Nottingham, commuter)*

There are **expectations** of:

- More modern (smoother, faster, quieter, longer) trains
- Fewer signal problems and breakdowns
- Quicker journeys

But also **fears of price rises** in order to pay for the work:

- Higher costs of commuting
- Prohibitively expensive leisure travel for families

“ *They'd update the train stock and you wouldn't have diesels, traipsing by with passengers. It'll be electric. So it'd be quieter and greener for the environment. Yeah. And progress, hopefully towards longer trains as well (Derby, leisure)*



“ *If the work has to be done, fair enough, it's better for the environment and I am all for having a greener way of getting about. That's one reason why I got rid of my vehicle (Nottingham to Manchester, wheelchair user with cerebral palsy, leisure)*

The 'gut reaction' is to think of solutions

Passengers immediately focus on their own solutions without assuming the railway will solve everything for them

Leisure Travel

- **Reschedule** where possible
- **Drive instead**
- **Drive to another station** (on another operator) and continue from there
- **Take the coach** (regional or national) if/ where a parallel service exists (younger travellers / students more likely to take this option as it's cheaper)

Commuting

Most start from the assumption that this will not affect them (it would be done overnight or at the weekends)

For local/regional commutes, alternatives would be:

- Take the **bus or coach** (e.g. Loughborough to Nottingham)
- Take the **tram** (Nottingham)
- **Cycle** (if good weather)

Or: **work from home** / adjust schedule as and when necessary

But: if other options are not at their disposal, a few may have to just build in extra time to ensure they are not late

There is considerable variation by location and type of journey:

- On the Nottingham spur there are a range of other options (tram/bus/cycle paths)
- Between Loughborough and Leicester there is only the one (unreliable) bus route which doesn't accommodate anyone with a cycle
- Most have at least one viable alternative route into London (e.g. via Grantham) if they absolutely have to attend a meeting

Views of **disabled passengers** (mainly leisure users) can depend on level and type of disruption. Eg: they might:

- **Sit patiently:** if put on a diversionary route, resigned to a slightly longer trip but
- **Avoid travel:** if a long, non-essential trip with multiple changes (see more later)



I don't mind if it takes 2.5 hours instead of 1.5, as long as I don't have to change, as it is difficult to go from one platform/station to another. I find that too tiring and I might miss my connection as I have to walk with a stick (Nottingham to London, leisure user with lymphedema/mobility issues)

Closure options:

Weekends vs long weekends, vs longer periods of continuous closure

More, shorter disruptions vs fewer, longer disruptions

During the research, we asked passengers to consider this trade off:

Weekend working only – 12 weekends



*Longer weekends – Friday to Monday – fewer in number



A continuous 16 day closure



*This intermediate option was introduced after a couple of groups, just to gauge the appetite on the basis it might suit hybrid workers who work midweek or could adjust their hours to work midweek

But before discussing these options and probing on related topics such as bank holidays, time of year etc. we asked people (unprompted) 'given that not all work is possible overnight when should the work be done?'

In most groups, at least one passengers spontaneously suggested longer closures rather than weekend working

“ If you're going to do night working for like, six months or whatever, then I don't know if it'd be best to just say, **'Oh, well, we're just gonna shut all the trains off for two weeks here'**. And then just do it the entire time and have day teams and night teams. So it's done as quick as possible, **rather than just having so many disruptions that people don't know about**, and then show up for or whatever (East Midlands Parkway/Loughborough, commuter)

“ **Get it over and done with within a week**. So you got seven days completely shut, do it, and then it's just for a week rather than it being dragged on for a month (East Midlands Parkway/Loughborough, leisure)

“ Is it **better for them to shut it down for say, two weeks, full stop? And then it's done?** Or is it better to shut it every night for six months? **In terms of costs, and knock on effects**. I remember when they closed Nottingham station, to put the extra platforms in about 10 years ago. I think the station was shut for about nine weeks. So the trains didn't go further than Beeston and there was a replacement bus I think but yeah, it was **it was very disruptive, but it was better to get it out of the way** (Nottingham, commuter)



Why did passengers leap to this conclusion?

- It's **easier to remember** and **plan** for when the (longer) disruption is taking place
- It's **easier to communicate** - both to them, and from them to employers
- **It's a shorter, sharper 'pain'** - better than a prolonged 'niggle'
- Several used the 'rip the plaster off quickly' analogy
- Likely to be **more cost effective**

“ I would probably say try and do it in **a two-week block or whatever**. And **even if you had to do multiples of them over however many months or years or whatever, just because I think that allows people to plan around it better** and impacts less on people's work lives and also, say if it's every weekend, that's people's leisure time when they want to go and see family or friends (Nottingham, commuter)

They recognise that it allows for **more efficient working**:

“ *When I decorate a room at home, you know, I set everything out, I do a wall, and then my partner says, right, can you just clear up now because I want to use this room later on. And I clear everything down and takes me an hour or so. And the next day, I go back in, put everything out again, and then I get another hour's worth of work done because we need to use the room again. So I don't know, often **it might take longer by them doing [overnight / weekend working]**... (Derby, leisure)*

All of the disabled travellers we spoke with agreed that this option would be less painful:

“ I'd pick the two-week block, just crack on and **get it over and done with**. It's better to affect only 2 weekends rather than 8 or 12 ... I'd prefer it to be all done in one go – it would be **more cost effective** and **easier for commuters to plan** (Derby, wheelchair users – one with Vatar syndrome, one with cerebral palsy, both travelling for leisure)



Overall, passengers feel there is no *right answer*

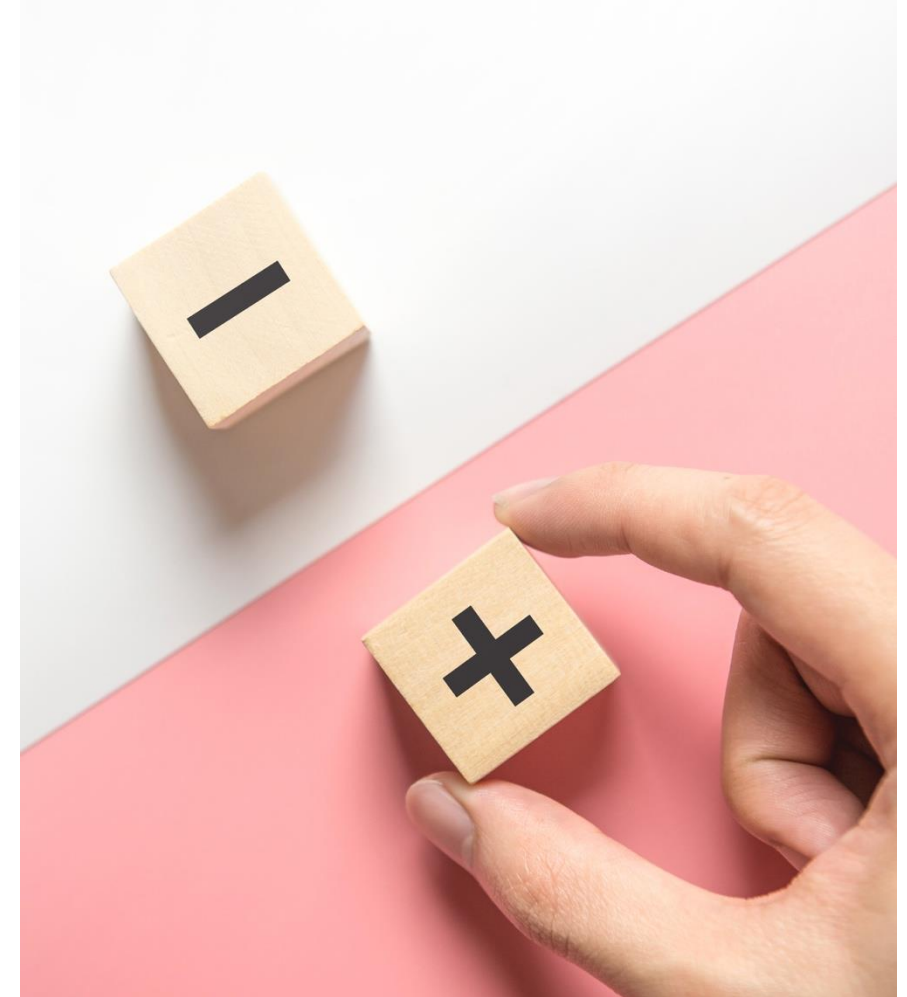
Overall, the sense was that there is no right answer

- There is no time that **someone** would not consider **unfair**
- There are **pros** and **cons** for every option

Whilst **some would prefer weekend working** (less disruption to very busy commuting) there is some **resistance** (and not just amongst leisure travellers) **to disrupting leisure** by conducting work on weekends and Bank Holidays:

“ *It would be better as a weekend to be honest, because the trains are busy as it is. Sometimes it's standing room only. So I just feel that if there's a delay, you know, it's just gonna be a nightmare trying to even get on a train, really. So it can be sort of ideal, rather than extending it into the working day. Okay (Derby, commuter)*

“ *I think it will be more disruptive to have it on public holidays, because people travel for different reasons. If it's work, you just get in the mindset that you've got to get to work somehow, you find a way. But if it's your leisure time and your own time, and you're being disruptive, I take that more personally (Nottingham, commuter)*



Not much consensus as to when the work should be done

There is no 'best time to do the work' - it just has to be done!

Public holidays were somewhat polarising, particularly Christmas

- A few suggested the break between Christmas and New Year as 'not many people travel'
- Others were strongly against this:

“ Not Christmas Eve as people travel to see family and friends ... Christmas is a thing on its own, a lot more people travel then – it could be awful as people are trying to get back to their families (Sheffield/Chesterfield, leisure)

“ I think Christmas should be a no, no...to think that people suddenly have a car so they can travel to see family because the rail services are so disrupted, I think it's really unfair (Leicester, commuting)

Time of year / season also led to mixed views:

- Many felt that winter was the best time for works, when fewer people would be going out/attending events, etc
- Yet a minority thought of the practicalities, wondering if bad weather may make the work difficult/cause delays

School holidays were the ideal time – but not for parents!

“ You get two weeks in October, two weeks in April. There's five weeks now in the summer and like a week in May. There's lots of blocks of time where people are more than likely going to be at home with the kids or universities might be closed, schools might be you know, people aren't relying too heavily on using transport during that time (Nottingham, commuter)

General sense that it's **just not possible to work around every single sporting event or concert**, but that planners should be mindful of very large events (e.g. the Commonwealth Games) and large festivals

“ Well, you can't go into every level of detail can you, otherwise it's going to be cricket fans or hockey fans or concert fans or you know, it's a never-ending kind of circular situation with that, isn't it? (Nottingham, leisure)

But **it's important that sporting and cultural events organisers know about periods of planned disruption** so that they warn spectators and plan around them (e.g. additional parking / park and ride etc)

After revealing the options

When polled nearly all preferred the option of a continuous 16 day closure!

Group No.	Main reason for travel	Preference	Prefer weekend working	Prefer longer weekend	Prefer 16 day closures
1	Leisure	16 day closures	1		All
2	Commuter	16 day closures			All
3	Leisure	16 day closures			All
4	Commuter	Weekend closures	4		2
5	Leisure	16 day closures			All
6	Commuter	16 day closures			All
7	Leisure	16 day closures	2		3
8	Commuter	16 day closures			All
9	Leisure	16 day closures			All
10	Commuter	16 day closures			All
11	Leisure	16 day closures		1	5
12	Commuter	16 day closures			All
	Disabled depths x 10	16 day closures			All

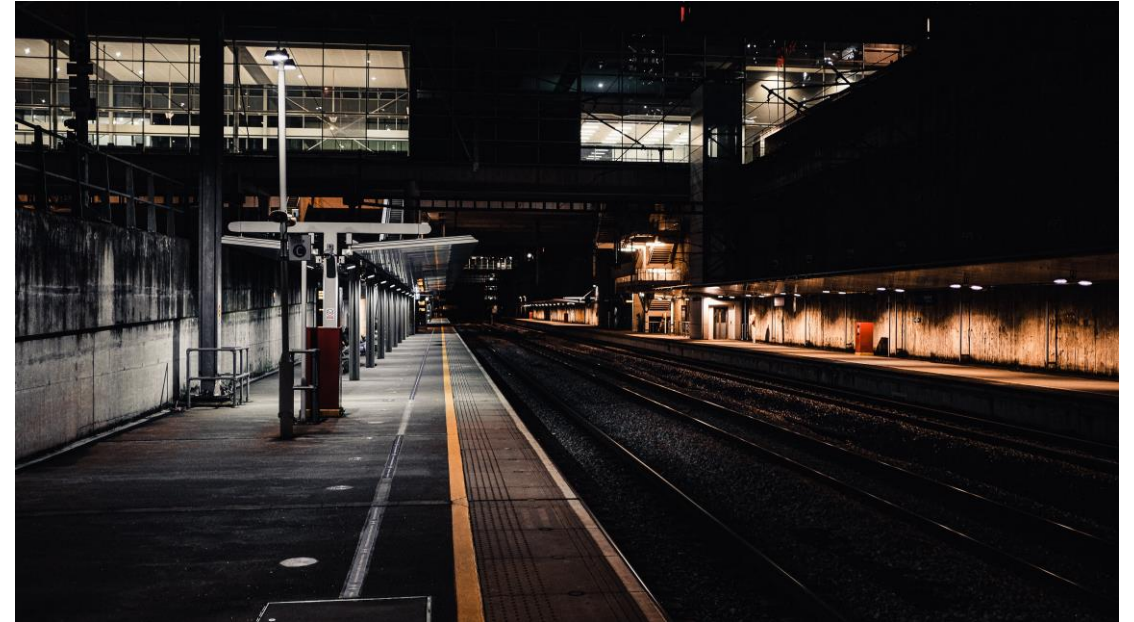
16 day closures are acceptable – but:

Don't overrun

“ If you have planned for 16 days, and you **overrun** by a couple of days, that's gonna be **catastrophic**. And it's going to have a knock on effect on lots of different things (Derby, commuter)

Be mindful of **disabled** and **economically vulnerable** passengers who have fewer options:

“ It would affect me more from a business rather than leisure perspective. Just because I'm very restricted on timeframes through the day of when I can actually work. I pay after hours childcare, and the amount that I pay on childcare is probably more than really what I go to work for, but I, I go to work, because I need to go to work mentally more than anything. So I would say, from a leisure point of view, it wouldn't bother me at all. In fact, I would see it as probably just an extra little adventure. But from a business point of view, then that would bother me more (Nottingham, commuter, a lady working part time as a cleaner)



Summary of passenger thoughts on longer disruptions

People are (perhaps) less afraid of / more willing to accept a 'shut down' for a couple of weeks than they might have been pre pandemic

- Many (although by no means all) know they can work from home

If longer continuous periods of disruption are considered, then the goodwill of passengers should not be taken for granted.

- **Overruns after a two-week disruption would not be well received!**

Good, reliable (and inexpensive) alternatives need to be in place to ensure that the most economically vulnerable who cannot work from home do not end up bearing the brunt of the disruption!

It was taken as read that **Network Rail would check usage data** to get a clearer view of demand; indeed, passengers expected that it would **use 'big data'** in order to:

- **Predict** when demand was lower (by month and season as well as by day of week and time)
- **Properly plan** workarounds such as replacement bus services
- **Make adjustments** as necessary if the 'new normal' shifts



[Long weekend shutdown?] There still seem to be a lot of people travelling on a Monday or Friday, but surely the train companies have all the data on this and if it's telling them otherwise, then there may be good logic to this (Leicester to Derby, leisure/business user with mental health issues/anxiety)

Alternative travel options when there is planned disruption:

Rerouted trains are a preferred option where available

... as long as the additional time is not 'unreasonable'

Passengers would prefer to **stay on the same train**...

- Avoid the possibility of a missed connection or a long wait
- Able to relax or do work

As long as the additional time is:

- **Specified upfront** (e.g. an extra 30 mins)
- Is **not 'unreasonable'** (indicatively, 10% or 20% extra is acceptable, but 50% is too long)

Easier for **older passengers** and those with heavy luggage



*For me, you'd still just stay on one train **not getting on and off and on**. Because I hate that, **once I've got my seat on the train, I don't want to be bothered** with getting my case off. And then sometimes you have to stand up or whatever. **I'd rather have a longer or more convoluted journey on one train rather than hopping on and off** (Derby, leisure)*

*It's **easier to stay on the same train**, even if you're going to be on it for longer ... if you miss a connection, then it's potentially hours. I've been to Milton Keynes recently and missed the connection, that was an hour and a half. So, I'd rather sit on the train with my laptop (Nottingham, commuter)*



Also true for **disabled passengers**, for whom changes in transport mode can cause more serious issues, e.g.:

- **Wheelchair** users may find themselves without a ramp
- **Deaf** passengers may not hear announcements
- The **less mobile** can struggle to transfer between platforms
- Those with **mental health** issues (e.g.: anxiety/autism) can find this a stressful disruption to what they know or expect, as can the **visually impaired**



Just the thought of like it being different... I think those kind of situations are the worst, in my having to use multiple different modes of transport in one journey. So, if I had to you know, get off the train on to a coach, I feel like those kinds of things are very stressful (Leicester to Derby, autistic passenger, leisure)



It's better if you can stay on the same train rather than lots of changes. I hate that, as if they are shouting directions and it's not visual, you are wondering where to go, especially if you don't know the station (Kirby to Mansfield, deaf traveller, leisure)

Using alternative lines considered the best option into London

Most would **much prefer using an alternative line into London** (whether they travel to an interchange by train or park there) **to using a replacement bus service** (which some reported as adding hours to their journeys)

Grantham or Newark are considered a good interchange for those living in and around Nottingham and Derby, as long as:

- The trains are **regular**
- **Sufficient capacity** (enough carriages to cope with higher volume of passengers)
- The wait for a **connection** is not too long
- **Seats** can be booked through
- The journey is **not significantly more expensive** than EMR
- There is **available capacity** on LNER
- There is **available, bookable parking** (for those who would rather drive to Grantham)

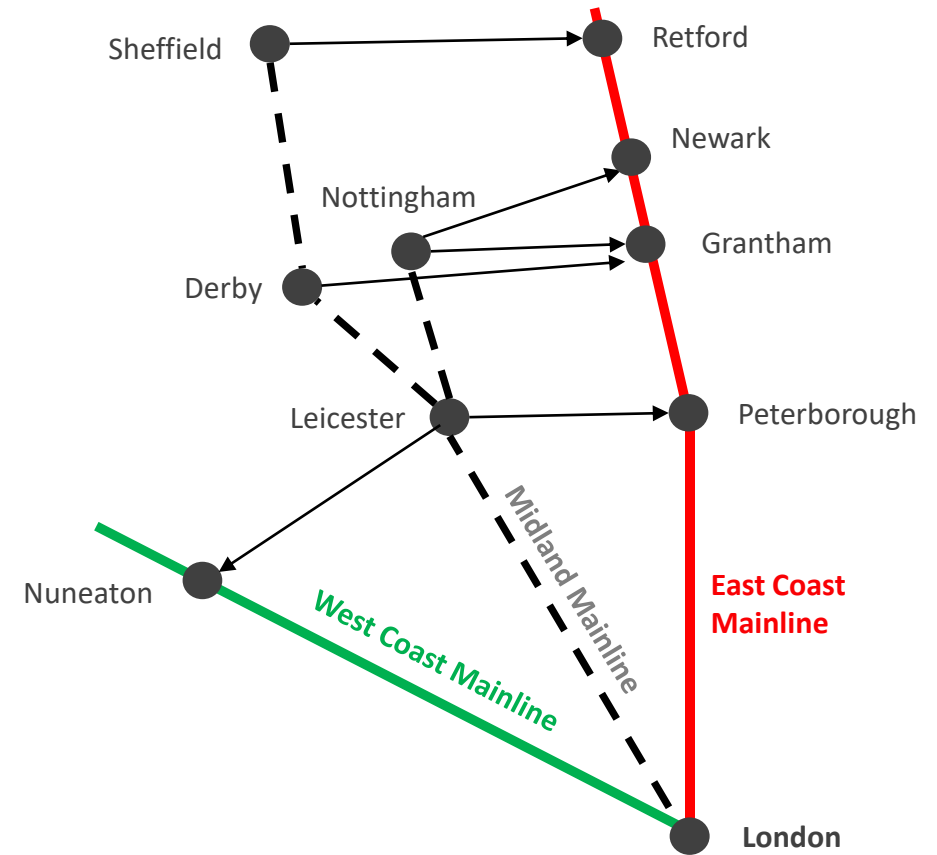
Similar applies to **Peterborough** for those living in Leicester and Doncaster, Retford or **Stockport** for those living in Sheffield

Passengers reported using other alternatives in the past:

- E.g. Driving to **Lichfield, Nuneaton, Birmingham or Rugby**



*It's a 45-minute drive to **Newark**, (from Kirby) so I could go to London that way. In fact, it's almost a preference, as it's 1.5 hrs, instead of 2-3 from Nottingham, plus has a nice waiting room. Both stations in Newark have a train to London, so it gives you more options (Kirby to London, Deaf passenger, leisure)*



There is an expectation of cooperation, and planning for additional capacity and parking

“ There could probably be **a lot more co-operation and co-ordination between the different train operators**. Because I think if you're going to look for alternative routes or something like that, if it's a different train operator, different times, whatever, that needs to be **co-ordinated** a little bit better (Derby, leisure)

“ As much collaborations as possible, e.g.: if they've reached out to these other train companies that said, **we can honour these tickets that you've bought in advance** or so we know that you've done as much as possible for everything to work seamlessly (Sheffield/Chesterfield, commuter)

“ **Two carriages from Nottingham to Grantham**. It was an absolute bunfight! (Nottingham, commuter)

“ You **shouldn't have to pay any more** (Derby, commuter)

“ The benefit of Luton station is that there's a **multi storey car park right next to the train line** (Derby, leisure)

“ If there was a **large car park, if that could be a shuttle service**, rather than everybody trying to find their own particular parking space, maybe do something like that (Derby, leisure)

There are particular problem areas

The research included passengers **living in and around Loughborough**, and this was a salient example of a community that is **very isolated** if there is work between **Loughborough and Leicester**

The section of the Midland Mainline which appears to be the most challenging is the section between Syston and Trent Junction:

- Impacts on journeys into London
- There are few good alternatives between Leicester and Derby and Leicester and Nottingham

Loughborough is one of the stations most impacted if this section is disrupted

- There is a quick reliable coach service between Loughborough and Nottingham,
- But, buses between Loughborough and Leicester take three times longer than the 10 minute train journey and are considered unreliable - and they take passengers to the bus station, which is a long walk from Leicester train station
- Passengers who would normally take their bike on the train and then cycle from Leicester are stymied
- Additionally, there is a regular shuttle service between the rail station and the university and students rely on this (and connecting services) during term time



If there is planned disruption, alternatives should be flagged

Passengers were strongly of the view that, when communicating planned disruptions, a train company should highlight **all** of the available alternatives, including:

- Other operators / other routes
- Scheduled bus, coach and tram services
- Cycle routes
- Park and ride options

For example, those living on the Nottingham spur were quick to mention **the tram** as an alternative for some passengers as well as the **cycle routes** during good weather.

“ I would like to be made aware of the other options. For example, the Red Arrow that just goes from Nottingham to Derby. [Tell us] if there's alternative options that might be competitors to the railway (Nottingham, leisure)



Providing different options is also particularly pertinent for **disabled train users**, for whom it may be necessary to plan further ahead, work out what alternatives are practical based on station facilities, etc



Just sort it for me and make it easy, or it would cause me too much anxiety (Leicester to Derby, mental health issues, business/leisure)



It's good to put in as many options as possible (Long Eaton to Nottingham, deaf passenger, business/leisure)

Summary of requirements regarding alternative options

Passengers made it clear that they expect choice / options!

- They expect a range of alternatives and to be able to select the one that is right for them

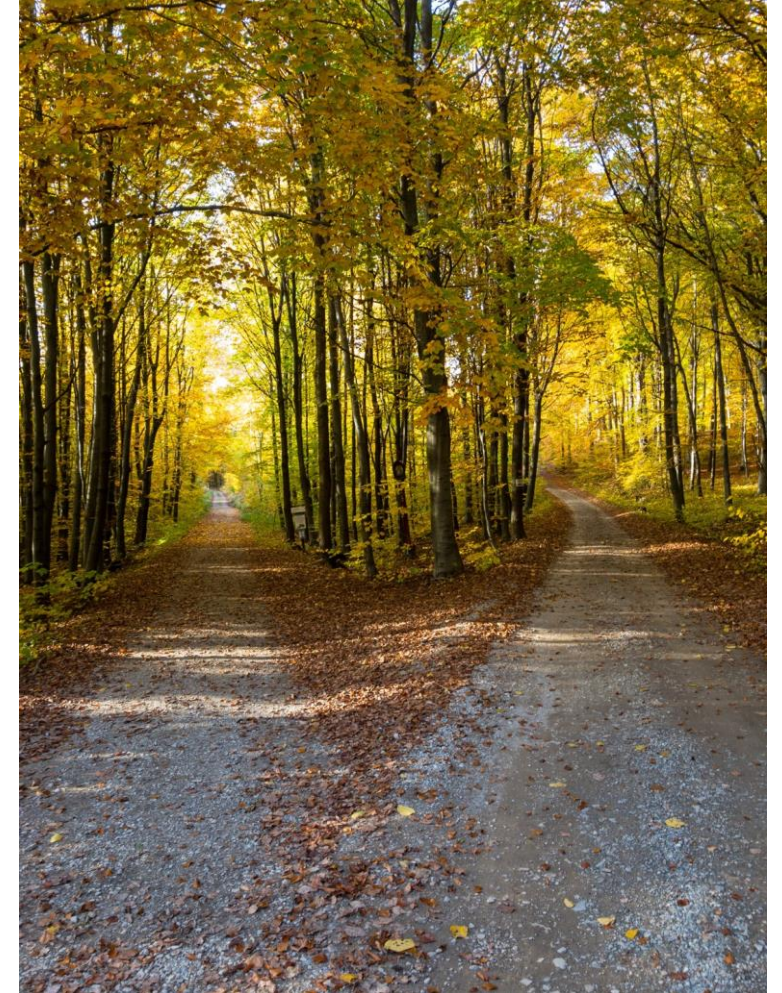
Using **diversionary routes** was considered the 'next best' option, allowing passengers to stay on the same train and only disrupting them in terms of additional journey time.

They felt that the use of **alternative services/routes** should be both promoted and facilitated where diversions are not possible

- Providing information on alternatives, including 'park and ride' options where there is good parking capacity and including alternative modes (bus, coach, tram, cycle routes)
- Passengers expect alternative routes via other operators to be similarly priced (cross subsidised if necessary) during periods of disruption

There is also an expectation that the railway will encourage:

- Coordination on timetabling, where possible
- Additional capacity, where feasible (e.g. on CrossCountry routes)



The image shows the interior of a modern bus. Passengers are seated in grey seats with blue accents. A woman with a brown backpack is standing in the aisle, holding a yellow handrail. The bus has large windows on both sides, and the interior is brightly lit. The text "Making replacement buses more acceptable" is overlaid in white on the left side of the image.

Making replacement buses more acceptable

The 'dreaded' replacement bus service

Not all passengers cited terrible experiences of replacement buses (some were 'surprisingly good' and again the Nottingham station closure was held up as an example of how to do it properly) but many had horror stories to relate

- Very long journeys; stopping everywhere
- Motion sickness
- Chaotic interchange points, where even the drivers don't seem to know where they are going
- Slow, rickety buses
- Anxiety around not knowing where you are going and where you need to get off (particularly at night / darkness)
 - Scary for single women passengers in particular
- Difficulties in stowing luggage and (in particular) cycles



*The dreaded replacement bus service! I can't travel on buses anyway. I'm sick as a dog, but it's like just **making a painful journey more painful**. It's yeah, it's just **the slowest form of transport known to man** (Derby, commuter)*



*I'm thinking of like **a queue of people, a rickety old bus, you know, a miserable bus driver**. I just think if they're going to do it, if they can up their game and give us a bit of luxury coach travel; then I might consider it (Nottingham, leisure)*



But it can work well:

[At Nottingham] There were lots of staff, with high vis vests and tablets. So, nobody got flustered, they knew the next step and people felt really cared for. They should follow that template (Long Eaton to Nottingham, deaf passenger, business/leisure)

Most 'horror stories' relate to unplanned disruption

But those experiences set up an expectation of a **poor, disorganised and chaotic** service

“ I totally try to avoid it because it's just chaotic and you've got no idea when you get on the right bus. The drivers don't know whether you get on the right bus. Whenever there's one going you can't find it. There's no kind of sense of anyone in control of the service (East Midlands Parkway / Loughborough, commuter)

“ It wasn't very good because it was a boneshaker of a bus, a really old bus. It was like something from the Victorian era. It was awful (Derby, leisure)

“ And then someone with a bike, they couldn't put it on unless they shoved it underneath, but that was kind of at their own risk. See, I guess that's an issue with a coach as you can't really put your bike on (Nottingham, commuter)

“ I did that journey, similar to what you've mentioned that one to London where I had to get off, and it dropped me off somewhere, and then got I back on a train. And it was a coach on the way down, which was more comfortable. On the way back, it was a normal bus. And I mean, it didn't help that there was a few people quite drunk on there as well (Nottingham, commuter)

Such experiences can be even **more upsetting and disorienting for those with disabilities or health issues or who are otherwise vulnerable (such as the elderly)**

In general, the view is that **the best rail replacement bus service is the one you don't ever have to use** because you are warned about it in advance!

- Passengers would like to know if there is the possibility of a replacement bus so that they can make other plans
- **A bus is not a train** - it's slower, less comfortable and less convenient (and, consequently, should be less expensive)
 - This point was made by several passengers

If there is no alternative, a more flexible approach is desired

Passengers suggested **flexible use of vehicles**:

- Coaches for longer journeys
 - More comfortable
 - Safer (seatbelts)
 - Can cope with luggage
- **Mini-buses / minivans** where there is only a handful of passengers at a smaller stop

Express routes were strongly favoured:

- Avoiding very long journeys that leave main roads in order to find every station stop
- Or **shuttle buses between lines** if that works better in a specific situation

In most instances, it makes sense for the replacement bus to stop at a station, although **in some specific circumstances additional stops would be tolerable / sensible**:

- E.g. in Nottingham or Leicester city centre
- Connecting with tram links or other modes of transport



*A shuttle to the nearest station, you know, to try and ease that. So for example, if I were to go to Chesterfield, and that line was closed, I would just end up driving. But **if there was a shuttle to Nottingham, and then I could get the train**, it might be a possibility (Derby, commuter)*



*The problem is that when they do replacements, they put one on every hour. And **it goes through every village, and it takes you an hour and 40 to get into Leicester and it takes an hour and 50 to get into Nottingham**. So if they put on a series of buses where some are fast ones (East Midlands Parkway/Loughborough, commuter)*



Disabled and elderly passengers: Bear in mind that some have specific needs, which may need to be considered if swapping them from trains to buses, e.g.:

- Wheelchair users/those with mobility problems can find coaches inaccessible (no ramps), or need staff to help, who may not be on hand
- Elderly/those with health issues may struggle with lack of toilets on a regular bus, especially if their normal journey becomes longer



A diversion can cause me more issues than others as I rely on ramps. The more changes I have to make, the more things can go wrong. Frequently I find there is nobody to get me on or off a train and I have to ask members of the public (Nottingham to Wales, wheelchair user, cerebral palsy, leisure)

If there does have to be a replacement bus service...

Universally, passengers expected that there would be **people** at the station – this is the top priority!

- To guide them to the right bus
- To provide information on timings etc.
- To manage crowds
- To assist with luggage / disabled and elderly passengers

Good communication on the bus/coach - e.g. voice messages or indicators telling passengers where they are / what interchange options are available (if any) at the next stop

- The more tech savvy suggested use of QR codes / mobiles for this

Additionally, passengers expected:

- **Good signage**, particularly on the buses themselves (external and internal) - e.g. some kind of route map
- **Toilet facilities** at the station (and time to use them)
- **Refreshments** available (or drinks provided free of charge)
- **Adequate shelter** if raining
- **A waiting area** that feels safe if dark/vulnerable
- **Frequent services**: at least as frequent as the trains they are replacing

NB: a couple of stories about being on the last replacement bus in the evening and left stranded in a deserted station

The expectation is that disruptions involving replacement bus services will be **planned to the nth degree**:



*I'd like **somebody directing you making sure that you've got on the right bus** and got away. Rather than you trying to having to find the right coach or whatever yourself (Derby, leisure)*



*Because **it's scary**. And you do think if you're going on a long bus journey, you definitely don't want to get on the wrong one (East Midlands Parkway/Loughborough, leisure)*



*Rather than just saying: 'Oh, it's just like, when we blocked the line off last 10 years ago, we'll just do this and send them on the rickety bus', **you need to really take the time now to plan it properly** (Derby, leisure)*



*You need somewhere comfortable and safe – as a woman alone you do feel **vulnerable**. There's a good waiting area at Newark. It's heated and has glass windows with a clear TV screen, (good for me, being deaf), though I realise that may not be possible at a temporary stop (Kirby to Mansfield, deaf passenger, leisure)*

Mitigations

Most passengers felt that there should be **some (financial) recognition** if they have to take a replacement bus service, perhaps more so than for simply being put on a diversionary route, as bus is not the service they signed up for and will invariably take a lot longer. E.g.:

- A **discount**
- A **voucher** towards a future journey
- **Flexibility** in allowing changes/refunds (on advance tickets)
- This was particularly true for commuters / regular travellers / season ticket holders

“ I do like the idea of the incentive. You stomach you know, a journey on a rail replacement service. You get a voucher. 50% off your next ticket with that same company. Yeah, we've inconvenienced you, but you've still stuck it out. So I'll tell you what, whatever ticket you buy next, we'll give you 50% off it (Sheffield/Chesterfield, commuter)

In the absence of this, most felt that a **warm drink** (and possibly a biscuit) on a cold day or **cold drink on a hot day** would go a long way towards at least making them feel that they were valued / not being taken for granted

“ If you are on the coach, the best, whatever you want to call it, is they provide free hot and cold drinks. I mean, obviously not alcoholic drinks, but you know, maybe free tea and coffee and a biscuit (Nottingham, leisure)



Disabled passengers feel similarly, though (judging by our small sample) are even less demanding – they mainly want good, clear comms so they can plan ahead:



If they can allow you to change tickets for free, give you that flexibility. I'm not bothered about a small gesture, or concessions – it's not their fault. I just want to be assured of flexibility and no admin fees (Nottingham to London, leisure traveller with mental health issues/epilepsy)

Doing the research and hopefully acting on it is great in itself. You just need to be aware that these things are coming up, so you have a choice, rather than it just happening to you (Sheffield to Manchester, visually impaired leisure traveller)

**Communication, Communication,
Communication!**

transportfocus 

 **BVA** BDRC

COMMUNICATION: The what?

Passengers expected to be informed both of:

A. The details of the disruption

- The **dates and times** for the planned disruption
- The **routes and stations** affected
- Using **diagrams** rather than verbal descriptions which might not be clear and could be ambiguous
- The **alternatives** available: Provided by the network - including the approximate additional journey time if relevant
- Other alternatives
- The **financials** - any increased costs (not wanted, obviously) and any discounts available

B. The reason for the disruption

- The **need** for electrification
- The **benefits**
- The **'vision'**

HONESTY, TRANSPARENCY, CLARITY



*I'd want to have some kind of clear image in my head about what is the long-term goal as a train passenger who is going to be frequently using this, in years to come after the work is done? **What are we aiming for?** What's going to make me continue doing it? What's going to be the vision for the future? We said obviously, they're going to do this work to make things better in the future? How's that going to look? For me as a customer? That's what I would like the train company thinking about now. **What's that vision? Share it with me** (Nottingham, leisure)*



COMMUNICATION: The when?

Particularly when we were discussing longer closures (16 days), passengers expected to be told 'as soon as possible'

The baseline was 'at least a month', but many required more notice

“ *In my industry, for example, **events are planned one year, two years out**. And some people are arranging to go to a gig, you know, a year out so they might be relying on that transport (Nottingham, commuter)*

“ ***At least three to six months** - particularly if impacting on holidays / Christmas (Nottingham, leisure)*

“ ***At the point of buying a season ticket** (even if a year) it should give you some indication of disruptions (East Midlands Parkway/Loughborough, commuter)*

“ *I would say **if you're going to if you're going to take the line out for a couple of weeks altogether, I think it wants to be at least six month's notice** (Sheffield/Chesterfield, leisure)*



One passenger suggested a **Red, Amber, Green** traffic light system, where:

- **Amber** would denote a **warning of potential** engineering works / disruptions
- **Red** would indicate **planned engineering works** that were **scheduled in**

The expectation was that **communications would be ramped up as the time of the planned disruption approaches**, similar to what some passengers had experienced during major station closures:

“ *Derby did it because it was a massive one; **it was on the local news**. So on a radio is quite good and they fed it on Twitter, so you knew for 90 days or whatever it was, that there was going to be real disruption to Sheffield and around there. It's been nice because I think all the signalling was about 70 years old. I think they **put an extra line in for London** as well, which is really considerable. So again, it was **communicated through the local radio, social media, and through Twitter** (Derby, leisure)*

COMMUNICATION: The where?

Passengers expected to see a multimedia campaign involving:

- **Stations**
 - Billboards, announcements, dot matrix signs, posters
 - Leaflets
- **Trains**
 - Posters and announcements
- **Apps / websites**
 - Banner headlines / warnings on **all relevant apps**
 - And/or a **dedicated** 'electrification works' app
- **Social media – Twitter** in particular
- **Local radio / local TV news**
 - Ideally as a news segment, rather than a commercial
- **Emails**
 - From Trainline and other services travellers use
 - From EMR and other operators

It was also expected that passengers would be **notified when booking a journey** on an affected route:

- At the **time of booking** (if known)
- **Subsequently** (via email) if not known at the time of booking - with an **option to cancel / get a full refund**
- This was particularly important for leisure travellers who book months in advance

“

... a tick box when you book your ticket. 'I recognize that they are going to be working this weekend. Therefore, I am accepting that it might take twice as long' or something and if you agree to that, then you're agreeing (East Midlands Parkway/Loughborough, leisure)

“

*...that's live and updated, has all the information on it that you need, so that you can make a sort of **informed decision** before you press the Pay Now button on your ticket to London (Derby, leisure)*



COMMUNICATION: The how?

In each group, there were debates around in **which order** messaging should focus on:

- **The outcome** / the promise - cleaner train travel / other associated benefits
- **The implications** - planned disruptions

*All felt that both messages were important, and on balance passengers felt that messaging should **lead with the benefits**, or at least that **benefits should be 'up front and central'** to any wider marketing campaign involving:

- **Images** of new trains / new infrastructure
- **Facts and figures** on why the work is being undertaken



Currently they're about to upgrade the gym I go to, and I'm looking forward to going back to the upgraded gym for over three weeks. But I'm not focused on the fact that I can't go three weeks. I'm looking forward to going back and it being better than it was before (East Midlands Parkway/Loughborough, leisure)

*It should be noted that passengers had spent much of the group discussing the **benefits/outcome** and that the stimulus also referenced this. In real life, the benefits may be of less saliency than the impact



Specific needs of disabled passengers

transportfocus 

 BVA BDRC

THE DISABLED: A further word on their needs

It is important to remember that not all disabilities are visible

A blind person with a stick or someone in a wheelchair both have more obvious health issues potentially needing support. Yet there are those whose disabilities are less apparent, who equally need to be considered in respect of upcoming works – especially as, with typical British reserve, many admit they do not like to put their hands up and actually ask for help:



- **Women travelling alone** – want to feel safe, eg: at night at a dark bus stop, so waiting areas need to be considered
- **Those with anxiety/aspergers/autism, etc** – like certainty and routine, so multiple unexpected changes or chaotic solutions will only tend to add to their stress
- **Deaf people** – can get disoriented when unable to understand tannoy announcements or if lacking visual signage to update them
- **Those needing frequent toilet visits** – may be more anxious if put on a long bus journey without facilities on board
- One suggested an idea that may help those with vulnerabilities during this time:

“ *Could you have a clear ‘**accessibility point**’, where things are communicated for all those with disabilities? I’ve never seen anything like that even at big stations. And not to rely on the lanyard system, as it was taken over in Covid by non-mask wearers (Kirby to Mansfield, deaf, leisure)* ”

COMMUNICATION: The disabled have specific, individual needs

They will need to know the same things as other travellers, but *how* they are conveyed may be different

HOW:

A multi-media approach is needed, to cater for:

- **The hearing impaired:** who struggle to pick up tannoy announcements (be it general info about upcoming works, or on-the-day instructions such as a change of platform). They need posters, visual displays or staff on hand
- **The visually impaired:** who, conversely, may want auditory alerts as they won't see notices unless really large, and may also need staff to advise. (Though not a strategy to rely on, the public are also deemed very helpful if they see someone with a white stick)
- The **less mobile and those with mental health issues** have no particular needs in terms of special format, but messages and explanations must be very clear and simple, if to avoid stress and uncertainty about the change of routine/switch of station, etc:



“ For **deaf** people, it needs to be as much in text format as possible rather than tannoy announcements ... knowing where the train is going is really important, as if you can't hear, you may miss your stop, so you need plenty of staff (Kirby to Mansfield, deaf, leisure)

“ Help us understand why it's cancelled, because if they don't explain it, you can feel confused and frustrated. I would rather know the reason for the disruption (Nottingham to Birmingham, leisure passenger with **autism**)

“ For a **blind** person, looking at departure boards is a struggle, but I tend to look at my phone and enlarge it. But it's less of an issue now I have assistance, which is usually booked in advance. It's made a massive difference using my white stick (Nottingham to Newark, partially sighted, leisure)

“ Familiarity is important as well, e.g. I know my regular stations, but put me at a new one and I'm not as happy (Leicester to Derby, passenger with **anxiety/mental health issues**, business/leisure)

COMMUNICATION: When and where may also be different

Here there are similarities to other passengers, just a few minor considerations

WHEN:

Some may need to plan well ahead, for hospital visits, ramps to be on hand, etc, so would like a month or more's notice (though may also be true of other passengers who want to be well organised or buy early, at lower prices):

“ I think three months' notice would be good, as I book my train tickets for the hospital **three months in advance**, or at least two. Otherwise, it's a pain to have to try and sort out a refund (Nottingham to London, lymphedema/mobility issues, leisure and hospital)

“ It needs to be in plenty of time to let the station know that I need assistance, so somebody is lined up to get me on or off the train. I assume they plan months ahead, but **a month** is sufficient (Nottingham to Wales, wheelchair user with cerebral palsy, leisure)

WHERE:

Beyond highlighting certain 'watch-outs' for particular types of disabled passengers, passengers cite similar ideas to other travellers for where to tell them about upcoming disruption. Namely, most use the same **train apps and websites** as others and feel they are a good place for alerts and updates



“ It needs to be on all the booking apps. I do most of my bookings online – it's better for me as I can't often hear what they are saying at the ticket window (Long Eaton to Nottingham, deaf passenger, business/leisure)

Another place worth considering is the **accessibility app**, used to good effect by one passenger in addition to the usual booking services:

“ I have started using the free travel assistance app, which has made things so much easier – it's linked to the phone number you'd usually call but is so much easier than ringing up. It's a life saver. It remembers all your details (Sheffield to Derby, wheelchair user with Vatar syndrome, leisure)

Pen portrait: wheelchair user



'40s male with long term illness and mobility issues, travels between Nottingham and Wales and occasionally Manchester

BACKGROUND

- Travels for pleasure, to see family or go to football matches
- Often requires long journeys with a change of train
- Minimal help with luggage needed, as travels light with a rucksack

TYPICAL BEHAVIOUR

- Likes to plan and book well in advance, to be sure ramps, etc in place and best price tickets are available

KEY NEEDS AND ATTITUDES RE DISRUPTION

- Is happy to be patient and use alternative routes if needed, but would prefer a longer journey to lots of changes
- Concerned that things may fall over during major works, e.g.: a coach with no access, or nobody on hand to get him off the train (but in fairness has in the past been well looked after in rare cases like this, given an accessible taxi, etc)
- Nonetheless, may decide to change his plans/not travel if the journey looked too convoluted or open to error
- Would like the **flexibility to change a non-refundable advance tickets**, or a **token discount** if disruption makes it hard to use
- And it would be great if this sort of disruption/any updates were **alerted on the accessibility app**



I couldn't get on a coach as they are not accessible, and if it's a long distance they tend to use those instead of buses. If it's only an hour away still make the journey, but otherwise I'd probably have to weigh it up carefully



Maybe knock off 10-15% during that time, nothing major but a small token as a way of acknowledging the inconvenience

Pen portrait: deaf passenger



'30s female with hearing problems since birth, as well as health issues, travels from Kirby to Mansfield, and occasionally to London

BACKGROUND

- Travels for pleasure, e.g.: Sheffield for shopping or London for a night away
- Is a fairly nervous passenger, after a highly stressful incident in the past

TYPICAL BEHAVIOUR

- Finds tickets increasingly expensive, so is cutting back, or trying to book well in advance for deals. Ideally likes to travel with her husband for support

KEY NEEDS AND ATTITUDES RE DISRUPTION

- During works she'd try to avoid travelling altogether and postpone her plans – especially as she rarely makes essential trips
- But if needing to do so feels it would be helpful – rather than over-reliance on announcements – to have **flashing lights** and **visual displays** to advise what's happening, as well as plenty of **staff** on hand (which, from experience can often be lacking)
- [This was the passenger who suggested a **central information point**]



It's quite stressful using public transport, as the conductor will shout down the platform, and announcements are garbled. I also have low level mobility issues and if the train changes platform I may not get to know about it in time



Once I was coming back from St Pancras and they cancelled all the trains. I couldn't hear the announcements and I was struggling to find a member of staff to help. I finally made it on a train to Newark and was trying to post on Facebook asking if anyone could pick me up, but there was no signal



It was a nightmare, as there was heavy reliance on announcements, and I didn't yet have my hearing aids. Since then, I'm always a bit paranoid about going on the train on my own

Important to also remember the economically vulnerable

These are the passengers most likely to find themselves on replacement bus services

ONS data shows that the less wealthy are:

- **Less likely to hybrid work** / work from home
- More likely to be in **lower paid sectors** (retail / hospitality/ caring/ nursing etc.) where they have to travel to their place of work

It was considered important that communication campaigns were designed to reach these audiences:

- That may be **less digitally savvy**
- That **may not speak English** as a first language

Passengers were keen that alternatives scheduled for planned closures during weekdays should offer reasonable alternatives for those who have less flexibility to find their own alternative options, for example, those without cars

- In this context, 'reasonable', means that the additional time involved does not penalise those with fewer options



I think two weeks is a long time for people, if they can't make other forms of transport, what that means they might not be able to get to work for two weeks (Derby, commuter working in IT but office based)



Summary of key findings

Messages direct to Network Rail from passengers:

Communicate. Be transparent. Give us plenty of notice. Plan effectively

“ **Communication!!** (Nottingham, commuter)

“ Get it all done in one go if you can(Sheffield/Chesterfield, leisure)

“ *But at the same time, you've got to **sell the benefits**, haven't you, you know, **there will be disruption but when we come back, it will be quicker and smoother** whatever the benefits are* (Derby, commuter)

“ Give us **as much notice as possible** (Derby, commuter)

“ **Communication**, that was all I'd say is, we understand it's gotta be done, but you know, make the communication effective, go all out to make it as easy as possible for people to get from A to B, when you're cutting the line in between A to B (Derby, leisure)

“ It's not just about the communication, but **it's the transparency**...you know, don't show just **some kind of commercial spiel** that gets chucked out. It's just **nice to be clear over the reasons why they're doing it** (Nottingham, commuter)

“ **Plan it within an inch of its life!** (Nottingham, commuter)

“ **Plan and be creative with your communication** so that people are well informed...I'm a customer. I've chosen that route because it works for me. I could have driven. I could have got the coach, cycled or walked in, but actually I took the train so I've already made an informed choice. You're going to change that. **Make sure you communicate well, to the customer and plan** (Sheffield/Chesterfield, commuter)



Just communicate well, then a lot of the pain will be avoided ... And maybe try and use the person who organised the Nottingham closure, as it was seamless. They deserve a knighthood! (deaf passenger, business/leisure)

Summary findings and recommendations: 1/3

Hybrid working is embedded, but it is limited to the population of white collar / office workers (who tend to be better off) and future work patterns are still difficult to predict

- Indicatively, people are planning ahead to buy tickets for leisure (and get the best deals) but being much more responsive / last minute / reactive with regards to commuting and business travel

The clear implication here is that future plans need to have flexibility built in, and that a priority passenger group is people who have to commute in order to work (and this includes important populations such as healthcare workers)

Planned disruption is well understood, but occasionally confused with strike action. There is currently low awareness of any planned disruption on the EMR / CrossCountry networks

Reactions to the electrification programme are positive and set up an expectation of cleaner, smoother, faster, more reliable trains in addition to the environmental benefits

Communications don't necessarily need to lead on the benefits, but they should certainly highlight the reasons why the work is being done

It is very difficult to reach consensus as to when planned disruption should take place, although Christmas working produced the strongest negative reactions (particularly in view of other interruptions to Christmas festivities in recent years)

Work at any time of year is going to make some passengers unhappy. Working over Christmas should be avoided, at least until the pain of the past two years is long forgotten

Summary findings and recommendations: 2/3

There is a willingness to accept, indeed a preference for longer periods of disruption (e.g. 16 days) if this avoids the need for rolling weekend disruptions over an extended period

- Longer, but fewer disruptions are **easier to remember** and **easier to plan around**
- They are also considered easier to communicate to passengers and easier for passengers to communicate to others impacted (e.g. employers / customers)

Those with resources (e.g. cars /flexibility around cost) are most likely to want to avoid planned disruptions, unless these merely include diversions (where they stay on the same train, but detour around work areas)

- They expect suggested alternatives (e.g. using other lines) and expect there to be coordination between rail operators and other services (coaches / trams etc.) to ensure that these suggested alternatives have sufficient capacity during the disruption period
- For these passengers, the best replacement bus service is the one they never need to take because they are pre-warned. This is particularly true for longer journeys (e.g. trips to and from London)

Those with less flexibility and resources (in particular, those who have to travel to work) are more likely to find themselves reliant on replacement services (including replacement buses where no alternatives are available)

Summary findings and recommendations: 3/3

Indicatively, coaches are preferred to buses and there is demand for express bus services and flexibility; but **demand for these additional services is greatest amongst the type of passenger who would rather avoid a replacement bus** if other alternatives (e.g. drive to another operator station and travel from there / take the tram / use a bike) are possible

It goes without saying that when considering replacement services, the sections of the route impacted need to be factored in and the range of alternatives that are practical for passengers

Ideally, passengers would be notified as soon as the network has clarity over planned disruption, particularly if buying a season ticket

Longer planned disruptions of the 16 day type discussed, need to be **flagged well in advance** and there needs to be a programme of **phased communications** (via multiple channels) as has successfully been employed in the past for station closures (e.g. Nottingham)

- The stations are important sites for messaging, but there is also an expectation of:
 - App notifications and information – including all apps (e.g. split ticketing sites as well)
 - Social media – particularly Twitter
 - Email notifications to passenger who have bought tickets on affected days / routes
 - Local radio (both advertising and travel bulletins)

There is not much that can sweeten the pill. Disruption is disruption. That said:

- **Passengers do not expect to have to pay more** for a slower disrupted service; **ideally they would pay less or receive vouchers** for future travel
- **A cup of tea and a biscuit** (or water on a hot day) go a long way!