

Shaping Rail's Future: Customer Community 2025-26

A new fares model for the railway
(**& naming the middle tier option**)

October 2025

The Customer Community: 2025-26

Following the successful community insight programme which ran from February 2023 to April 2024, and again from July 2024 to June 2025, this is the third community of rail users brought together by Transport Focus and the Customer & Revenue Growth Team to help inform the future of rail travel in Britain



A unique vehicle for engagement

- ✓ Hear users' experiences and opinions of rail travel in Britain
- ✓ Identify strengths, weaknesses, and improvements
- ✓ Involve customers in potential solutions and new ideas to help shape the future of rail



40 rail users

representing
diverse needs &
experiences



Sep 2025 to
March 2026



Using flexible, engaging research methods

- ✓ Online research platform for continuous interaction
 - Feedback on a given topic each month
 - Via activities using video, text, images, polls
 - Participants work individually, interacting with a moderator, and each other
- ✓ Face to face workshops to discuss topics further, generate ideas, and explore proposed concepts

In October 2025 the community...



Told us about the types of tickets they use for journeys of at least an hour, the decision making behind this, and how well the current fare structure works for them



Gave their overall views on the idea of a three-tier model for rail fares in principle, and their expectations for what each of the tiers would mean in practice

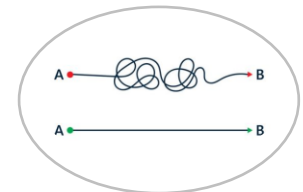
See Appendix for a summary of how the model was presented to participants



Evaluated three possible name options, for the middle tier ticket

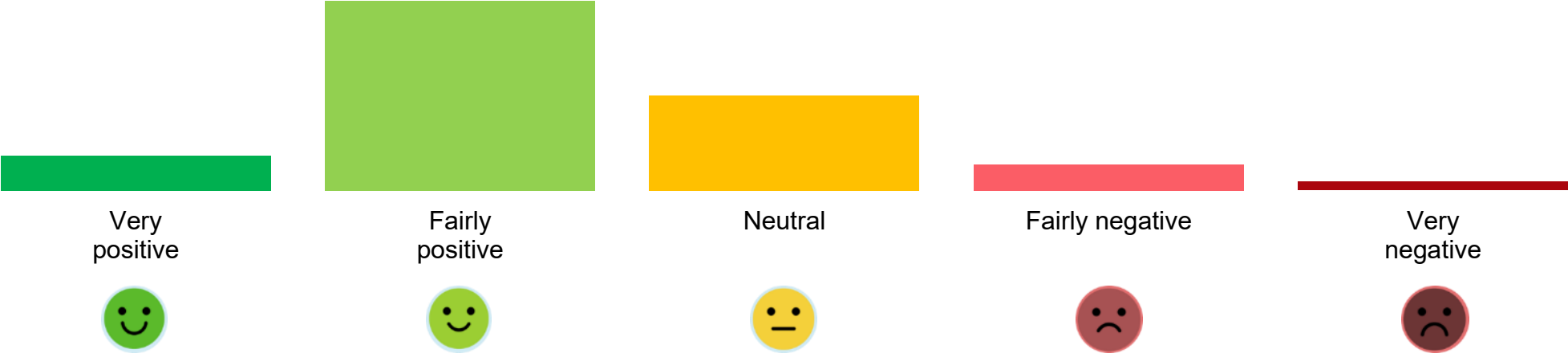
This feedback follows an earlier similar exercise, which gathered reactions to the proposed model in principle. This had taken place in June 2025 with a different set of rail users, in the previous customer community which ran in 2024-2025

(And gave us an overview of how they feel about travelling by train generally, as context)



Some context: most in the community were feeling fairly positive about the railway in general at this point

How you feel about travelling by train at the moment: A snapshot
(Sep/Oct 2025)



Base: all community participants, Sep/Oct 2025 (41)

Currently, most say that choosing tickets is reasonably easy, but there is a clear need and appetite for reduced complexity, especially for less regular travellers

Community participants described their most recent ticket purchase, for a journey of at least an hour



Around three quarters of the community found the purchase process for their last journey fairly easy – aided for many, by apps and websites

*The Trainline or TFW app is so easily accessed and **paying by Apple Pay makes it so quick and easy.***

Jenni

*I can research possible times and journey stops **at home using laptop** and order tickets to collect at my local station.*

Penelope

(Being familiar with the journey, its options, and the booking platform, definitely helps)

*I tend to book everything through the Scotrail website, and ...they show the cheapest ticket options first, but typically these will include split tickets if there is a connection involved. **You have to scroll past all of them to get the flexible options.***

Luke



But even for these people, choosing the right ticket / journey features is sometimes less straightforward and can catch people out

*There seems to be **little consistency with prices**, I don't know the best time to buy for the best price and they seem to **change on a whim.***

Dan

*I've bought it before, but **it's not always easy to know what's the most cost effective.***

Samuel

*I think one issue I've had is that it's too easy – it's a place and a time, and occasionally I've booked it so quickly that **I've only realised after I've booked the wrong train time and should've thought harder** about getting a better one.*

Matthew

*I encountered the usual frustrations of **complicated screen layouts and a multitude of ticket types**, with it not necessarily being clear which would be the most suitable tickets for my journey.*

Benjamin

*The online booking systems usually show all the options... so it's easy to compare prices. However, it can sometimes be a bit **confusing to decide which ticket gives the best balance between cost and flexibility, especially with so many options....***

Maulika



And around a quarter in this group found it more difficult, for reasons including...

- × **The need to factor in other elements like Passenger Assistance booking**

*[I've] done the journey enough times to know ...what to do and who to contact, but the **initial stages are very intimidating to a new traveller.** Each journey involves **multiple apps** [to book the journey and PA separately], staff, and often the **information between them doesn't match**, causing issues.*

Chloe

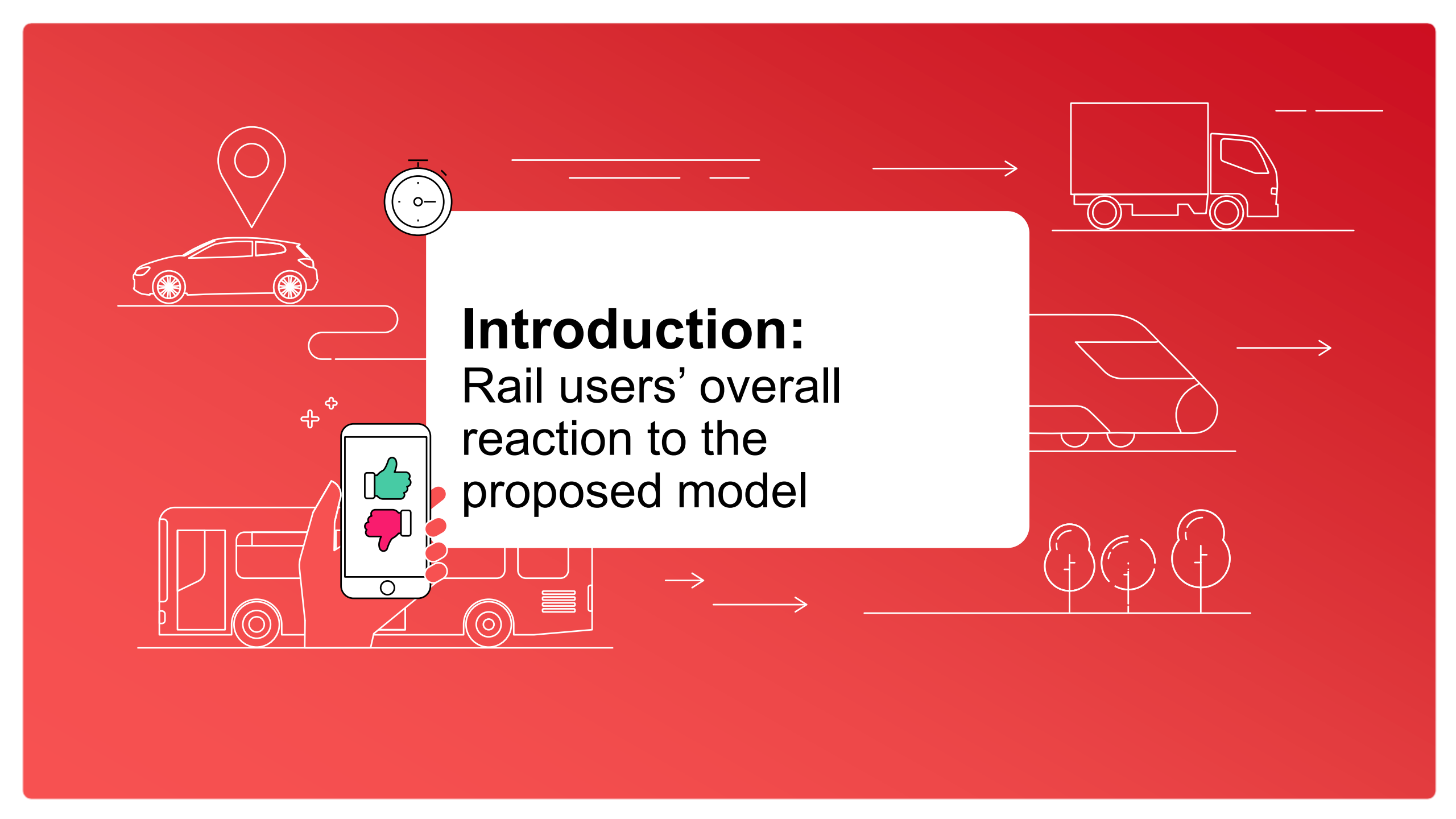
- × **Discomfort / lower ability with online tools**

*I certainly didn't feel I could buy online or use a [TVM] as **I find the various options rather confusing.** However the lady at the ticket office was very helpful in ensuring I purchased the best ticket.*

Zoe

*Easy when ticket office is open **but hours are now restricted.***

Elijah



Introduction: Rail users' overall reaction to the proposed model

A quick recap: in June 2025 a different set of rail users in the previous (2024-25) customer community gave initial feedback on the proposed fares model



Overall, the previous community **tentatively welcomed the proposed new fares model**, and the **three ticket options were broadly understood**

Feedback indicated that the model:

- ✓ is **simpler, easy to understand**
- ✓ **is felt to provide a balance** between meeting different people's needs, and limiting the number of choices
- ✓ helps **project a better perception of transparency for the railway** (though it is important to **acknowledge that trust in the railway is a wider issue**, driven by various factors, notably service reliability and the price of journeys)
- ✓ **may marginally reduce customers' propensity to shop around**

(Some key concerns and watch outs were identified:)



Regardless of the fare model, passengers want greater fairness when trains are disrupted

This includes full understanding of the terms for the new ticket types in this scenario – and ideally some leniency and greater flexibility, when the customer is not at fault



Views on the removal of the "Off-Peak" ticket type were deliberately sought in this previous exercise.

There were mixed views on removing "Off-Peak", and there will be winners and losers from this.

This is linked to a general discomfort around the affordability of train travel, and concern that the new model simply reframes what passengers see as the core issue of absolute price

Retaining the availability of cheaper prices during quieter times (via a Train Specific / Fixed ticket) or on quieter services (via dynamic pricing) will be logical and important to many



Some assumption that Full Flex can be bought cheaper in advance, and conversely a risk that some miss that Train Specific ("Fixed") tickets can be more expensive nearer to the date of travel.

It will be really important to make dynamic pricing very clear – its terms, and the tickets to which it applies



A small risk that the more flexible tickets can be construed as making flexibility something that is premium / exclusive, or something to be penalised

The right framing and presentation may help head off and mitigate this risk

The next community, evaluating the proposed new fares structure in Oct 2025, have a similar overall response – they are **cautiously positive** towards it

See Appendix for a summary of how the model was presented to participants

Key perceived benefits for this group of rail users

(which are similar to the benefits highlighted by the previous group)

Core & common points of appeal

- ✓ Straightforward, minimal set of options, easy to understand in principle
- ✓ Options to suit different needs, taking into account flexibility and budget
- ✓ Prices are the same wherever you buy the ticket
- ✓ Removing complexity and confusion generated by different prices and restrictions across different operators

Additional / less universal points of appeal

- ✓ Many (though not all) appreciate the facility to buy in advance to save money
- ✓ Flex ticket is always the same price regardless of when you buy – “helps with budgeting”

The restrictions and price model make sense. There doesn't seem to be any rhyme or reason for [current] ticket pricing apart from time you book the ticket and peak/off peak classification.

Alexander

I think this system would make more sense and make things less complicated!

Amelia

I like how the ticket prices are the same across different websites and apps; there is [currently] a booking fee on trainline; which is annoying.

Lucas

It sounds like the current structure of Anytime, Off-Peak and Advance, so it should be relatively easy for the population to understand.

Benjamin

I think this new fares model sounds like a sensible move towards making train tickets easier to understand. Having just three main types of ticket ...feels much simpler than the current complicated system, where there are too many names and rules to figure out. I like the idea that prices would be the same no matter where you buy your ticket, and that you could mix and match ticket types for each direction of a return journey. That gives people more choice and flexibility based on their plans.

Arjun

Note: overall, this cohort of rail users has a slightly more muted response to the proposed new model for fares; the previous community were a little more enthusiastic overall. This may be related to the timing at which the model was introduced to each of the groups: the 2025-25 community were first shown this new structure idea towards the end of their tenure (in June '25, having been part of this research since July '24), while the 2025-26 community have been shown it only two months after joining the project. The second group are thus arguably less warmed up to ideas and ways of working in the rail industry, and may find it harder to engage with this idea. This second group is therefore like to be a little more representative of the general rail user population and the general public. Nevertheless, both groups were, on the whole, pleased to see development in this area, interested to know more, and generally supportive of the proposed direction of travel.

Rail users do have some concerns and queries around the proposed fares model

Two key areas are:

£ Broader concern about affordability, and the model's resulting impact (or not) on the absolute ticket price

*...for me growing up the only way to travel [was with] super off-peak day return, or advanced non-refundable, you know all this all [these ticket types] which ...really brought the price down a lotThat is the one issue [I have with the new model]: **The fixed ticket price would probably have to be an average of all the fixed ticket prices, and might erase the very cheapest options which for a lot of people including me was really the only the price tag to get on the train.** And you don't really mind if it's ... like, the 5a.m train to London, ...it was the only way you could get there.*

Matthew

*The idea that Fixed and Lite prices go up as trains get busier is understandable, but I think **it will be important to make sure those increases feel fair and predictable.***

Arjun

*My concern is whether prices would reflect fairly each option or would we be paying over the top for flexibility... **It's about seeing the pricing before I could make a straight opinion on it but the idea sounds alright***

Michael

*For me, **I'd be interested in really exploring what the pricing structure looks like because ultimately that is my number one barrier to using rail services** extensively and I (anecdotally) know that others feel the same way.*

Concern around passenger rights during delays / cancellations



Many still worry about whether or not their ticket will be valid on a different train, or whether they will be compensated for delays

Particularly for the Fixed ticket – if the specified train is longer running, is missed due to delayed connections, or otherwise no longer works for the passenger. This concern can be heightened when people register that Flex is refundable but others are not



Many would “choose” the more flexible options because of the risk of disruption, rather than for their own flexibility

Rules and rights must be clear at point of booking, so passengers have genuine choice and do not pay more than they may really need to



This has implications for naming and describing the ticket types:

1. There is confusion and inconsistency around passenger rights in the current fare system, and while rules around disruption and customer service do not strictly fall under the remit of FTR, to passengers these are all connected to ticket options and decisions
 - It could be worth being really explicit in comms and ticket descriptions, that **the consistency benefit of the new proposed fares model covers both ticket options themselves, and the rules and operator behaviours around disruption** and how tickets work in this case.
2. More literal names are appealing to some to distinguish tickets on the basis of refundability (see page 22). However, explicitly describing one ticket type as refundable and the others as non-refundable can heighten these concerns and assumptions
 - **Naming & description needs caution if it implies that people cannot transfer or refund the Fixed and mid-tier tickets in the case of disruption.**

Some other issues, while less common or less impactful, nevertheless exist and will be worthwhile to address, mitigate, or clarify

- **Lack of refund on the cheaper options**

(NB some assume that refunds and changes will still be possible for a small fee, even on the Fixed and mid tier option)

I think the 'Lite/Value/Day' ticket should be partly refundable if you do not travel, perhaps 50%.

Isaac

- **Return being the same price as two singles**

Can be easier to understand, but some see this as a loss

I don't understand why the fixed ticket is non refundable, I would expect that ticket to be the easiest to refund [given it's clear which train would have been used, only one operator in play, etc.,].

Isabella

- **Variable / dynamic pricing**

- Some appreciate the opportunity to buy at a cheaper price
- But can be “a complicating factor” (i.e. may undermine the streamlined structure for some)
- And concern about how variable the prices could be

I don't like how the Fixed and Flex-Lite are based on market economics and will fluctuate; I feel this is unfair which punishes the individuals who leave it to the last minute..

Lucas

- **Some still want to be able to choose the slower / less comfortable train to save money**, or vice versa

(i.e. it's not only about flexibility vs price; comfort and speed are also key decision-making factors, as a trade off with price)

- Queries about whether **Railcards** can still be used with any/all of the tickets

I still find the new ideas rather baffling and would want someone to help me find the best fare rather than use a machine or buy on-line.

Zoe

- **Reduced complexity will not eliminate the need for in person assistance** with buying tickets, for the less confident, familiar and tech-able passengers

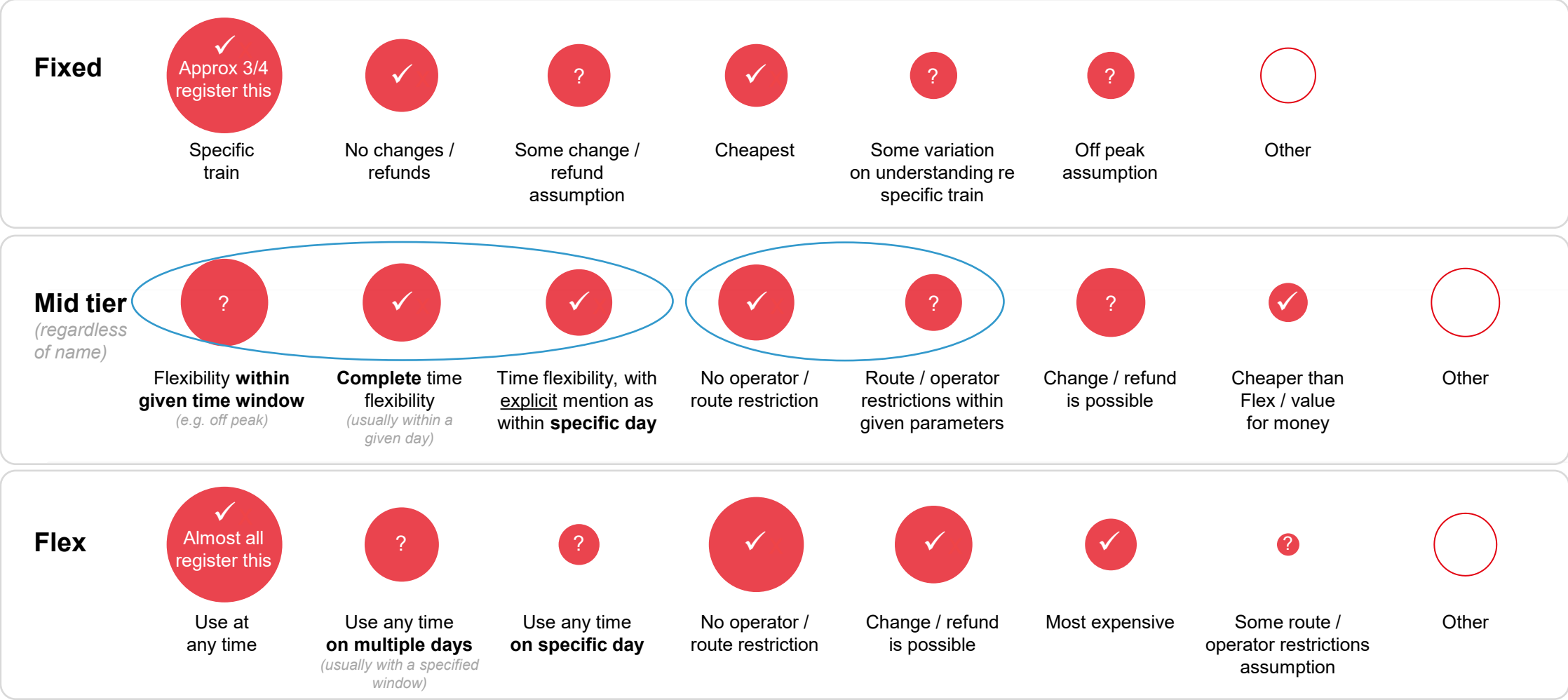
- **Integration with other booking requirements & considerations**

A current bugbear for some of the community is that tickets must be booked separately from Passenger Assistance, requiring lots of back and forth, lining up both options via different booking platforms, before committing to a purchase. This feels like an important extension that will need to be considered as part of the intention that all tickets options will be the same, regardless of retailer / booking platform.

**Passengers'
understanding of
the ticket options
in more detail**

Based on names only, key features of **Fixed** and **Flex** tickets are understood, though some clarifications will be worthwhile; **the mid tier gets a more varied interpretation**

Key themes in the community's expectations for each of the ticket tiers | Bubble sizes indicate relative frequency with which each theme is mentioned in this qualitative feedback
Expectations are based on a simple presentation of the three ticket options, for a realistic journey, and were given before participants were shown more detail about the conditions attached to each ticket type*



*See Appendix for more on how the ticket types and names were presented to participants

More detail on consumer interpretation of the **Fixed** ticket

Expectations are based on a simple presentation of the three ticket options, for a realistic journey, and were given before participants were shown more detail about the conditions attached to each ticket type*

✓ Most in the community overtly register that the Fixed ticket is for use on a specific train only

That there is no change to which train you get on, has to be the exact one you book and must stick to this. Would be more expensive to get on a different train even 10 mins later.

Aria

A fixed time of travel using only one train company. Missing the timed train, I expect I would have to pay for another ticket.

David

✓ Lowest price is also well understood

I'd expect this to be the cheapest option but only valid for one specific train and time, with no changes or refunds.

Layla

There are occasional misinterpretations

- ? Sometimes in a way that more flexibility is assumed, than is available in reality
- ? And sometimes in a way that passengers might be missing some flexibility that is possible. In particular, some assume this ticket will only be available at quieter or off-peak times

A limited number of trains on which the ticket can be used, probably excluding peak times ...If different companies run on the route, I would expect to be able to use them within the time constraints of the ticket.

Elijah

Restricted choice of travel times. Set train only. Cheapest option.

Ellen

A specific train company I can use such as Thameslink or Avanti and a specific time range such as 10-3 or 7-12pm.

Yasmin



These are a minority, and likely to be resolved with clear description and information at point of booking

But several make assumptions about the ability to refund or change the ticket, possibly with a fee

- ✗ This can generate disappointment & frustration when people realise that no refund is available
- ✗ Note that many people link the concepts of changeability and refundability to disruption. As such, (unintentionally) implying an outright refusal for refunds can also impact on anxiety around disruption and ticket validity in this scenario

The cheapest option. Able to travel on one route only and one specific time. Refund available if not using ticket.

Jenni

If I missed the train, I'd probably have to buy another ticket....and I wouldn't expect to make changes or get a refund unless I cancelled well in advance, possibly with a small fee..

Wyatt

Non-refundable or only refundable with a fee. Changing to another train or time may not be allowed or would incur a high charge.

Maulika



It will be worthwhile to make the distinction between non-refundability at the passenger's choice, vs. non-refundability where passenger is not responsible for the need to do so. This also has implications for the way Flex and mid-tier tickets are described

More on the **mid-tier** ticket: Arguably, the very concept of partial flexibility is **more liable to misinterpretation** → **clear naming and description especially important here**

Expectations are based on a simple presentation of the three ticket options, for a realistic journey, and were given before participants were shown more detail about the conditions attached to each ticket type*

 **Some participants call this point out themselves**

Indeed the idea of “some flexibility” has caught people out before

Occasionally I've accidentally bought the wrong train if it's an open train return with only specific providers required, or a certain line which requires the train to go through a certain stop for it to be eligible. I've found the somewhat flexibility a bit confusing so just be very careful with it.

Matthew

*Good idea in principle but **what you mean by flexible isn't clear** - if you mean [the] train you're allowed on but it's a **specific route** fine, better would be any route/any train **around or after X time**. You could also mean **how long its valid for** e.g. in the case of open returns.*

Simeon



People tend to make assumptions about which element of this ticket's usage will have reduced flexibility. For example...

- **The times / days on which it can be used?**

[Valid on] all train operators but more flexible times 10-10 or something like that.

Yasmin

*I'd expect this to allow me to travel on a range of trains **outside of peak hours, using any reasonable route** and any train operator.*

Benjamin

- **The route / operator on which it can be used?**

*...like an Off-peak, it would have limits **such as doesn't work in rushhour** and maybe only works on the same day...? Possibly also ...say if there's a quick train and a slow local train **it would require you to get a slower one.***

Matthew

*This would give me the option of using **one train company, but the time of travel could be flexible.***

David



And, around a third wrongly assume refund / change is possible

(NB these interpretations were made before explicitly drawing attention to refundability / changeability features)

I'd expect this to give a bit of flexibility — maybe allowing you to change your train on the same day or get a partial refund, but with a small fee.

Layla

 **In all this context, some struggle to clearly see, or do not hold a consensus on, differences between the middle and top tier tickets**

Is the difference about a) the circumstances in which it is valid, or b) the refund ability?

...the Flex could also be classed as a “Day Flex” [couldn't it?] ... I don't understand why the Lite ticket is valid any time of the day as then there is not a large or significant enough difference between this and Flex ticket.

Isabella

...from what I can see the only difference is [on one] you might get it cheaper if you book in advance and [on the other] you can get a refund..

Yasmin

[Same] as above???

Sue

This has implications for naming → more (literal) distinction may be needed between the two names

 E.g. including a reference within the name for either one or both of the tickets, to define whether or not it is refundable, or how long it is valid (e.g. “day”), etc.

More detail on consumer interpretation of the **Flex** ticket

Expectations are based on a simple presentation of the three ticket options, for a realistic journey, and were given before participants were shown more detail about the conditions attached to each ticket type*

- ✓ **Most recognise that the Flex ticket can be used any time, on any route, between the specified start and end points**

Travel anytime, with just the class of travel restricted on standard fares. Most expensive.

Ellen

- ✓ **Around a third also overtly register the ability to refund or change**

...full freedom to travel whenever I want on the day, with no restrictions on train times or companies. It would allow me to change my plans easily, use different routes, and get a full refund if I decided not to travel. If my train was cancelled or delayed, I'd expect to simply get on the next available service without any issues. This would likely be the most expensive option, but it would offer complete peace of mind ...for people who value flexibility over price.

Arjun



There are some variations in assumptions around the duration of ticket validity

And where participants assume the ticket is valid for multiple days, their assumptions vary – a week, a month, forever...

*Flex I would think would be **for the full day**, across all times and services. **Full transfer to another day**. Most expensive option.*

Grace

*...complete flexibility **in terms of date and time of travel**. Refund or change options at no further cost. Be able to travel on any operator.*

Olivia

*Fully flexible as to times, routes, journey breaks, etc. **No expiry date**. Refund for non-use.*

Elijah

*...the most expensive but completely flexible, so you could **travel at any time that day** or easily cancel for a full refund.*

Layla

*Similar to an open return ticket, so ...allows for choice of day of travel ...For example: can be used **any day of the weekend or can be used Monday-Wednesday**.*

Michael

*I feel this ticket should be able to be used on any train service ...to the required destination on the corresponding route **up to a three day window**.*

Lucas



These varied assumptions likely resolvable with clear description and information at point of booking

(Where the community mentioned “other” expectations for each of the tickets, these were usually around perks or upgrade options)



Fixed

Lack of “perks”, e.g.

- No ability to reserve seats
- No (at seat) catering
- No lounge access

(But some others assume a guaranteed seat, given a specific train is booked, equivalent to current Advance tickets)



Mid tier

Some perks, but more limited than for full Flex



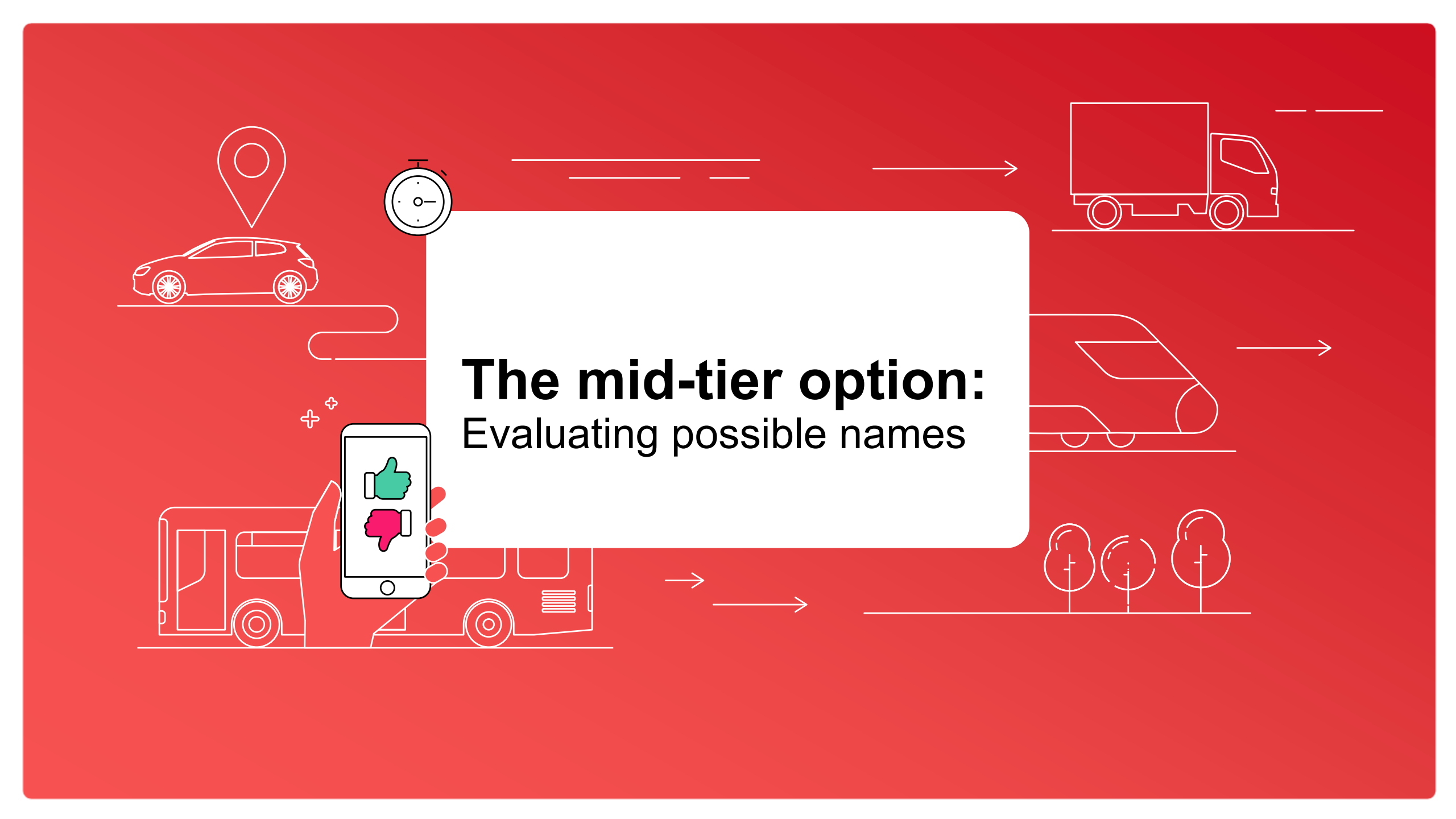
Flex

Additional “perks”, e.g.

- Lower cost to upgrade to 1st Class
- Seat reservation
- Advance booking / seat reservation, ahead of normal advance booking period
- Priority boarding
- Higher luggage allowance

If ability to change is taken advantage of, some mention that they expect to pay, or receive back, the price difference for the new journey

Ability to upgrade “Fixed > Mid > Flex at any time”



The mid-tier option: Evaluating possible names

Of the three proposed name options, the most preferred and meaningful is “Day Flex”

✓ Around half of the community prefer “Day Flex” over the other names

(Around a quarter prefer each of “Value” and “Lite”)

✓ Two thirds feel it fits well

(compared to around half for each of the others)

So while not a strongly popular name, Day Flex is likely to work for a larger majority of rail users, than the other two

Literal & describes its usage

...it's the most self-explanatory... “Day” immediately tells people the main feature is that it can be used flexibly within the same day while “Flex” makes it clear that there's some freedom to choose different trains or times. It feels simple, natural, and easy to understand without needing extra explanation... “Day Flex” best communicates what passengers can do with the ticket travel flexibly on the same day, at a fair price.

Arjun

Specifically mentioning 'day' would indicate that it is for that day only, ...The other two [names] do not have the same clarity.

Luke

It instantly tells passengers that the ticket offers flexibility for travel on the same day, without needing to read extra details.

Maulika

Unambiguous, without subjective dislikes & connotations to cloud interpretation

(unlike “Value” / “Lite”)

Value seems like low budget, might as well call it 'no frills'... **Using the term 'lite' comes across as a grab at a trend** ...its not as cool as they would want it to be.

Liam

Whether it is 'Value' would depend on the saving over the Flex and **I do not like the use of 'Lite' as description.**

Elijah

Value Flex is accurate as it technically is a cheaper version of the Flex but **when people are going to be paying a premium [for rail, anyway], it's not the nicest to have the word “value”.**

Omar

I'm not sure 'Lite' is even a proper word, sounds as though I wouldn't be getting something as thorough as the other names..

Zoe

Positive

(“Lite” / “Value” sound like compromise options)

...Day Flex sounds like its own unique option, not some thing that has been discounted. Value and Lite have connotations of sub-par products, ...limiting features.

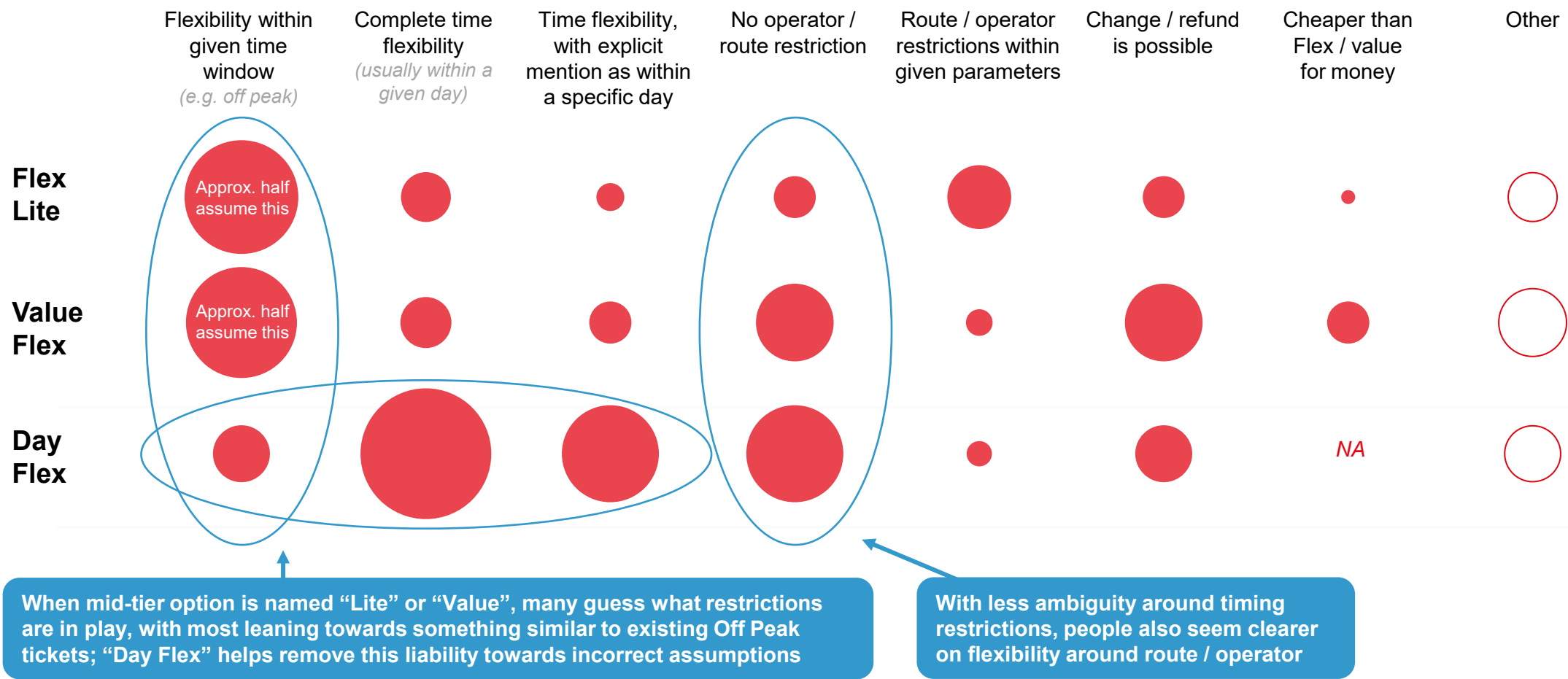
Wyatt

I feel Day Flex has a gravitas to it as opposed to the Flex Lite and Value Flex which conjure up images of [the] Tesco Value range and such; they sound cheap and basic.

Lucas

When mid-tier option is named “Day Flex”, there also appears to be greater clarity on what constitutes its flexibility

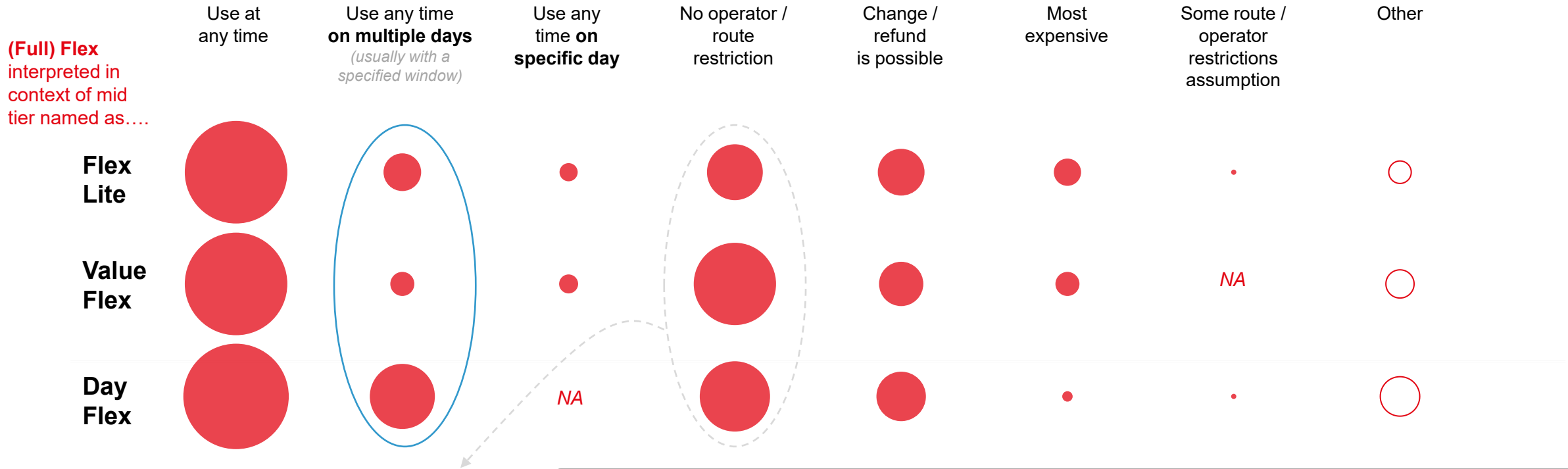
Key themes in the community’s expectations for the **mid-tier ticket** | Bubble sizes indicate relative frequency with which each theme is mentioned in this qualitative feedback



Expectations are based on a simple presentation of the three options, and were given before participants were shown more detail about the conditions attached to each ticket type. See Appendix for more detail.

...when the mid-tier ticket is named “Day Flex”, this also strengthens the idea that the (full) Flex, by contrast, is valid across multiple days

Key themes in the community’s expectations for the **Flex ticket** | Bubble sizes indicate relative frequency with which each theme is mentioned in this qualitative feedback



Also note that naming the mid-tier ticket “Value Flex” can help people to more explicitly register that the full Flex is valid regardless of operator. (However, many may be understanding this implicitly from the fact that the full Flex allows full time flexibility, so this is likely to be a less important finding here, than the impact of “Day Flex” on people’s understanding of the full Flex’s timing flexibility)

Expectations are based on a simple presentation of the three options, and were given before participants were shown more detail about the conditions attached to each ticket type. See Appendix for more detail.

A number of implications arise here:

- If multi-day validity for the (full) Flex is intended, **rail users will need clarity on the time window** (e.g. week / month)
- Clearly, some of the interpretation for each of the tickets is derived from the context of how the other two tickets are named and described. **The full set of names needs to be considered as a whole**, in addition to discussion around individual names.
- Note that where the difference between (full) Flex and mid-tier ticket is made to appear explicitly (in the name) about time validity, this can also dilute the extent to which people also register the distinction around **refundability**. **This will also therefore need unequivocal clarity in any description, if names reply on the simple terms “Day Flex” and “Flex”**

“Value Flex” is liked by some, but is less popular overall and brings in a risk of being seen to over-promise and under-deliver on price expectations

Around a quarter of the community prefer this over the other names

- ✓ Easy to understand, as clearly a lower price version of the Flex
- ✓ Anything that implies value, saving, or low cost is welcomed

I would expect the mid range to be good value and at the same time flexible so it makes sense

John

Everyone likes the word value - you feel like you're ahead of the game and getting a bargain!

Layla

It sounds the most appealing especially for people looking to save money

Emily



But of the three, it is most likely to be criticised for poor fit; the key issues being...

The potential to mislead on cost – already a sensitive issue

“Value Flex” – it is middle tier not cheapest.

Aurora

“Value Flex” ...implies it's a cheaper type ticket, but if it is more expensive than the fixed and also increases with demand then it's not a “value” ticket.

Grace

The fixed ticket is the best value, but it's not labelled as such. To have the mid range labelled Value makes it sound as it's the better value, which it isn't.

Chloe

But this strong pull could also lead to disappointment if the price is perceived to be high (or higher than travelling by car for example), in practice

Drawing attention to limitation and compromise, feels “second class”

...Similarly airlines have 1st Class [and] Business Class. They haven't called Business Class, “1st Class Value”. They have given it a premium respectable name..

Omar

Some other points arising in the direct evaluation of the names

There is minor disagreement on the term “Flex”

I like “Flex” because it feels modern and gives the impression that it’s adaptable to different needs. It’s easy to say and has a nice vibe.

Maulika

The name Day Flex is okay but sounds very childish; I like the formality of Flexible Day or Flexible Change.

Lucas

I would prefer to use the word ‘Flexible’ in the descriptions.

Zoe



Those who overtly dislike this term are a relative minority

Given that much of the tickets’ meaning comes from the contextual presentation of all three tiers together, **consider alterations to the other tiers to further clarify the middle, especially to differentiate it from Flex**

These might include, for example:



Not using the term “Flex” in two of the ticket names, to mark them as different

I personally would remove the word “Flex” from [the middle] option altogether as it initially sounds like it will be more flexible than it is.

Olivia

I don’t like the Flex in the title, as it risks confusion as the other ticket is labelled Flex. I’d rather three unique names, with the Fixed more reflective of being the value [option]... I like the name Flex, but I don’t think it should be used on two tickets, even if one is identified further

Chloe



An adjective for the Flex as well as / instead of the Value/Lite/Day Flex, for greater distinction between the two, especially either a...

- Premium indicator for Flex
- Or more literal description for the “full” Flex

Flex you could do flex silver and flex gold. That would be just as easy to tell which is the more premium option. Or just flex and flex gold.

Grace

I like ‘flex’ but I think it should be clear as a mid tier option, so that it is clearly differentiated between the lower and higher tier options.

Luke

The fixed option should be called Value as it’s cheapest. Super Flex might be a better name for the most expensive as it’s super flexible, or Flex Ultimate. Can’t think of a better name for the middle option.

Tom

Instead of “Flex Lite” or “Value Flex,” something like “Same-Day Flex”... could make it obvious that you can change trains on the same day ...Instead of just “Flex,” something like “Anytime Flex” or “Fully Flexible” could make it clear[er]...

Maulika

[I need] more clarification on how [mid tier] is different to a Flex... [I think] the only difference is that it’s non-refundable, [so] I would call [the Flex] ...Refundable Flex.

Dan

Summary



Summary: overview

The current range and variability of tickets for rail travel, and their benefits, restrictions and other features, are widely recognised by both the public and the rail industry to be complicated.

As part of wider reform, the Fares, Ticketing & Retail Programme is seeking to replace the current ticket systems with a unified model that will be simpler and consistent across the whole network, regardless of operator or retailer. A core part of the proposal is a three-tier fares model for medium and longer distance train journeys, which will give passengers the option of a flexible, semi-flexible, or completely fixed ticket.

The rail customer community first evaluated this idea in June 2025. The refreshed community (with a fresh set of 40 people who have not been exposed to the plans before) has now been asked in October 2025 to look at some of the further detail, including evaluating some possible names for the mid-tier ticket option.

Before considering the names in detail, this community was introduced to the concept and asked for their overall reactions.

Like the previous panel, **they were broadly positive about the principle of streamlining the number of options, and about giving passengers some choice around price and flexibility, to suit different people's needs and potential budgets.**

Both groups also raised some concerns and queries, which will be areas that the Programme will need to address, mitigate or clarify. In particular:

- Rail users are concerned about the absolute price of journeys; **they really want to see affordability improved (whether or not a new fare model is introduced)**
- **They want fairness and consistency around how tickets can be used when there are delays or cancellations**, or when passengers make innocent mistakes about which train they board. **They want to see these principles clearly and robustly included in the features and rules for all ticket types.**

Summary: understanding the three ticket options

On the whole, the community's understanding and expectations of the Flex and Fixed tickets are correct and fairly clear.

There are some points which will need to be made clearer at the point of booking, but the names themselves – when presented in context of the three-tier structure – do a reasonably good job at indicating what the ticket enables.

(While operators and retailers will naturally be expected to make the full information about tickets available, we know that consumers rarely read “the small print”. The names themselves do therefore need to go a long way in communicating the key features, and summary information will also likely be necessary alongside ticket choices).

One particular point to be really clear on is the fact that the Fixed ticket is non-changeable and non-refundable – and to distinguish between this general principle, and how the rules might vary if the passenger and/or their booked service is affected by disruption.

The mid-tier option can attract a more varied interpretation.

People easily understand that it has some flexibility, but less than the (full) Flex.

However, unless they see a succinct, clear description of what constitutes this flexibility, they tend to guess and assume what the features may be.

This means **some people assume there is flexibility around the times of travel, others assume flexibility around the routes or operators**, and as with the Fixed ticket, **people don't consistently imagine that there will be rules around changes and refunds**.

Many people assume that the mid-tier product might be similar to the existing Off-Peak ticket, and so assume that it might only be valid at certain times of the day (with varied expectations about what times actually count as peak and off-peak).

All of these varied assumptions can also impact in turn on what people expect of the Flex ticket, in contrast.

Summary: naming the middle tier (and others)

The ticket name can go some way to reducing the guesswork.

This has been a relatively small, qualitative test of three names, and so a more robust check is likely to be needed – however, **this community has indicated that “Day Flex” is the strongest of the three options tested:**

- ✓ Implies that the ticket is valid throughout the day, rather than at a specific time only

By proxy, this also implies that the (full) Flex might be valid across multiple days – if this is the intention, more guidance on the valid time window for the Flex will be necessary

- ✓ Leaves less room for guessing around whether different routes and operators might be in scope

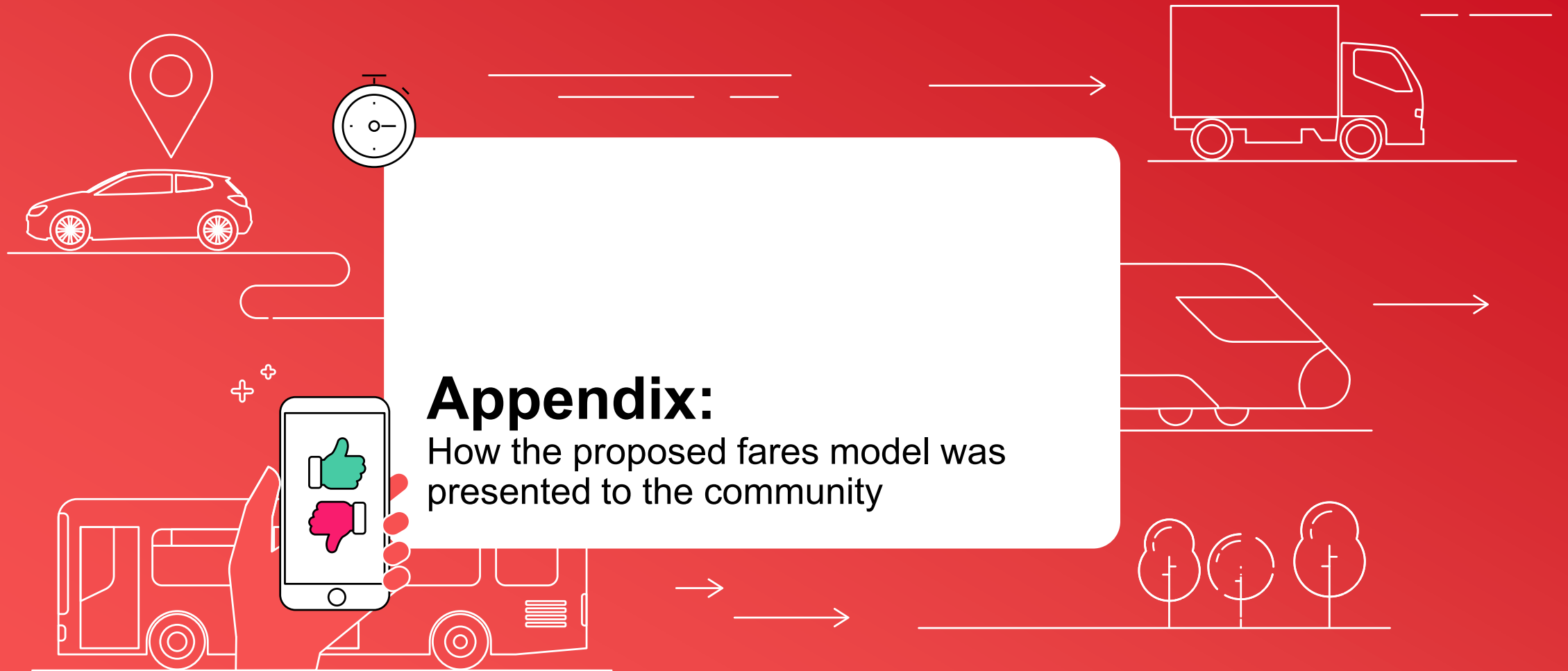
By contrast,:

- “Value Flex” can risk misleading people to expect a cheap ticket – when it may still be a lot of money for some individuals, and it is not the cheapest (the cheapest is Fixed)
- “Value” and “Lite” both sound like compromise products to some people
- “Lite”, while appealing word to some, is an off-putting spelling / “not a real word” for others, and ultimately lacks clear meaning

A minority also take issue with “Flex” as not being a real noun. However, this feels less of a problem than it does for “Lite”, given it is clear to most people what flex means.

Because the name of the mid-tier ticket can influence interpretation of the other two (and vice versa), the community’s feedback also highlighted some other considerations for the Flex ticket in particular:

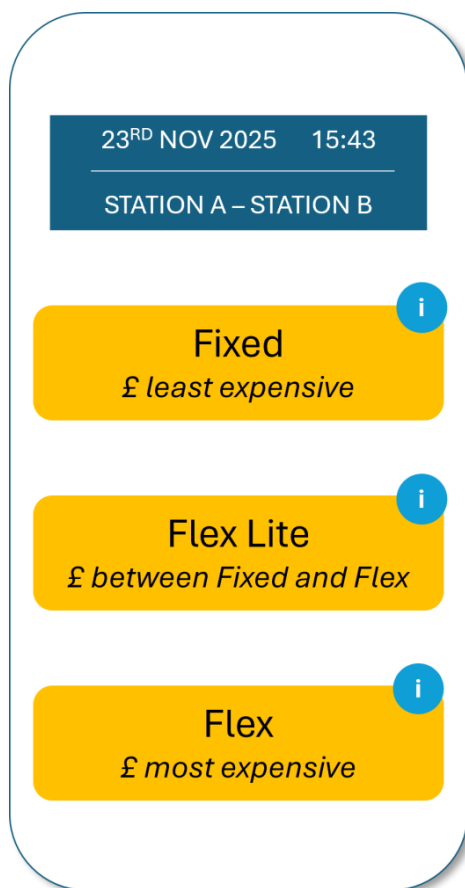
- Consider not using the word “Flex” in both the top and middle tier – to create greater distinction
- Consider a “premium” or superlative adjective for the (full) Flex – again to create distinction, but also to use a positive term here, rather than potentially a negative / compromising term on the mid-tier.



Appendix:

How the proposed fares model was presented to the community

When describing initial expectations for the ticket options within the three-tier model, participants were shown a simple mock up of how the options might appear on a booking platform



Expectations were tested for each of the possible mid-tier names:

- Individual participants saw either this version of the mock-up, or a version where the mid-tier was named “Day Flex”, or a version where it was named “Value Flex”.
- Each variation was served to an equal number of participants
- Each individual participant gave their interpretations and expectations based on two different versions (in randomised order), providing feedback for each version from between 26-28 people

Specific prices deliberately not given, in order to reduce the extent to which the community’s feedback might be distracted by price issues

(although concerns and queries about price did still feature in their comments)

After outlining initial expectations, they were given further information, with a simple overview of the key ticket types

A new fares model

In the proposed ideas for a new fares model, there would be three main ticket types:

Characteristic	Description	 Fixed <i>(least expensive)</i>	 Flex Lite / Value / Day Flex	 Flex <i>(most expensive)</i>
Refundable	I can get a refund for the ticket if I do not travel	NO	NO	YES
Changeable	I can choose to take a different train on the same day (without having to “change” the ticket at a ticket office or online)	NO	YES	YES
Flexible	I can travel on any train, on any route, any time of day	NO	YES	YES

And some key additional notes

“ Some key things about this model are that:

- For return journeys **you would be able to buy different tickets for each direction if you want to**
- If you chose to use the same ticket type in each direction, it would be the same price in both directions, providing you bought them at about the same time. This means **a return journey would be the same price as two singles**
- **For any given journey, the “Flex” ticket would always be the same price**, regardless of how far in advance you bought it
- **“Flex Lite” and “Fixed” prices would increase in line with demand and closer to the day of travel.** This means these ticket types may be cheaper, the further in advance you bought them, and they may rise closer to the day and as the train service become busier
- Not all of the ticket types would be relevant to every journey, and so when buying a ticket **you would only be offered the ones which were possible for your journey**
- **The ticket options and prices for your journey would be the same wherever you bought your ticket.** So you would see the same options and the same prices if you looked for the same journey on different websites/apps, if you went to the station ticket office, and so on.

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About Transport Focus

Transport Focus is the independent consumer organisation representing the interests of:



Bus, coach and tram users across England outside London.



Rail passengers in Great Britain.



All users of England's motorways and major 'A' roads (the Strategic Road Network).

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Transport Focus is the operating name of the Passengers' Council

We work to make a difference for all transport users.