

Shaping Rail's Future: Customer Community 2024-25

Face to face workshop November 2025

Enabling ticket choices



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

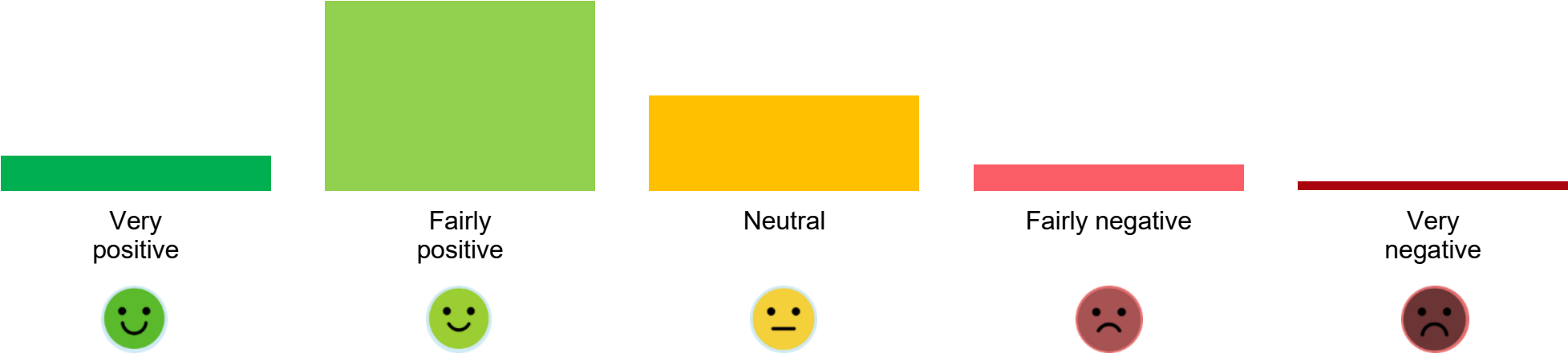


Using flexible, engaging research methods

- ✓ 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

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)

November 2025: the first of this cohort's in-person workshops



Saturday 8th
November 2025



Central
Birmingham



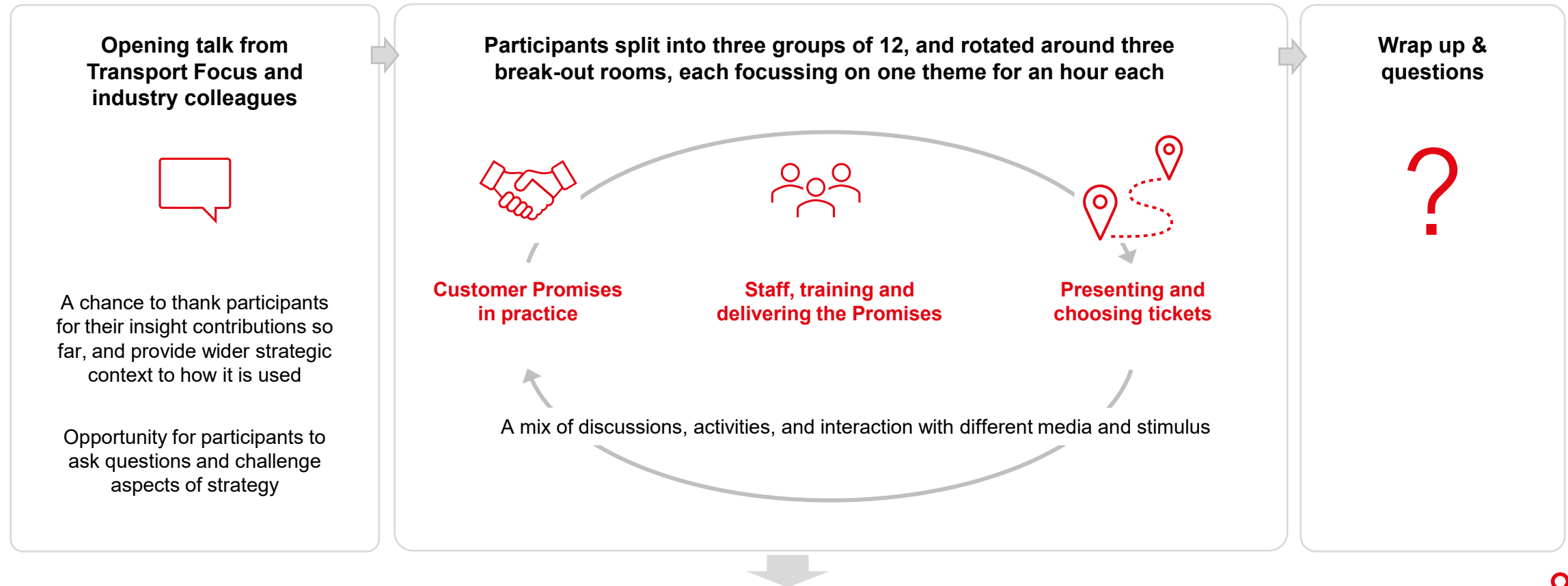
Detailed
discussion on:

- **Customer Promises**
(in practice)
- **Staff & delivering the Promises**
- **Presenting and choosing tickets**



The workshop: a chance to engage face to face with the community, and hear richer discussion around customer needs to complement their online feedback

Outline of the day:



This report summarises discussions around **presenting and choosing tickets**

About this report

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

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 has previously evaluated this proposed fares model itself.

Now, this workshop has explored the range of customer requirements and considerations that will inform how to make sure that rail users can find and purchase the best ticket for their needs, for any given journey. This will inform FTR and potential 3rd party retailers in developing tools such as booking websites that will meet customer needs effectively.

The community's input has focused on how journey and ticket product options are surfaced and prioritised in online booking tools, but the feedback is also informative for the way the industry facilitates customer choice in other purchase settings, including via staff at stations.

In November 2025, workshop participants worked in small groups, responding to and critiquing many examples of booking websites and apps, across both rail and other industries. They also considered the features and structures of these examples with the proposed new rail fares model in mind, and evaluated some mocked up examples of how this could be presented specifically.

This report is structured as:

1. Some context:

- Rail users' views on the ticket landscape and the new model
- How they plan and book journeys currently, and the kinds of information they need to facilitate this

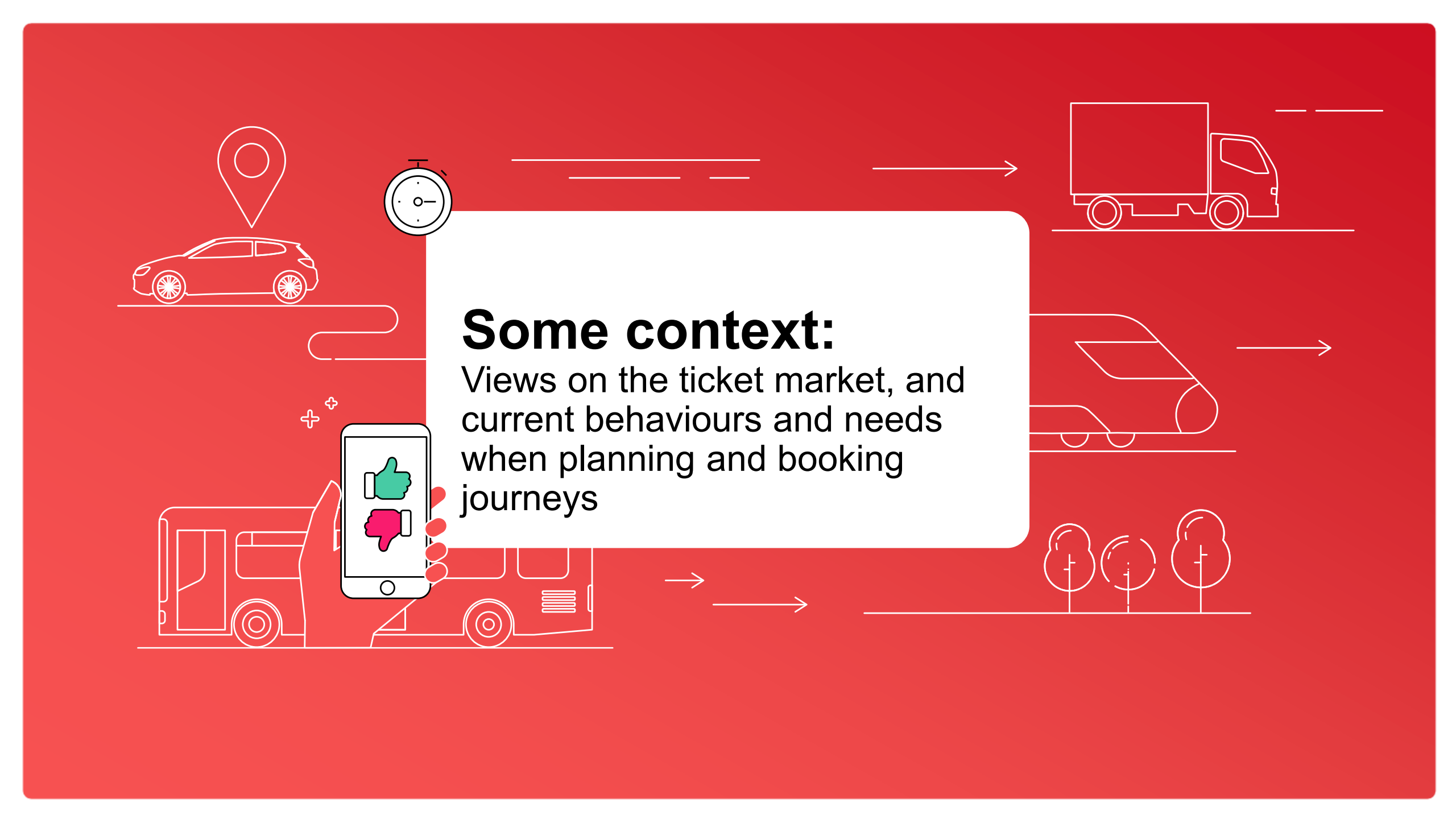
2. Exploring retail approaches & principles that will enable customers to buy the best ticket.

This identifies some factors which inform and influence customers' purchase journey, and organises them into:

- Subjective preferences for the way journey options are surfaced
- Areas of consensus
- Other factors to consider

3. Some broader considerations for the new fares model and how it is presented to and made user friendly for customers

4. Summary



Some context:

Views on the ticket market, and current behaviours and needs when planning and booking journeys

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

(Prior to the workshop, in October 2025) 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 its 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

In June and October 2025, community participants were introduced to proposals for a new fares model, with three product tiers

(The focus was on tickets for longer distance journeys at this point)



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



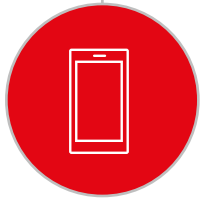
Some concerns and watch-outs were highlighted however, including

- The middle-tier offering is inevitably open to the most variable interpretation, and care is needed to mitigate this
- How tickets would work when there is disruption (especially the implications for fixed tickets)
- The implications of removing the “Off-peak” idea – there were shown to be both potential winners and losers from this
- Some small misunderstandings about dynamic pricing
- Broader negative perceptions of the affordability of rail, and whether the new model would alleviate this

Overview of how rail users currently go about researching and buying train tickets

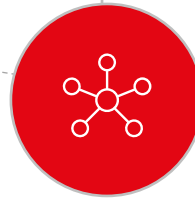
Some default to one retailer (typically the Trainline or their operator), and find this straightforward

Anecdotally, these customers tend to use an app, and feel relatively confident in the options likely to be available to them, and how to see and choose from those different options



Others use multiple apps for different, related purposes

E.g. Google Maps to work out their full end to end journey, plus one or multiple rail apps / sites, plus a separate app or service for Passenger Assistance if relevant



Many use several different apps / sites, looking for different prices.

In some cases this is simply how individuals like to operate – some people like to check prices in different places for their own sense of due diligence.

However it is often driven by distrust in the railway at present, where people can perceive the ticket market to be confusing, presented inconsistently, and sometimes that it is set up to cause them not to be able to find the best deal.

Changing the fare model and ensuring that tickets are always sold at the same price regardless of retailer (and being seen to do so) should help, but it may take time to turn this trust around.

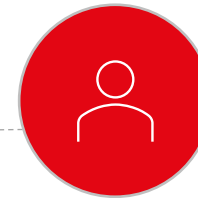
In the meantime, some rail users may still want to check prices across other sites – or at least know that they can do so. **While GBR may ultimately replace individual TOC retail offerings, there may also be a customer benefit if multiple other 3rd party retailers continue to be present, to cater for different booking process preferences, and also to help demonstrate that ticket prices are consistent in practice, to support a trust shift.**

Some want to speak to a person at a station (or, less commonly, by phone)

This is sometimes about trust in the information that is provided online, or about the complexity of all the information online and needing someone to help.

It can also be about accessibility and inclusiveness – enabling people who find it more difficult to interact online (or to pay electronically), for whatever reason, to be able to travel by train.

The ultimate objective for changing the fares model is to reduce complexity and facilitate trust; this might reduce some of the reasons that people have for buying in person, but there will still be a need for some people to be able to discuss ticket options with a person and buy face to face.



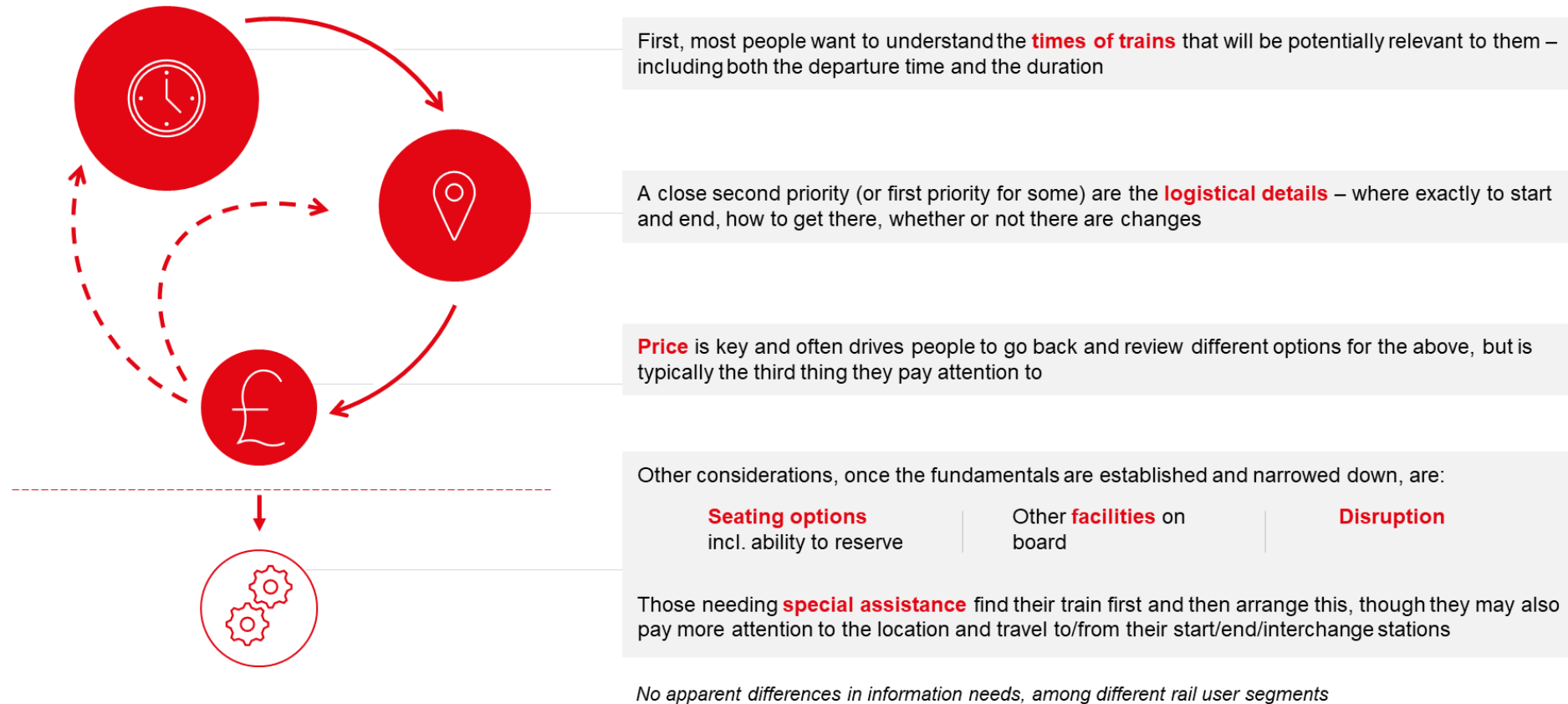
A minority use TVMs

TVM usage was rarely discussed by this community, other than noted as for collection of pre-booked tickets.

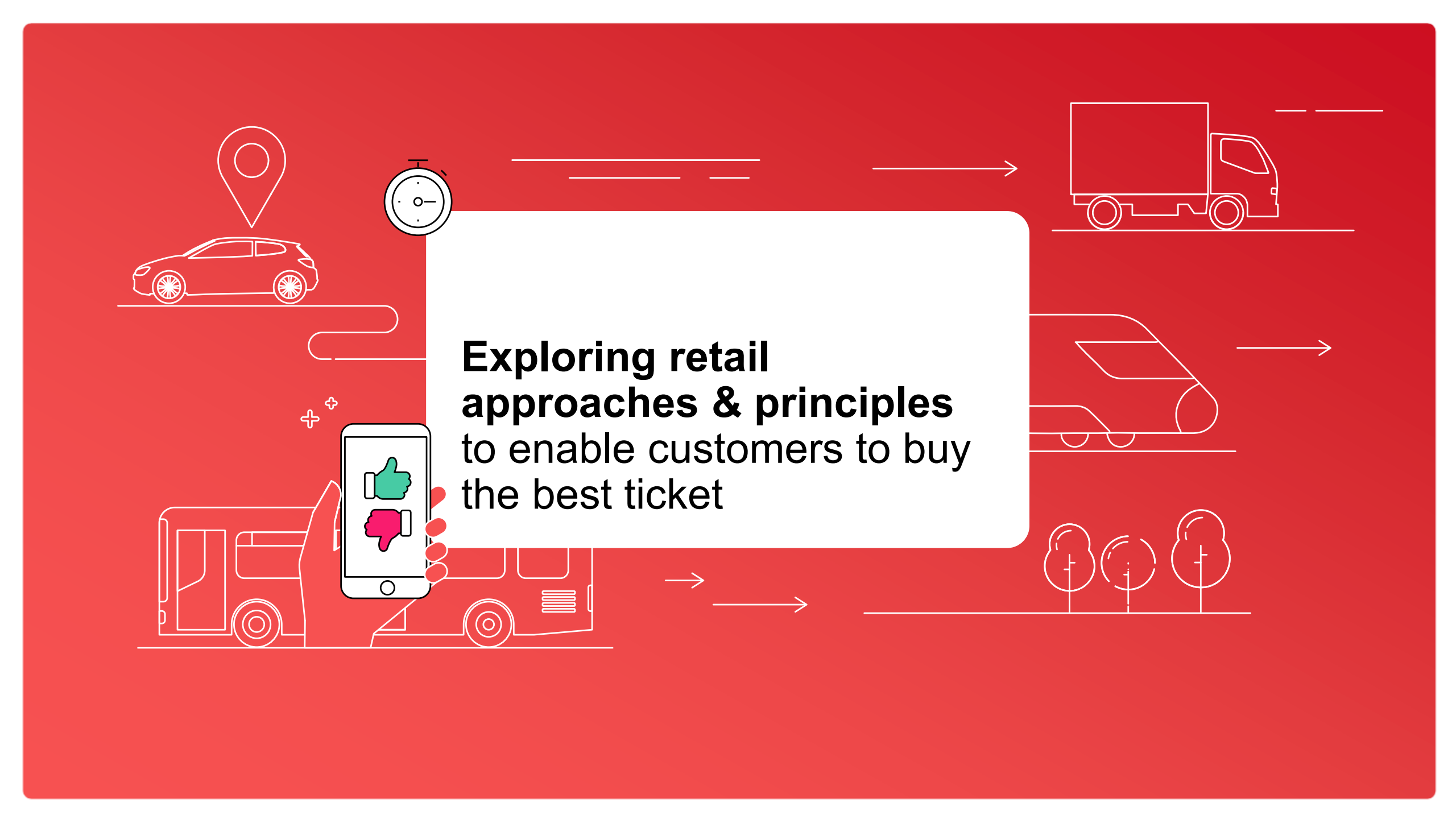
This may be because workshop discussions were focused on regional and longer distance journeys, and (anecdotally among this community) TVMs are seen as more relevant for shorter, local, and lower stakes journeys (with fewer options & price variations)

Summary of customers' information needs when considering journey options

The factors people think about when booking a journey and choosing a ticket (customer community, January 2023):



The remainder of this report looks at how these factors can be best accommodated in retail environments, in order to support customers in finding the ticket that will suit best



**Exploring retail
approaches & principles**
to enable customers to buy
the best ticket

Discussions about retail experiences brought to light a range of factors that can be important to the way rail customers consider ticket choice options, and which therefore shape the way these options are presented. These can be organised as:



Factors which appear to be **purely subjective and based in personal preference**, with pros and cons to the various alternatives, and therefore no definitive consensus on which should be used by retailers in the way they surface ticket options



Factors which garnered some degree of **consensus**, or at least a leaning towards a **more commonly held preferences**

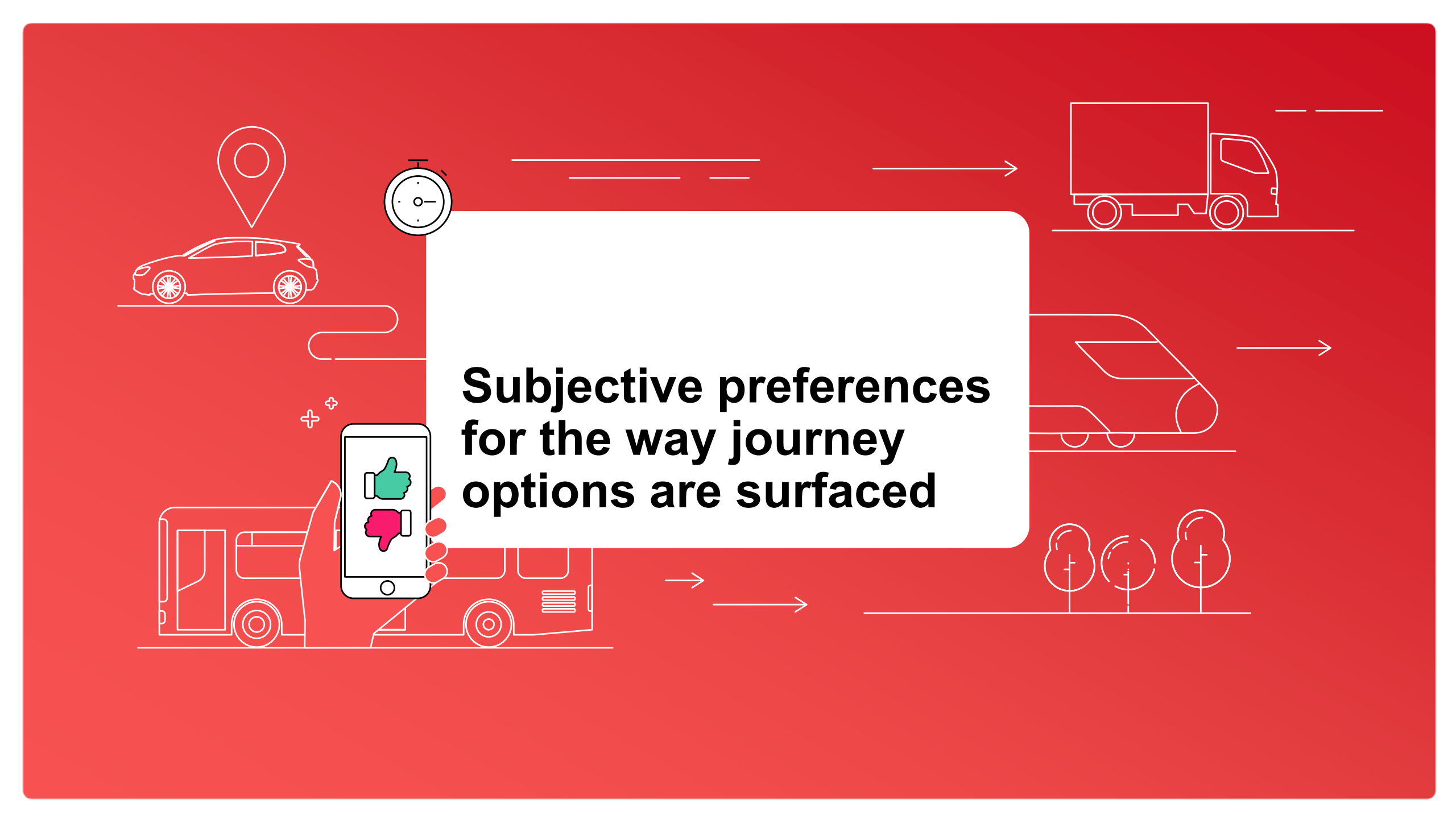


Other factors, which may be relevant to specific smaller cohorts (such as those with accessibility needs), or which have a lower overall impact but may help further inform the way retailers work with ticket product options. This includes some watch-outs and approaches to avoid.

The next sections of this report give a summary of each of these areas, followed by detail and illustrations* for each. These illustrations are based on workshop discussions, around a mixture of existing rail industry websites and apps, and mocked up examples of how ticket choices within the proposed three-tier fare model could be presented. Some retail platforms in other industries were also critiqued to support this feedback further.

The focus here is naturally on online booking environments, but some of the principles are relevant to the way that ticket choices are presented to customers who book at a station, or over the phone, for example.

**The examples used in this report have been selected to illustrate key feedback points, and are not exhaustive of all the examples of website and app interfaces that were evaluated.*



**Subjective preferences
for the way journey
options are surfaced**



Subjectivity in customers' preferences for choosing tickets

Key factors that can shape the ways in which ticket choices might be presented, where there are pros & cons to different options and preference is personal

These preferences were identified as having little pattern according to demographic or other definable cohorts, via a qualitative exploration. It may be possible to conduct further, large scale market research or to AB test in situ, to understand more conclusively where patterns exist, but qualitative insight to date indicates they are very much subjective.

	Approach A	OR	Approach B	
Presenting a big picture vs narrower set of choices	Presenting minimal number of options (which are to some extent therefore curated) in a deliberately uncluttered way		Presenting all the possible options to enable maximum choice	
	Large screen, desktop view		App / smartphone view	
	Purchaser sets filters and parameters to narrow down the choices from the outset		Full matrix of options, combining dates / times, ticket types & prices	OR decision tree / "Build a bear" process, taking purchaser step by step
Where a step-by-step / decision tree approach is used...	Prioritising and beginning the purchase journey with time-price options followed by ticket type options		Prioritising and beginning the purchase journey with flexibility options followed by time-price options ...and whether your flexibility is for time, route, refundability, etc.	
	...and begins with time-price options: Surfacing the lowest ("Fixed") price for each timetabled service, with subsequent ticket type options therefore presented as the level of premium for more flexibility		Showing the highest possible (Full Flex) price for each timetabled service, with subsequent ticket type options therefore psychologically appearing as a "discount" on the top possible price	
Other factors	Making recommendation on a given criteria (e.g. price)		Not making a recommendation	
	Presenting options for a specified date only		Presenting options on alternative dates as well	
	Presenting options for single tickets only (this is likely to be the default in the current new fares model plan)		Presenting options for a return ticket vs 2 x singles	
	Presenting options for accessible routes only (involving some way of defining "accessible" for the individual)		Presenting all options	
	Limiting the info. presented about each journey option to the timings, TOCs, number of legs, prices		Also including information about on board facilities, and/ or station facilities for any connecting stations	
	+ subjective preferences for features like direct / fastest services only, cheapest, specific TOC, presence of catering, etc			

Given these often conflicting preferences, **it is unlikely that any given booking / retail platform will be able to meet all needs.**

Rather, different retailers will need to either:

- Aim to meet a particular need, accepting they will not meet other preferences and those customers will go elsewhere
- Provide different platforms for different audiences, or allow individuals to tailor their interface to their own preferences
- Innovate in other ways

All of this also appears to **validate the existence of a market with multiple retailers** to meet different passenger requirements, and to create the competitive environment for innovation.



Illustrating subjectivity in customers' preferences for choosing tickets: Presenting a big picture vs a narrower set of choices

Minimising the number of visible options typically goes hand in hand with a decision tree or filtered approach

And while the preference for step by step decision-making vs having oversight of all options often correlates with preferences for web vs app views...

Outbound Journey	Return Journey
Standard	Standard
Fixed	Fixed
Flexible	Flexible
Plus	Plus
Super	Super
First Class	First Class

LNER web example

Return	Choose tickets
Standard	Standard
Flexible	Flexible
Plus	Plus
Super	Super
First Class	First Class

LNER app example

Some participants loved being able to see all their time and ticket type (and in this case class) options

Others found this far too overwhelming and so preferred the decision tree approach

Some participants still found the LNER-web style too overwhelming, preferring a decision-tree approach, even on a web view like this

...and some preferred to break the steps up further again by splitting outward and return journeys across two steps / screens like NRE

Outbound Journey	Return Journey
Standard	Standard
Flexible	Flexible
Plus	Plus
Super	Super
First Class	First Class

Trainline web example

Please select a journey	Please select a return journey
Standard	Standard
Flexible	Flexible
Plus	Plus
Super	Super
First Class	First Class

NRE web example (screen 1)

NRE web example (screen 2)

...and there were mixed views around the app views as well – some loved the uncluttered style of Avanti's app, but others found the information too limited and felt unable to make a proper choice as a result.

Select Outward
Standard
Flexible
Plus
Super
First Class

Avanti app example

...some further thoughts and feedback around whether retailers might present customers with a big overview of options vs a narrower set of choices



This qualitative exploration has **not shown up any clear patterns in who prefers to see a full range of options and who prefers a decision tree approach**, in its own right (and this fits with other previous research and feedback).



However, **preference for looking at a full range of options, or limiting them**, e.g. with a decision tree approach, or filters, often (but not always) **aligns with preferences for web vs app views**.

Anecdotally there were some slight patterns in the preferences for using web- or app-based booking tools, among different demographics. This suggests that **some demographic cohorts might be more drawn to the typical presentation styles used in apps rather than browser views, and vice versa**.

For example...

- Those using web views and wanting to look at all the information in one place were often older and with access to desktop devices
- Those using app views and wanting bitesize, step by step information were often younger, keener to make a quicker decision
- Part of this seemed to be due to a link between age and access to / familiarity with desktop devices – older people were more likely to own and regularly use a desktop computer / laptop, whereas younger people used a desktop less often and/or did not necessarily have their own desktop device whereas all in this community owned and used a smartphone. This pattern is partly due to lifestyle and habit and norms for people in different lifestages, but could also be partly driven by wealth / disposable income, with a desktop device less of a priority to spend money on for the very youngest adults in this community.

Ultimately however, these demographic / lifestyle patterns were not especially strong, and demographics / lifestyle indicators are therefore not a strong predictor of what people are most likely to want from ticket retail in this respect.

A stronger pattern existed around how familiar / confident people felt in the options available to them.



That is, people were usually happier to set filters on a journey query, or to go through a decision tree process, when they have some sense of what the “filtered out” options would have been, and can confidently discount them. When people were less familiar with a journey – or when the stakes were higher – typically for longer distance, multi-leg or more expensive journeys, or when the journey felt like more of an occasion – they were more inclined to use a desktop, website view in order to see a bigger picture of a larger range of options to them.

This can therefore vary even for individual people, when they are considering different journeys and in different circumstances.

While there are hints at demographic or lifestyle patterns behind these preferences, it really is truly down to individual preference; journey context and familiarity can also play a role



Illustrating subjectivity in customers' preferences for choosing tickets: Additional variations in preferences for the decision tree approach itself

Where purchasers are taken through a decision tree approach, the current most common journey begins with the timetabled services around a specified time, and the lowest prices for each.



Mock up example for new fares model (screen 1)

Mock up example for new fares model (screen 2)

...followed by a choice of tickets for the selected time



This felt logical to many, but several workshop participants suggested, without prompting, that they would **prefer to state their level of flexibility before settling on a time** (especially where they do have some flexibility and so selecting a time feels redundant)

This can be for a number of reasons including...

- People are unable to commit to making the journey at all and may need to know they can refund it if necessary
- People don't want to, or know that they cannot commit to a specific time of departure
- (...note that this is very common for the return leg of a journey, even if they were able to commit to a time for the outward leg)
- Where the journey involves an interchange, they struggle to trust that they will be able to commit to anything other than the first leg
- A minority feel strongly that the concept of "fixed" tickets for specific trains only is wrong, that they should be able to travel on any train. Being able to filter out the fixed ticket options from the outset could be a preferred approach for this group
- Conversely, some wheelchair users have stated that they will only ever travel using a fixed ticket since it is essential to have a reserved wheelchair space, and associated booked Passenger Assistance booked.

Some also suggested that they might **prefer to see the highest possible prices presented in the first screen**, followed by the options for reducing this via less flexible ticket types in the second step

...some further thoughts and feedback around structuring and ordering the flow of a decision tree approach – where and how do price options fit in?



In this qualitative exploration, **no clear patterns emerged for who might be more likely to prefer starting with time-price options** within a decision tree approach to ticket booking, **versus who might prefer to start with flexibility options**. The same is true for understanding patterns in people's preferences for seeing the prices at a high start point followed by possible trade-offs for a discount, versus seeing the lowest prices to begin with, followed by possible "upgrades".



Clearly some people will be more price driven than others. However discussions in this workshop (and elsewhere) **do not conclusively show that price is more or less of a significant factor among any particular age group** for example, nor among other easily defined demographic cohorts.



In this case, journey context is not a reliable predictor either.

- Those travelling for leisure reasons can be more relaxed about timings and therefore seek flexibility, but those travelling for work reasons can equally wish to allow for meetings or events to overrun or finish early, meaning flexibility can be useful here.
- Similarly, the concept that an employer might be paying for the ticket no longer feels like a reason that people may be more willing to pay more for flexibility – many report that their employer requires them to travel on the most economical ticket that is practical.



Despite the lack of any clear pattern to presentation preferences across demographic or other groups, workshop discussions did highlight that **the way price is presented may have a more subliminal impact on broader perceptions**. (This is also supported in other feedback).

Many rail ticket purchasers have a preferred ticket app/website, and claim this preference is based on the fact that they can get tickets cheaper here than elsewhere. This is not technically correct, but **their preferred retailer has created this perception**, either through always presenting the cheapest ticket options (first), otherwise promoting the cheapest options, or highlighting special offers, etc. Interestingly, the preferred retailer is often the Trainline, which can in fact be more expensive than other platforms due to charging a booking fee.

All of this creates a sense of stronger sense of trust in – and a reason to advocate for – whichever retailer is perceived to be “the cheapest”.

The possible options for how and in what order to surface price versus flexibility, or whether to lead with high or low prices, are even harder to predict and more subjective than other choice factors considered in this exercise. However...

This is an area where some participants envisaged having a **toggle option up front** to specify whether they want to start with choosing their flexibility or their timetable service, and whether they want to see lowest or highest available prices.

This could potentially be a confusing question to ask first time or infrequent users, so a further balance needs to be struck around allowing knowledgeable purchasers to tailor their experience vs overcomplicating things for others.

Coupled with the fact that price dominates the rail discourse generally (despite it sometimes being a lower priority in ticket choice for some), this suggests a **clear benefit to both customers and the rail industry, in leading on price** when taking people through a step-by-step booking journey.

Illustrating subjectivity in customers' preferences for choosing tickets: Further choices for GBR and other retailers to consider

Making recommendations

Trainline app & web example

Some find this **helpful as a shortcut** to identifying their likely best options – providing the recommendation criteria match their priorities (see previous page).

Others prefer to scrutinise options for themselves and make their own decision.

Occasionally this is **influenced by a distrust of the railway** (where an individual might suspect that the retail platform is steering them towards its own favoured option rather than what is best for the customer). However it is **more often about personal preference** in how choices are made.

Enabling choice from alternative dates

Lumo web example

Helpful and can increase sense of transparency (by demonstrating that other options are available) for some.

Simply felt to **add clutter on the page** for others

How to present return ticket options

Avanti West Coast web example

Understood and therefore logical for some.

But many find this **really confusing** (especially but not limited to those who are **less familiar** with rail travel).

The proposed new fares model may eliminate this as an option.

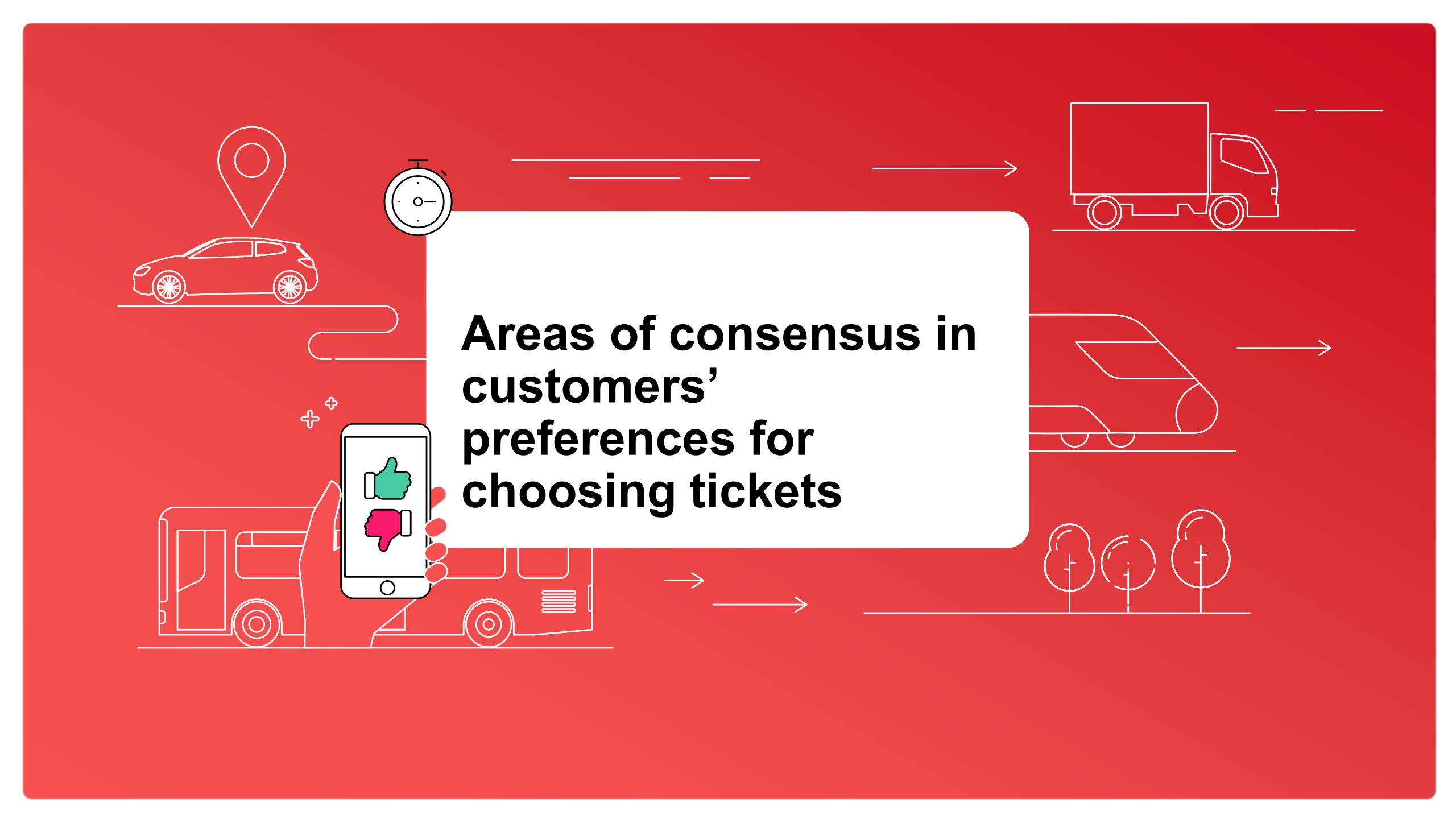
Presenting options for accessible travel

LNER web example

Layering-on of “additional” elements is generally popular, and feels logical to many.

However, **in the case of wanting accessible space, this is a fundamental factor** in choosing which train service to travel with. Those needing this want to check if wheelchair space (and toilet) is provided (and not booked) **before choosing their time and flexibility**. For some people, this needs to be a filter or decision-tree step, rather than an add-on.

Similarly, for some it is essential to include information about other on board and connecting station facilities, especially for understanding which services and routes are accessible or not.



Areas of consensus in customers' preferences for choosing tickets



Areas of consensus in customers' preferences for choosing tickets

Key factors that can shape the ways in which ticket choices might be presented, where there is a degree of consensus among rail users

General navigation and overview	Clear, side by side comparisons of journey / ticket options
	Booking summary information on each screen
	Using colour and other visual devices to help navigate and digest information on a page
Presenting the total price	Prominence given to the total / final price (including any return journeys, and any "extras")
	Absolute prices generally preferred, rather than "+£xxx"
Reassurances & feeling in control	Purchase journey progress and ongoing confirmation of current "basket"
	Ability to review and confirm essential features before committing
	Feeling informed about what prices could rise or drop to
Setting <u>your</u> journey parameters	Ability to set filters where there are preferences that apply to some people and not others
	Ability to specify a return journey (and knowing from outset that this will be an option)
Icons, flags & shortcut indicators	Clear icon / information on number of changes required during a journey
	Showing the operator running each journey option
	Small flags / icons highlighting fastest / cheapest journey option
	Avoidance of apparent pressure selling tactics
Summarising crucial product features	Flags / icons / brief text outlining key ticket features
	Side bar / small alert that other options are available
	Information buttons / hover overs / expansion buttons

The key objectives of this workshop were to

- Explore the **principles involved in helping rail passengers to choose the most suitable train service and ticket product** for their needs
- ...in such a way that they feel **confident** in this decision, and **trusting** of the information and the ticket choice outcome.

...rather than to extensively test the user experience of websites from a technical or useability perspective.

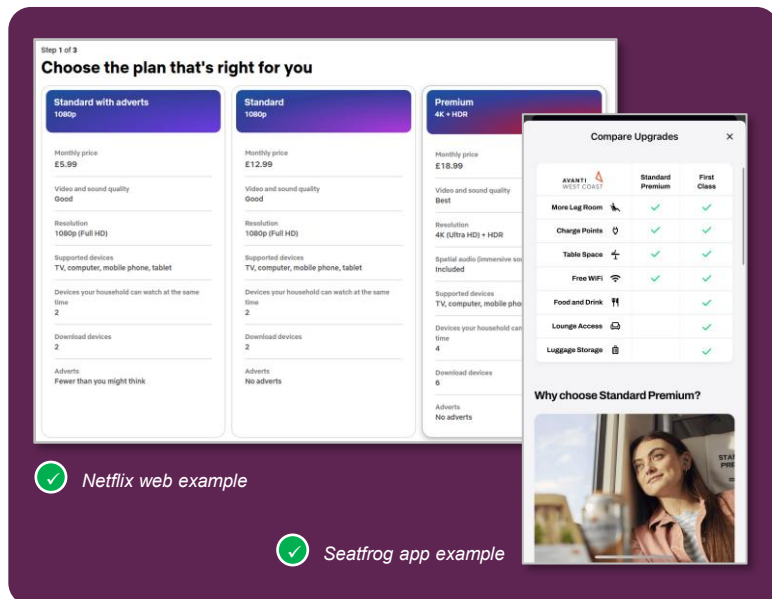
Inevitably however, some of the community's feedback did stray into some parts of the user experience as well. Where the feedback was consistent, and where it is relevant to helping them understand and choose ticket products, it has been included in this summary and the illustrative examples on the following pages.

This provides insight into what principles are important to rail users when choosing tickets, and should be used in conjunction with more robust UX testing and web/app behaviour analysis to understand what is used currently and how.



Illustrating consensus in customers' preferences for choosing tickets: General navigation & providing customer an overview of the information

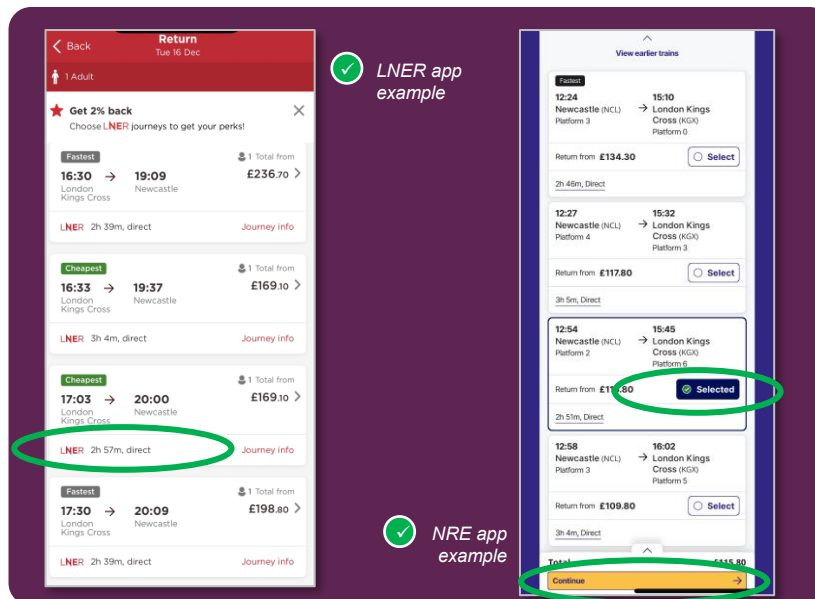
Clear side by side comparisons



This is a **really important general principle**, appreciated across various industry website / app examples that were critiqued by participants – perhaps obvious but should not be underestimated.

Most obviously used in enabling customers to understand the differences between different classes or ticket products, but also **confirms that the table format typically used in presenting different timetabled service options** (with their various features such as journey length, no. changes, etc.) **works well for purchasers**.

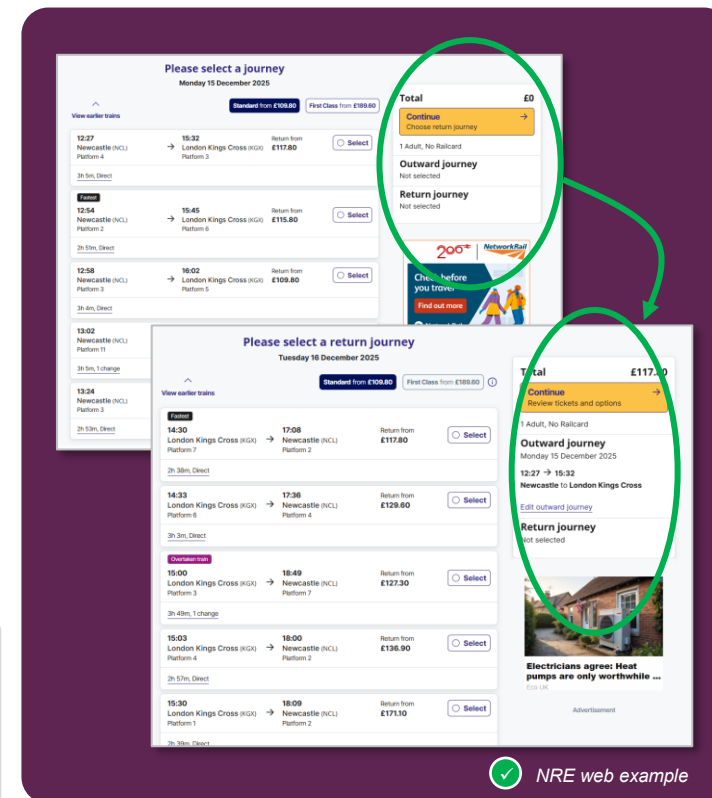
Using colour and other visual devices to help navigate and digest information on a page



Using colour and shape on the screen can be a **fine balance** between aiding navigation and helping the purchaser shortcut to key information, and **increasing clutter**. Some examples that participants felt were easy to navigate from this perspective included:

- Use of TOC logo rather than more text (e.g. LNER app above)
- **Visual separation** of timetabled services (e.g. LNER app) – though some commented that this could even be more defined for greater visual accessibility
- **Clear selection identifier** (e.g. NRE app)
- **Visually distinct** 'continue' & other navigation buttons (e.g. NRE)

Booking summary info on each screen



Frequently but not consistently used on rail booking websites and apps to summarise the booking journey so far, showing what's included, and crucially the **total price so far** (and in this case, a clear **indication that more will be added**)



Illustrating consensus in customers' preferences for choosing tickets: Presenting the total price

Prominence given to the total / final price

The NRE web example shows a return journey selection screen for Tuesday 16 December 2025. It lists two return options: one from £117.80 and another from £129.60. A 'Total' box on the right shows £117.80. The Mock up web example shows a single fare selection screen for Wednesday 5 Nov 2025, with a 'TOTAL' box showing £2.85. Both examples have green circles highlighting the total price.

✓ NRE web example

✓ Mock up web example

A strong area of consensus was that where different timing or ticket product options are listed for comparison, the price should be:

- **Prominent** (e.g. in the listings in the left hand side panes on each of the above examples)
- **Inclusive of any discounts or extras** (e.g. mocked up example above, showing Disabled Railcard discount)
- **Total**, i.e. including outward and return journeys if applicable

Absolute prices preferred rather than “+£xxx”

The Trainline web example shows a 'Ticket options' screen. It lists three ticket types: 'Fixed' (+£0), 'Flex Lite' (+£8.90), and 'Flex' (+£9.10). The 'Flex' option is highlighted with a green circle. The 'TOTAL' box shows £2.85.

✓ Trainline web example (mock up)

Where a choice of ticket products is offered, some did like the approach to presenting the price differences between them, as shown above. However, there was a **stronger preference overall for retailers to present the total absolute price that would be payable.**

Overall being able to see the total price felt **more transparent and trustworthy**, and **easier to register quickly** meaning a purchaser is less likely to make a mistake.

Although the approach in the example above is not using any “hidden” pricing, the concept of having “additional” costs presented as “+£xx” can lead some to make an association with retailers like Ryanair which have been known to add on extra, unexpected costs later in a purchase journey. **In the rail industry's ambition to be more customer-focussed and transparent, any perception of using this kind of tactic – even if it is misplaced – should be avoided.**



Illustrating consensus in customers' preferences for choosing tickets: Reassurances and feeling in control

We have already seen that customers liked the booking / “basket” summary provided by many platforms currently. Similarly, they appreciated details such as...

Summaries on each screen **confirming key journey details**. This provides reassurance that you haven't accidentally clicked an incorrect time/date, or for where you might be considering alternative dates or start/end points, for example).

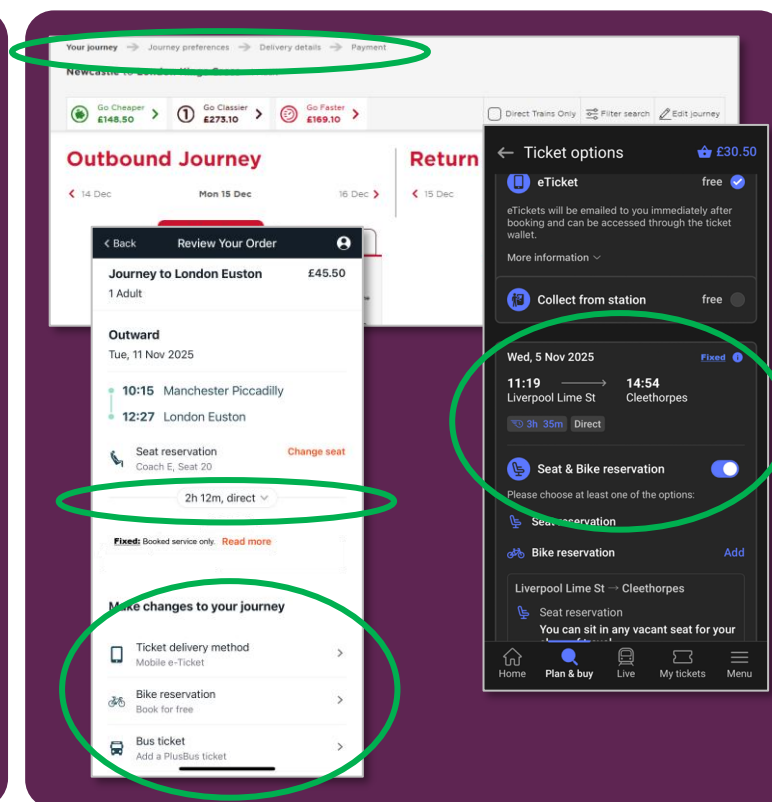
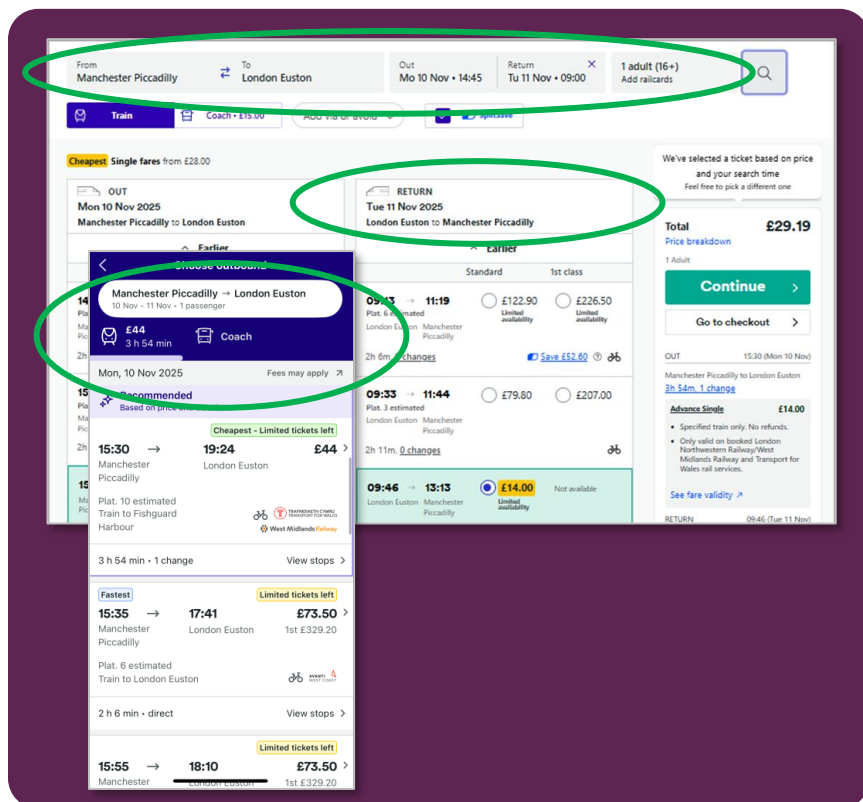
Clarity on whether a return journey is or is not part of the query.

Signposting for where you are within the purchase journey.

The ability to **review details before committing to payment**, and to include essential elements such as seat reservation, or consider additional flexibility

Some workshop participants also expressed a wish to have a **better understanding of whether the ticket prices will change, and by how much, if they decide to wait and book at a later date** (for a journey they are thinking about in advance). This is true for both potential increases in tickets, or decreases.

This was not provided currently in any of the examples of existing rail booking sites that were critiqued in this exercise. Not this idea is not the same as alerts which do exist currently, for “limited tickets left” or similar.



While different individuals may appreciate different elements shown here, the common theme is about feeling fully informed and in control, with no hidden or unexpected extra charges or limitations / ticket restrictions to be discovered when it's too late (meaning either after purchase, or even before committing to payment but having gone through some effort to research options).



Illustrating consensus in customers' preferences for choosing tickets: Ability to set parameters for your own journey requirements

Set filters where there are preferences that apply to some people and not others

The image shows two screenshots of travel booking websites. The left screenshot is from Booking.com, displaying a hotel search interface with various filters on the left side, including 'Your budget (per night)', 'Popular filters', and 'Smart filters'. The right screenshot is from the LNER website, showing a 'Plan a Journey' interface with options for 'Standard' and 'First Class' tickets, and a 'More journey options' section. Both screenshots have green circles highlighting specific filter areas. The Booking.com example is labeled 'Booking.com web example' and the LNER example is labeled 'LNER web example'.

Specify a return journey

The image shows two screenshots of travel booking interfaces. The left screenshot is from the Trainline website, displaying a 'Plan a Journey' interface for a train from Newcastle to Carlisle, with options for 'Single', 'Return', and 'Open return' journeys. The right screenshot is from the NRE app, showing a 'Plan a Journey' interface with options for 'Single', 'Return', and 'Open return' journeys. Both screenshots have green circles highlighting the 'Return' option. The Trainline example is labeled 'Trainline web example (mock up)' and the NRE example is labeled 'NRE app example'.

Workshop participants appreciated the filters available on existing rail booking websites (examples from LNER and NRE above), and discussions highlighted this as an **expectation for booking websites** more generally.

Booking.com was noted as a great example, providing the ability to filter on a wide range of requirements. While this number of different choice parameters may not be completely relevant to rail, feedback indicated that **more filtering options could be useful**, to deal with some of the subjective preferences outlined earlier. These include, for example:

- ✓ Level of flexibility required (for outward and return journeys separately)
- ✓ Direct trains only
- ✓ Accessible routes only
- ✓ On board features, e.g. ability to reserve seat, quiet coach, catering, or disabled toilets and wheelchair spaces.

It is also important that purchasers have the **ability to save their preferences / filters for subsequent use** (but with the ability to amend these for journeys that might not fit the norm for an individual).

Specifying whether or not a return journey is required is perhaps obvious, and is always possible in rail booking sites currently.

However, it is worthwhile to recognise how important it is for passengers to be able to **see and have reassurance** that a return journey is or is not included as they progress through their purchase journey – this is for **overall price transparency**.



Illustrating consensus in customers' preferences for choosing tickets: Icons, flags & indicators as shortcuts to crucial decision-making factors

Number of changes required during a journey

Trainline web example

Trainline app example

NRE app example

Lumo web example

Choose outbound

Manchester Piccadilly → London Euston

10 Nov - 11 Nov • 1 passenger

£44
3 h 54 min
Coach

Mon, 10 Nov 2025

Recommended
Based on price and duration

Cheapest - Limited

15:30 → 19:24
Manchester Piccadilly → London Euston

Plat. 10 estimated
Train to Fishguard Harbour

3 h 54 min • 1 change

View steps >

Fastest

15:35 → 17:41
Manchester Piccadilly → London Euston

Plat. 6 estimated
Train to London Euston

2 h 12 min • direct

View steps >

Limited tickets left

£73.50
1st £329.20

15:55 → 18:10
Manchester → London Euston

1st £329.20

12:27 Newcastle (NCL) → 15:32 London Kings Cross (KGX)
Platform 4 → Platform 3

Return from: £117.80

3h 5m, Direct

12:54 Newcastle (NCL) → 15:45 London Kings Cross (KGX)
Platform 2 → Platform 6

Return from: £115.80

2h 51m, Direct

12:58 Newcastle (NCL) → 16:02 London Kings Cross (KGX)
Platform 3 → Platform 5

Return from: £109.80

3h 4m, Direct

Operator running each journey option

Trainline app example

LNER app example

NRE web example

Lumo web example

15:30 → 19:24
Manchester Piccadilly → London Euston

Plat. 10 estimated
Train to Fishguard Harbour

3 h 54 min • 1 change

View steps >

Fastest

16:30 → 19:09
London Kings Cross → Newcastle

LNER 3h 39m, direct

Journey info

Cheapest

16:33 → 19:37
London Kings Cross → Newcastle

LNER 3h 4m, direct

Journey info

17:41 → 18:10
London Euston → London Euston

1st £329.20

Limited tickets left

£73.50

18:10 → 18:31
London Euston → London Euston

1st £329.20

Limited tickets left

£73.50

12:27 Newcastle (NCL) → 15:32 London Kings Cross (KGX)
Platform 4 → Platform 3

Return from: £117.80

3h 5m, Direct

12:54 Newcastle (NCL) → 15:45 London Kings Cross (KGX)
Platform 2 → Platform 6

Return from: £115.80

2h 51m, Direct

12:58 Newcastle (NCL) → 16:02 London Kings Cross (KGX)
Platform 3 → Platform 5

Return from: £109.80

3h 4m, Direct

Participants consistently felt that this information is a **key factor when choosing between available timetabled services**.

- The need to change can be an inconvenience (even a barrier) and increases the risk of possible disruption, but some accept and **want to know possible trade offs for a lower price**, or the **ability to travel at a preferred time**.
- Knowing the operator can give people an indication of the likely rolling stock and environment on board**. Some find it useful to have more detailed rolling stock information (**see page xx**), but a TOC indicator can act in place of, or as an initial overview of this. This is missing in the NRE web example above, for instance.

The feedback highlighted some examples of how these types of information can be presented well, and less so. For example:

- Small visual separation from other text** making the change information **quick and easy to identify**, as shown in the Trainline example above, compared to the NRE example which is less clear
- Bold / coloured text to distinguish** the changes information, as in the Trainline web example here. This is also a link to **information about where the changes will be made and the timings involved** – also seen as essential information
- Use of **TOC logos** to help them stand out on the page (e.g. LNER and Trainline apps above, and in contrast felt to be less easy to discriminate between options in the Lumo website)
- Giving all operator names where there are multiple legs** – this can be difficult given limited space, but is illustrated for example in the Trainline app, and simply saying “multiple operators” as in the Lumo example, is felt to be unhelpful



Illustrating consensus in customers' preferences for choosing tickets: Icons, flags & shortcut indicators – highlighting info that is useful to customers, rather than (what might be perceived as) a sales tactic

Small flags / icons highlighting fastest / cheapest journey option

✓ LNER app example

Visual cues to the cheapest, fastest (or other factors which are priorities for some, like most accessible / fewest changes) are appreciated in current rail sites and apps, and would work for customers with the introduction of the proposed new fares model.

They provide **useful shortcuts**, but also **reinforce perceptions of transparency and putting customer interests first**.

The **ability to tailor which flags are shown** would also be of interest to many (e.g. turning on the “cheapest” flags, but turning off the “fastest”)

Take care to be consistent in this, however. Participants noticed for example that the NRE example above does not highlight the cheapest at all, and that the (albeit mocked up) Avanti example here ought to have both a “cheapest” and “fastest” flag on the last visible option.

Even **tiny inconsistencies** raise questions around how the algorithm behind this works, **damaging trust**.

Avoidance of apparent pressure selling tactics

✗ Avanti West Coast app example

✗ Seatfrog app example

? LNER web example (mock up)

There was less consensus around the use of highlight flags to alert customers to limited availability of certain ticket products.

It is useful to know if the same journey / ticket type will be more expensive at a later date, and how much more expensive. However:

- Many platforms currently present this with a sense of urgency that **can be perceived as a pressure-sale, designed to benefit the retailer not the customer**. Using red text and icons that cue urgency can add to this
- Participants often felt that they had bought a “last remaining” ticket, only to find that many seats were empty on their train. While it may be true that the specific ticket type was limited, this isn't always understood by customers. They would prefer **information about the limitations on certain product prices** to be presented so as **to be much clearer in terms of what it actually means in practice for them**
- (Equally, **it is useful to know when a ticket price will not go down** – such as for the proposed new fully flexible ticket).

Illustrating consensus in customers' preferences for choosing tickets: Providing an essential, succinct summary of crucial product features

Mock up app example

LNER app example

LNER web example

Trainline web example

Workshop participants frequently gave examples of whether or not rail booking platforms **provided clear information about key ticket product features – highlighting it as among the most crucial elements that they must have a grasp of before committing to a purchase.** Popular ways of relaying this information included:

- ✓ Signalling that the booking is for a specific time but that other services are eligible (see mock up app example left)
- ✓ Specifying which services are eligible (e.g. LNER app example)
Note that while this info. was appreciated, the whole screen was somewhat confusing, since participants felt they had already been given a choice around flexibility on a previous screen, and this appeared to be a second suggestion to consider the same thing
- ✓ Side by side comparison (e.g. LNER web)
- ✓ ...and especially using a structured / table style layout where this is possible on the screen (e.g. Trainline web example – where the key features are also confirmed in the summary pane on the right before the customer continues to payment)

...effective alternatives to these also included expandable / collapsable panes or pop ups, or alerts to where other information and options are given (see following page).

Take care to **ensure consistency** here.

Participants highlighted some examples where this is not the case currently, which has the **potential to raise questions (damaging trust and perception of transparency), or to create confusion** where the intention was to ease it.

- × “Non-refundable” feature is mentioned for the Fixed ticket in this app example, but refundability is not mentioned at all for the other options. Some simply see this as incomplete (but wonder why), a minority can feel suspicious that the potential for refunds is being kept from customers to save operators’ money in the long term
- × The detail on Advance Single is appreciated in this web example, but people question where the detail is for the others

Avanti West Coast web example

LNER app example



Illustrating consensus in customers' preferences for choosing tickets: Providing a succinct summary of crucial product features – display options

Side bar / alert that other options are available

Trainline web example

Information buttons / hover overs / expansion buttons

LNER app example

Avanti West Coast web example

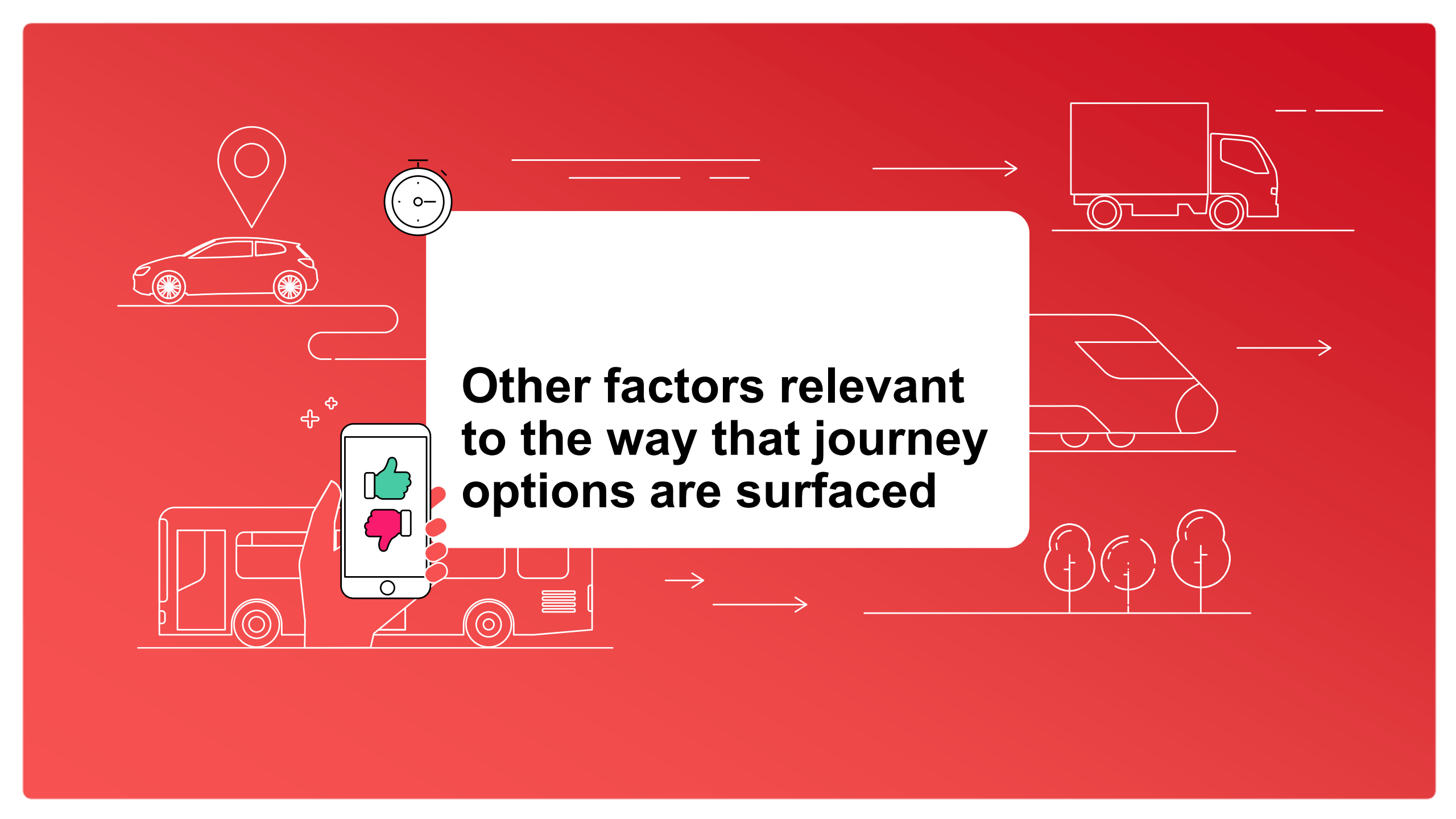
A simple signal like this that other options are available, and an acknowledgement that others might suit better, can **indicate fairness and transparency**. **Purchasers do not feel they might be being steered unknowingly in a certain direction.**

In this case, the *continue* button takes the user to an area where they can “pick a different one”, from available ticket products relevant to the selected service. This also **helps to signpost** people through this part of the journey, **minimising the potential confusion that some feel when presented with further price options having made their selection** (as they saw it).

Icons and links for further information are **useful in practice** for those who wish to click on them – a good example of conciseness coupled with actionable information to support the decision-making process

They also **play a role in transparency and trust even for those who don't click, simply by being visible** – users know they have the option to find more detail if needed.

Pop up boxes or expanded panes (e.g. Avanti example above) are popular, **allowing the purchaser to view the information alongside the other options available** and without having to leave the page.



**Other factors relevant
to the way that journey
options are surfaced**



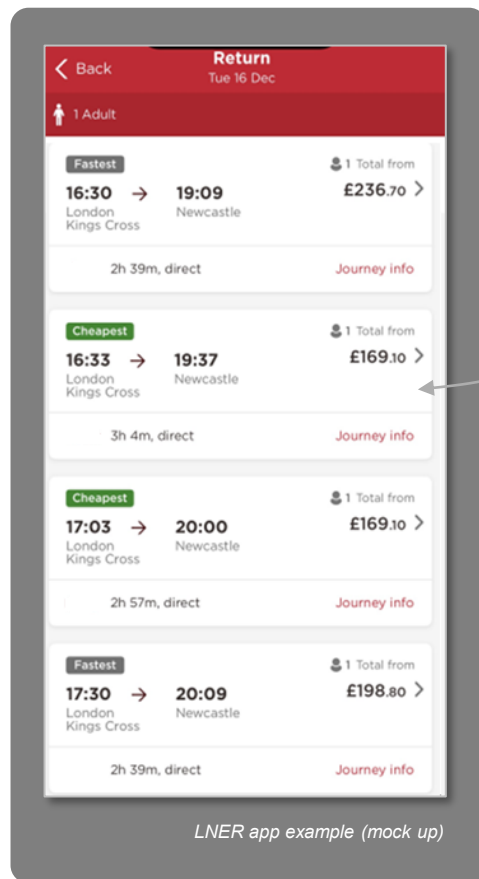
Other factors relevant to the way that journey options are surfaced

On board comfort, usability & accessibility	Information about rolling stock
	Viewing and filtering on class
Other information and presentation preferences / needs	Platform & status / disruption information
	Aesthetics for interpretation & accessibility
Additional points to avoid, to minimise confusion	Apparently extraneous information
	Carbon saving credentials
	Ambiguous or potentially contradicting terms & information

Illustrating other factors in customers' preferences for choosing tickets: **On board comfort, usability & accessibility**

Information about the rolling stock or the presence of particular carriage types is useful and interesting to most, but can be essential to some rail users or for some journeys.

This might be related to a disability or other accessibility need, driven by how the individual intends to spend time on board (working, sleeping, etc.), or simply for personal comfort (notably, many leisure customers tell us that a key draw of rail travel is the ability to relax, seeing the journey itself as a key part of the overall trip, and so on board comfort is more than just a nice-to-have).



For the individuals or journeys where this information can have a direct impact on the choice of service used, having **information about on-board features is therefore needed alongside other key journey information when choosing between timetabled services.**

Alternatively, having the **ability to filter on these kinds of features** could work well for many.

(This in itself is a subjective point, however, since some people may want to understand, for example, the price difference between more comfortable and more basic train services operating on the same route, whereas for others the comfort/environment element is fundamental).



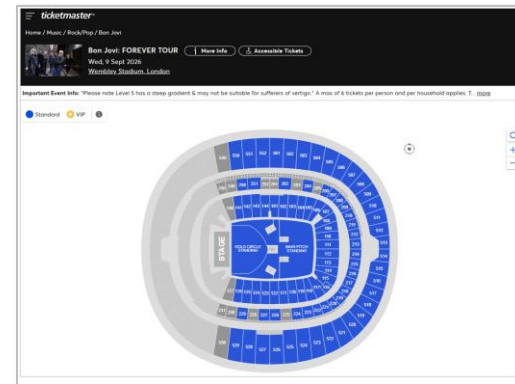
The types of information that is of interest here includes:

- How busy the train / carriage typically gets
- Presence of toilets / accessible toilets
- Space for wheelchairs
- ...or large luggage, bikes, prams, etc.
- Presence of tables, plug sockets, wi-fi
- Catering and how to access it
- Quiet areas
- Aspects of the layout such as distance between toilets and catering carriages
- First / Premium Class and what the offer entails

The relevance of each of these details will be dependent on the individual's own circumstances, so again, having the ability to filter them on or off can be a useful approach to making this useful rather than superfluous.

A small number of participants felt that having **visual information about some or all of these features** is useful.

This is inspired (and the expectation may be raised) by other industries' booking sites that use seating layouts, photographic illustration, etc. It is often felt to be a desirable extra in the context of rail travel, but again for some people, especially those with a disability or who may feel anxious about a journey, this can be really important.



✓ Ticketmaster web example

✓ Premier Inn web example



Flex Pay now or on arrival, fully refundable with free cancellation up to 1pm on the day of arrival	£59 Total price 1 room, 1 night
Advance Pay now, fully refundable with free cancellation up to 28 full days before arrival	£48 Total price 1 room, 1 night



Illustrating other factors in customers' preferences for choosing tickets:

Other preferences / needs

Platform & status / disruption information

Trainline app example

Lumo web example

Aesthetics – interpretation & accessibility

LNER app example (mock up)

Mock up app example

Feedback from the community indicates that information about...

- ✓ **which platform the train will leave from** is always useful, even in advance (albeit this may be estimated initially as here)
- ✓ **the final destination of the train** is useful (as an indication of how busy or long it might be, and to help identify the right train at the station)
- ✓ **planned disruption** is essential
- ? ...**current status** is not needed at point of (advance) booking. In the example above, some found the site quite overwhelming, and this extra information was unnecessary (over a month ahead of the specified journey) and therefore adding to clutter on the page

Visual preferences can be subjective, but themes arose via a small number of participants, that may be constructive:

- **Using red font**, which can occasionally cue danger/alert, or something negative – with **potential for confusion** where this is not the intention
- **Using a dark-mode and/or low contrast** (e.g. blue on black as above), which was felt to be **too hard to read** for some
- **Special care is needed to ensure information is suitable for screen-readers**, for visually impaired people (and some other disabilities).

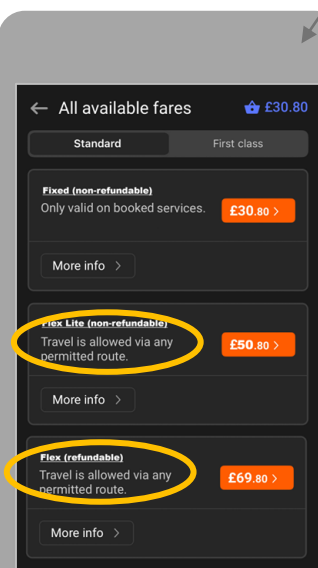
This includes ensuring the **text in the code for buttons and text areas is concise and meaningful, and crucially, that it is up to date**. A blind participant described difficulties with normally-useful apps when they are updated but the output for screen-readers is not retested, or if there are bugs.

(Indeed, regardless of the impact on screen-readers, using apps successfully as a blind person can rely heavily on being familiar with them, so in addition to ensuring accessibility during initial development, this must remain a priority consideration as and when any changes are made to online planning tools.)



Illustrating other factors in customers' preferences for choosing tickets: Additional points to avoid, to minimise confusion

Ambiguous / potentially contradicting terms & information



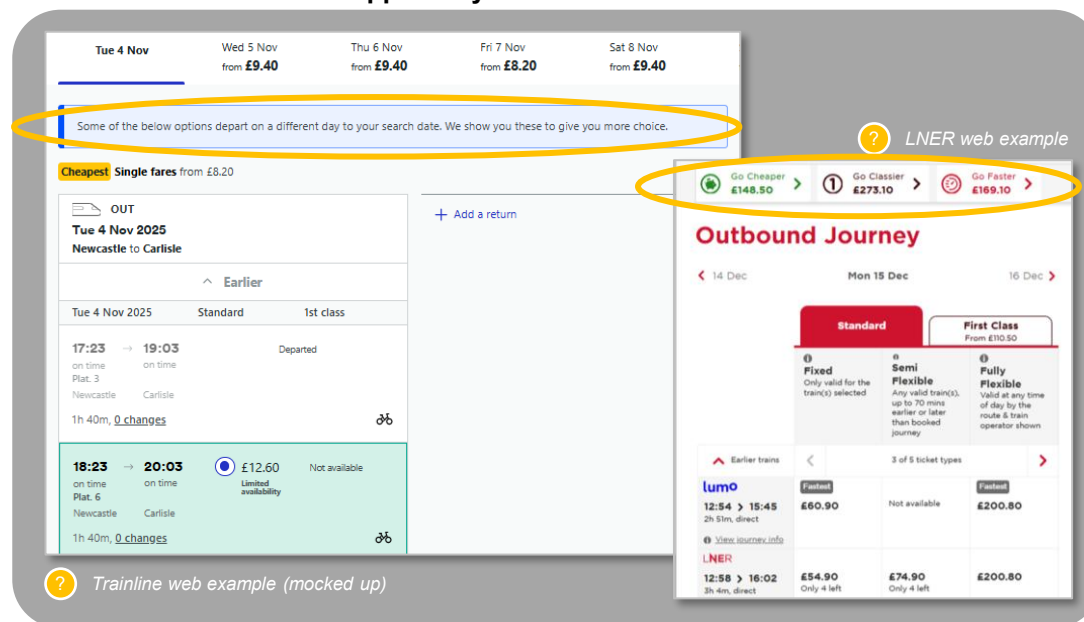
Mocked up app example

Take care not to use terms which appear contradictory and/or ambiguous from a customer perspective. For instance in this example:

- Some participants were confused by the idea that “Flex” (interpreted as flexible) would potentially have route restrictions
- If route restrictions are in place, some also felt that the information here is factual but not actionable – they want to know which routes are permitted.

(Anecdotally, across various feedback, rail users have liked small “i” icons immediately next to a point of possible query like this. This was not tested specifically here, but such an approach to providing this extra information may be easier for people to register than the “More info >” button which is currently separated and underneath the queried point)

Apparently extraneous information

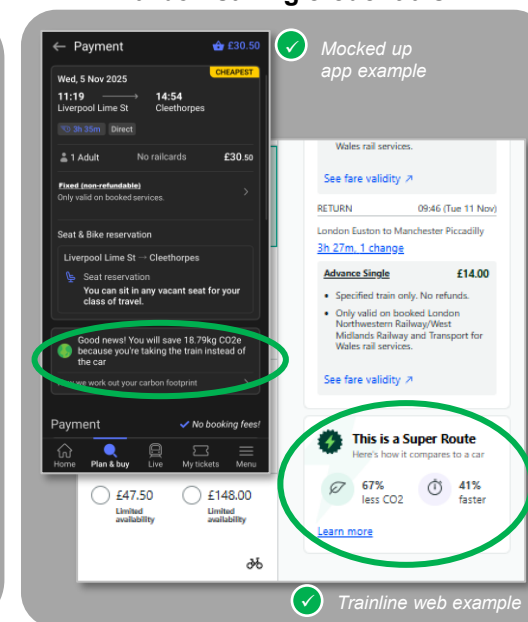


Trainline web example (mocked up)

Take care not to include areas of information which could lack obvious meaning or context from a customer perspective. For example:

- In this Trainline example, some people were confused by the note about dates here, since the journey options listed are all on the same date. (This example has been mocked up so this may not arise in reality, but does illustrate a potential area for caution)
- In this LNER example, two or three people queried the options for different styles of travel. This may have been in the context that a large matrix of options is given already and so some people are surprised there could be more, or start to question why they are seeing the ones that are being shown. Or it may be that these options are at different times/dates to those shown. A small additional piece of text here might have helped to explain why/how these additional options were being flagged.

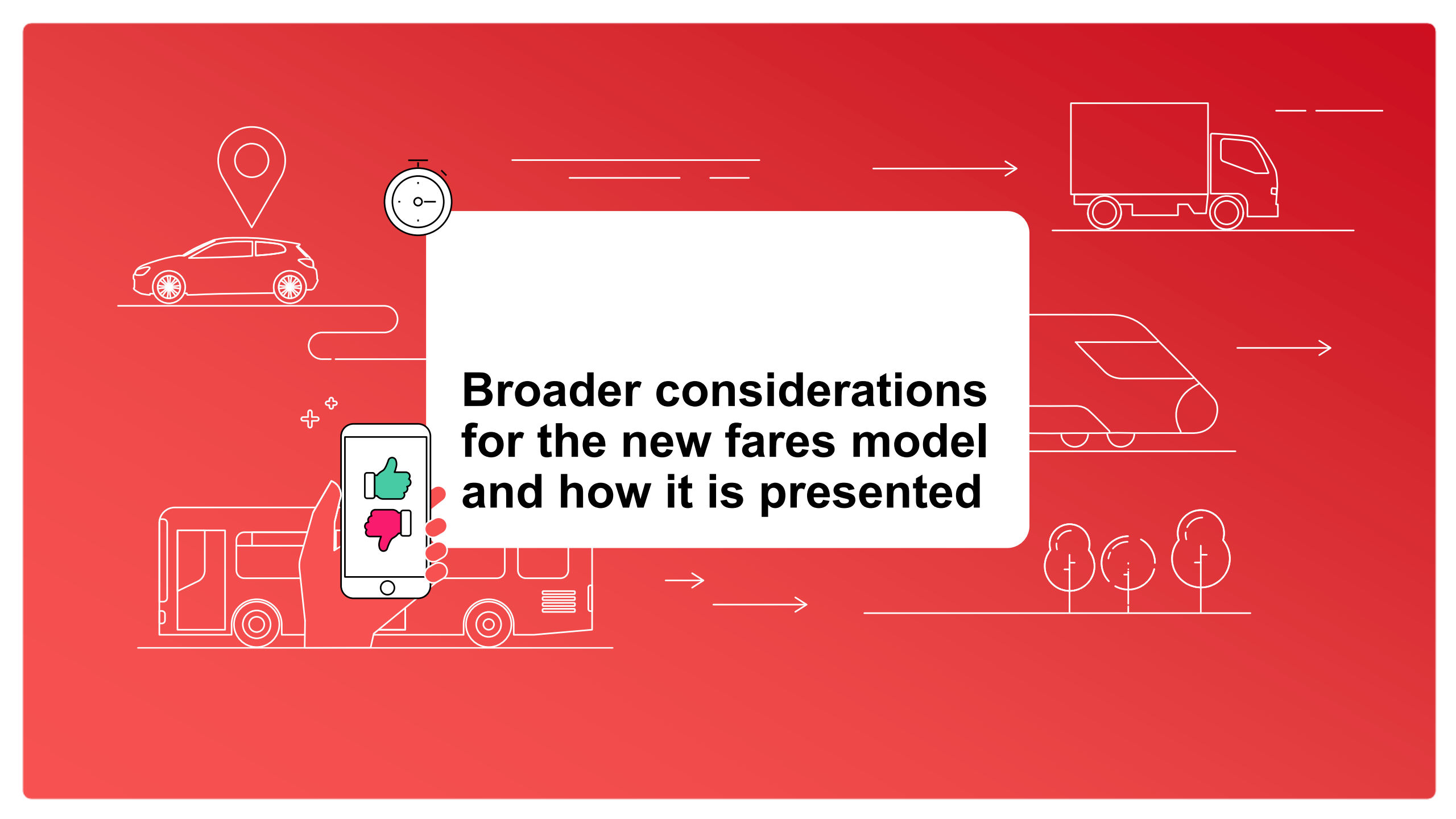
Carbon saving credentials



Trainline web example

In contrast there was no negative feedback about including this kind of non-essential information about carbon emissions. Many were pleased to see this, even though it had no impact on their choices for services and ticket products. Knowing the positive carbon impact of a train journey was simply of interest, and affirming of the sense that travelling by train is a positive behaviour.

Positioning in the bottom of the screen also means it is not compromising the space for directly informative details.



**Broader considerations
for the new fares model
and how it is presented**

This research has also underlined a number of concerns about fares themselves: 1. understanding fare types in the proposed new model

In most cases these concerns are already acknowledged, and they exist regardless of how fare options are surfaced to purchasers.

However they are important to customers and continue to be sources of frustration or confusion, and can therefore affect their ability to make choices and / or their perception industry, in term of how fares are decided on and managed.

In some cases there may also be steps that retailers can take to mitigate such concerns.

? Potential confusion about the middle tier ticket product, within the three-tier model

As highlighted in previous feedback from this community, the middle tier is most vulnerable to misinterpretation around what type of flexibility it enables (by time, route, TOC, potential refund eligibility, etc.).

The naming and descriptions of the features need to be unambiguous to mitigate this.

This issue has been exposed further in this workshop exercise, where participants have responded to a mix of examples of existing retail platforms and ideas for presenting the new model – which has included:

- some different operators' descriptions of a semi-flexible product (e.g. Offpeak, or Semiflexible, etc.)
- and different mechanics (e.g. existing off peak pricing, trials for 70min windows, and the new proposed product which might be usable at any time but is not refundable).

While the proposed new fares model will replace the trialled ideas with a consistent product across all operators, the highly variable, existing landscape is likely to continue to influence customers' perceptions and understanding for some time, compounding the potential for misinterpretation of the mid tier product.

Clarity and consistency in description at point of booking will of course be paramount.

? The impact of the proposed fares model in relation to regional and long journeys

Potentially aggravating this effect another step, is the difference between the regional and long distance fares, and product models.

This has not been explored in detail, but workshop discussions highlighted that this difference is not clear, and not especially meaningful to rail users who each have their own interpretation of what "long distance" means, for example.

This may not be a material issue if the difference can be kept behind the scenes and does not affect customers themselves in practice. That is:

- **providing it does not mean potentially different ticket types for different journey types**
- **ensuring that product names consistent across different journey categories – or that they are conspicuously different, if ticket products are different, so as to prevent confusion**

This research has also underlined a number of concerns about fares themselves: 2. attitudes to absolute ticket prices

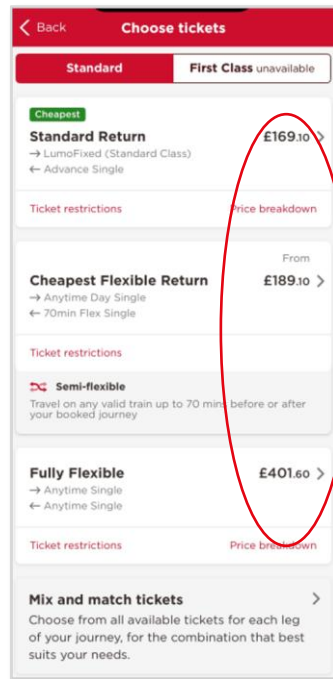
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However they are important to customers and continue to be sources of frustration or confusion, and can therefore affect their ability to make choices and / or their perception industry, in term of how fares are decided on and managed. In some cases there may also be steps that retailers can take to mitigate such concerns.

Very high absolute prices

The affordability of rail is a hot and ongoing topic, and where there are very high prices this raises big questions from customers, and can be distracting in booking journey.

This extreme example of £400+ created some shock, but was also shown to have the potential to distract the user from a what feels to them like a fair and considered decision process.



Standard class journey from London to Newcastle

Very wide / narrow ranges in prices

Similarly where there are very different prices for the same journey (highlighted here), or conversely very marginal differences in the price for different ticket types, this causes concern.

Customers can doubt the credibility of the information they are looking at in extreme cases like these.

	Earlier	Later
Fixed Specified train only. No refunds.	17:23 ↓ CAR 19:03 1h 40m 0 changes	18:23 ↓ CAR 20:03 1h 40m 0 changes
Flex Lite Travel any time of day. No refunds.	19:23 ↓ CAR 21:02 1h 39m 0 changes	20:23 ↓ CAR 21:57 1h 34m 0 changes
Flex Travel any time of day.	£12.60 Limited availability	£8.20 Limited availability
	£21.50	£21.50
	£21.70	£21.70

£0.20 more for full flexibility raised questions

Customers would like to see more work done around the absolute level of fares, and the range of prices for a given journey.

In the shorter term, **for retailers this reinforces the importance of making clear what the benefits of different ticket products are.**

In extreme cases there may also be decisions to make about whether to show the very highest prices to all customers, if this will never be their selection and it has only served to create a negative impression of the industry.

Workshop discussions revealed additional areas that FTR and other retailers should consider as enhancements and extensions to rail journey booking



Reliable and effective Passenger Assistance booking

Some community members who require Passenger Assistance regularly have expressed frustration that they routinely find themselves in a “chicken-and-egg” scenario, where they must book a journey before they are able to book Assistance to go with it, but they would prefer to check the availability of Assistance – along with other accessibility essentials such as availability of wheelchair spaces, lift access at interchange stations, and so on – before committing to the purchase of a ticket. Their Passenger Assistance also needs to be booked separately, via a separate app, from the journey itself.

Currently this means a lot of time is spent between separate platforms, and these customers do not always feel reassured at the end of the process that everything is lined up as it should be.

They would like to see a more seamless experience, where the journey search requirements can include (or filter on) the need for both accessibility on the stations and trains, and the ability to book Assistance at the same time (and reserve an appropriate seat at the same time).

They expect that this could also improve the way that Passenger Assistance is handled and rearranged if there is any disruption, and they end up using a different train from that which was originally booked.

This lack of joined up experience is currently viewed as a point of discrimination by some customers in this position.

★★★ Higher priority



Accommodating end to end journey planning / arranging

Several community members already use tools – most often Google Maps – to plan a full door to door journey in outline, before interacting with rail platforms or going to a station, to plan the train element in detail and purchase the ticket.

This works reasonably well for those who do this, and so there may not be a strong requirement at the moment for **railway booking services to allow end to end journey planning**. This research has not explored in detail how much of a demand there is for this, though there is certainly an **appetite for it and it should be a consideration for booking engine owners**.

In the short term it means that **there is an expectation, and reliance on the fact, that all of the information about train service continues to be reliably available to providers of these types of online tools**. This includes information about timings, interchanges, platforms, and any disruption.

★ Lower priority?



AI enhancement

A handful of participants suggested (unprompted) that an obvious element in GBR’s commitment to help rail users get the best ticket for their journey should be to make use of AI within online planning and booking tools.

Rather than asking a passenger to input their journey details and other requirements, within the constraints of a pre-designed platform structure, **these rail users wanted to be able to open an AI chatbot within the ticket booking website/app, tell it in their own words what they needed, and be served with relevant options, along with any information about restrictions or flexibility**. This would negate the need for decisions around whether to structure a retail platform as a decision tree, or as a matrix of all options, and so on.

This idea was not outright rejected by others in the community, although undoubtedly it would not be appealing for all. Nevertheless, **it seems likely that more AI integration could become an expected element of journey planning**, and those behind retail interfaces will need to be prepared for this.

★ Lower priority but may very quickly become expected

What does all of this mean for those who do not research and buy train tickets using online / app platforms?



Those who wish or need to purchase tickets from **staff at a station** (or by phone) typically do so because:

- They perceive the ticket market to be too complicated and they need help
- They have relatively unique requirements for the journey (e.g. wishing to break in a certain place, go via a certain route, request specific in-journey assistance or seating, make use of regional discounted fares which may not cover a whole journey, travel as a group, etc.)
- They wish to use cash or not to make online payments
- It is the most convenient / time efficient way to buy a ticket (often for shorter, more local journeys for which they do not perceive a strong price advantage to researching in advance)
- (it is their habit or preference)



Those who wish or need to purchase from a **station ticket machine** typically do so because:

- They have not had time or inclination to do so in advance
- It is the most convenient / efficient way to buy a ticket (often for shorter, more local journeys for which they do not see a price advantage to advance research)
- (It is their habit or preference)
- *(They preferred to purchase at a station ticket office but this was not available – staffing is a separate issue)*

In both of these contexts, passengers do not want to be overwhelmed with lots of different options, nor is this practical

Instead, staff will need to take special care to ask the right questions, and that the customer has been able to take relevant options into consideration. Including

Where this results in multiple options, staff must clearly explain the implications of each in practice for this individual, including:

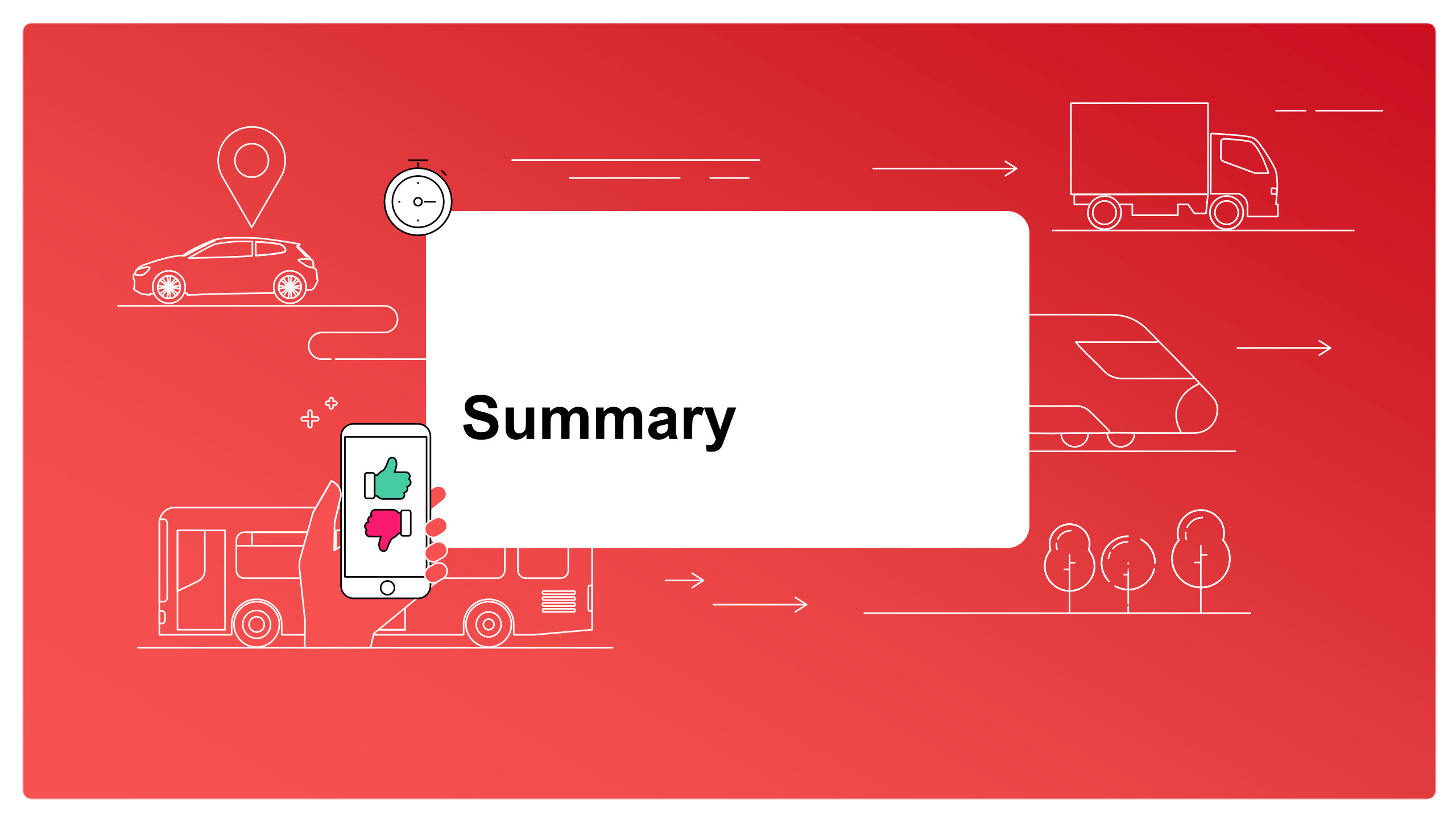
- Total price of each option
- Details of any changes that need to be made (timings, accessibility, facilities, etc.)
- Flexibility & refundability features of the ticket product(s)
- The specific TOCs/trains that must be used, if relevant

- Whether the person needs flexibility – and in terms of:
 - The outward or return journey
 - Timings, or the date
 - The route taken or operator(s) used
 - The ability to refund
- Whether a direct service is preferred
- Whether a certain TOC is preferred
- The class of travel
- Offering to look at cheaper alternatives if available, including 2 x singles vs a return and the implications for the journey
- Any special requirements, such as on board facilities, accessible interchanges, and Passenger Assistance
- Any onward travel requirements which impact the decisions

Ideally, TVMs would be provided to mirror the online/app landscape, with different machines available that will cater for different preferences. This is clearly not practical at a busy station, potentially with queues for TVMs, or at smaller stations with limited capacity for multiple machines.

Ultimately **TVMs need to allow for the same decision-making factors as highlighted for online retail platforms.**

Where there are subjective preferences for different approaches, retailers should consider the approach that is most relevant to the typical usage the TVM will see within the specific station context it will sit (i.e. with consideration for the typical journeys made from that station). This will require separate research and testing.

A graphic with a solid red background. In the center is a large white rounded rectangle containing the word "Summary" in bold black text. Surrounding this central box are various white line-art icons: a location pin above a car on the top left; a clock above the central box; a hand holding a smartphone with thumbs up/down icons on the bottom left; a bus below the smartphone; a truck on the top right; a car on the middle right; and three trees on the bottom right. White arrows indicate a flow from left to right, starting from the car on the top left, passing through the central box, and continuing past the truck, car, and trees on the right.

Summary

Key takeouts 1/3

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

As part of wider reform, the Fares, Ticketing & Retail Programme (FTR) 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.

This workshop has explored the range of customer requirements and considerations, that will inform how to make sure that rail users can find and purchase the best ticket for their needs, for any given journey. This will inform FTR and potential 3rd party retailers in developing tools such as booking websites that will meet customer needs effectively. Some of the feedback is also relevant to ticket purchasing at stations (or by phone).

The customer needs that should be considered can be organised into three broad groups:

1. Subjective preferences for the way journey options are surfaced
2. Areas of broad consensus
3. Other factors, which may be relevant to specific smaller cohorts, or which have a lower overall impact

A summary of each is given over the page.

All of this also appears to validate the existence of a market with multiple retailers to meet different passenger requirements, and to create the competitive environment for innovation.

In addition:

- This research has underlined a number of concerns about fares themselves, around their understanding of the fare model, and views on prices. These concerns exist regardless of how fare options are surfaced to purchasers, but can affect their ability to make the best ticket choices and / or their perception industry, in term of how fares are decided on and managed.
- Workshop discussions revealed additional areas that FTR and other retailers should consider as enhancements and extensions to rail journey booking. These are around integrating Passenger Assistance, and considerations for end to end journey planning, and AI.

Key takeouts 2/3

Subjective preferences for the way journey options are surfaced include:

- Whether the customer is presented with a full range of ticket options for their desired journey, or a selection, which introduces some form of curation or prioritisation
- If a selection is presented, whether this is achieved through filtering by the customer themselves or via a decision-tree approach, where the customer is taken through a series of steps to arrive at suitable ticket options
- If a decision-tree approach is used, whether the steps begin with possible train times and prices, or with a choice of flexibility levels
- If the process begins with a choice of flexibility levels, whether this is presented from the perspective of time flexibility, route flexibility, or the potential need for refundability
- If the process begins with time-price options, whether these should be presented as the lowest possible price for each timetabled service (and followed with further choices on flexibility that might increase this price), or that they should be presented as the highest possible price (followed by ticket options that can reduce this price).
- Whether or not to make specific recommendations to aid customers
- And whether or not to offer additional options such as looking at alternative dates, specifying certain features such as accessibility, and so on.

Given these often conflicting preferences, it is unlikely that any given booking / retail platform will be able to meet all needs, and different retailers will need to either:

- Aim to meet a particular need, accepting they will not meet other preferences and those customers will go elsewhere
- Provide different platforms for different audiences, or allow individuals to tailor their interface to their own preferences
- Innovate in other ways

There are no clear patterns within these preferences, for any particular demographic cohort for example. However preferences can be influenced to some degree by how confident and familiar an individual is with the journey in question. As such, different ways of presenting ticket options may be best suited to different types of journey circumstance.

Key takeouts 3/3

Areas of broad consensus for the way journey options are surfaced include:

- The need for really clear, side by side (or logically listed) comparisons of products and options
- Enabling the customer to feel informed and in control throughout the purchase journey. This can include, for example:
 - Providing summaries of the customer's "basket" throughout the purchase journey
 - Presenting the total, absolute price to be paid made, throughout– taking into account personal requirements like the presence of a return journey, railcards, etc.
 - Being clear about whether ticket price could go up or down, and by how much, in future
 - Displaying progress through the purchase journey itself
 - Brief highlights to customers that there may be other options available to them, before they commit to a purchase – aiding transparency and trust
- Clear, succinct – and complete, consistent – descriptions of key product features and restrictions (this is not consistently provided currently)
- Popular and well-understood devices include:
 - Filters, for dealing with large volumes of information
 - Icons or flags, which act as shortcuts to cue key pieces of information
 - Pop up / hover over and expandable/collapsible areas to provide extra detail without losing an overview comparison view with other products
- Retailers should avoid "pressure selling" tactics – or appearing to do so

Other factors relevant to the way that journey options are surfaced include:

- Information about the rolling stock, which can impact how passengers are able to use or access the train
- Additional information areas which matter to some people
- Presentation and aesthetic points which can affect how people perceive the retailer (or the industry), and how easy the booking tool is to use and access.

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.