

Shaping Rail's Future: Customer Community

Feedback report: March 2024

**Feedback on proposed
Standards for Customer Service**



Shaping Rail's Future: objectives



- ✓ Hear about rail users' – and potential users' – experiences, impressions and opinions of the railway in Britain
- ✓ Understand our strengths and weaknesses, where improvements are needed
- ✓ Involve customers in potential solutions and new ideas to help shape the future of rail

Introducing the customer community

40

Participants with a mix of:

- Rail usage purpose and frequency
- Rail dependency
- Disabilities and not, and other needs e.g. travelling with buggies
- Demographics, lifestyles, attitudes
- Regions and urban, rural or suburban context

Names have been changed throughout this report to protect anonymity



Each month, participants complete activities and answer questions around a particular topic

Via short videos, text, images

Individually, interacting with a moderator, and/or with each other

In addition, two face to face workshops to discuss topics further, generate ideas, and feed back on proposed concepts and solutions



12 months from February 2023

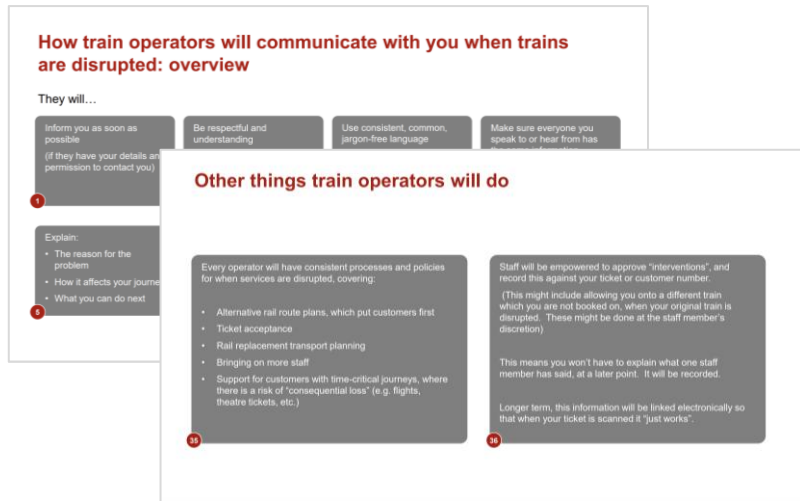
➤ *Now extended to March 2024*



Topic focus in March 2024:

**Standards for
Customer Service
across the rail industry**

In March 2024 the community...

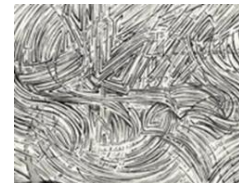


Evaluated proposed, industry-wide standards for customer service

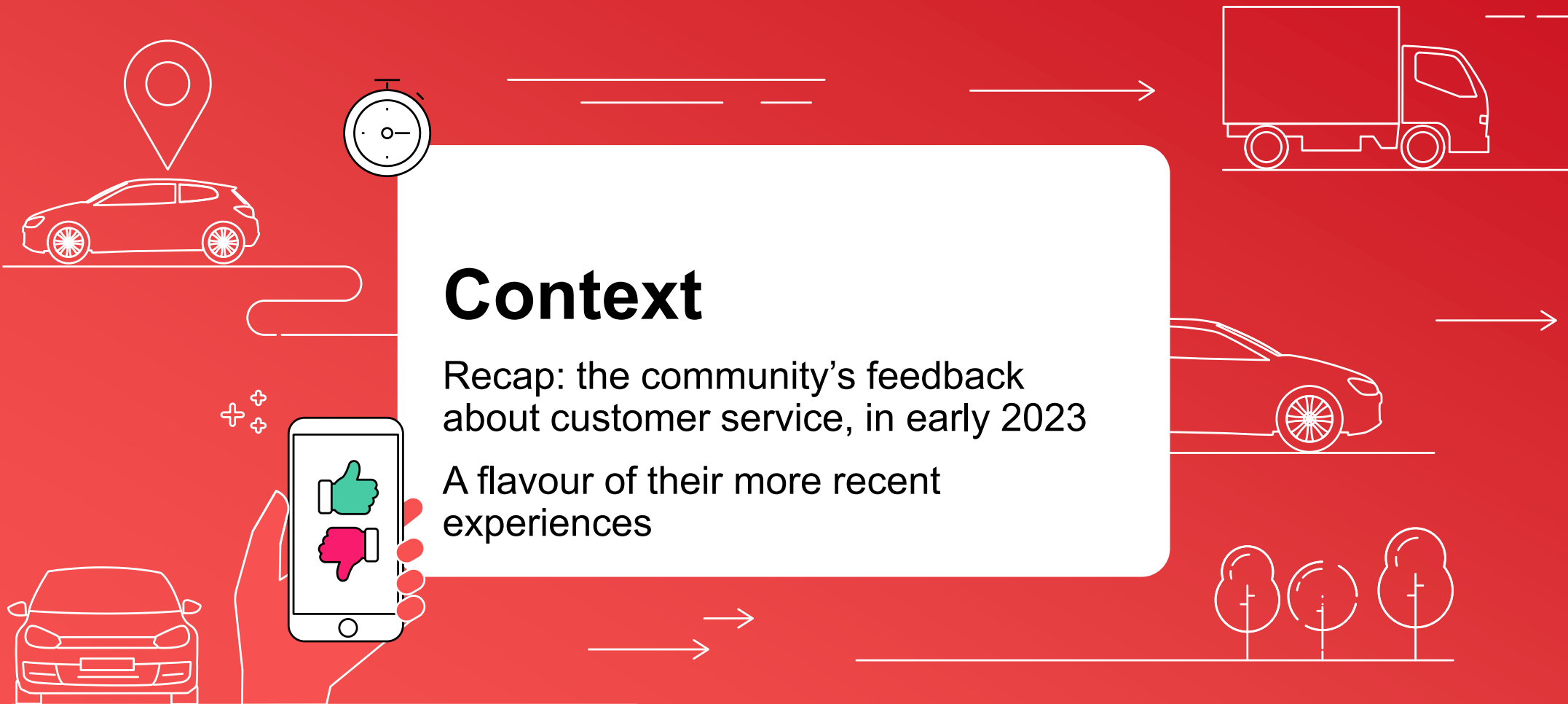
(Based partly on the community's feedback about existing customer service and where improvements might be made)

(See Appendix for full set of standards as seen by the community)

(Updated us on how they feel about travelling by train generally)



- ✓ Immediate, overall reactions
- ✓ Feedback on specific standards which resonated well, and less well
- ✓ Queries and concerns



Context

Recap: the community's feedback about customer service, in early 2023

A flavour of their more recent experiences

Recap (Mar 2023): rail users' current experience of customer service

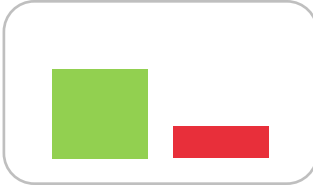
The quality and effectiveness of customer service varied by some key factors:

Where the type of problem or query was in relation to...

 Customer service during disruption

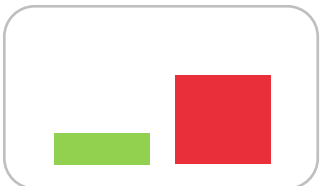


 "Everyday" info / assistance needs



Where the customer's journey was, for them...

 Regular / familiar



 Occasional / less familiar



Where this was delivered...

At stations 

Very mixed:
some great, some
satisfactory, some poor

On board 

Staff usually helpful
when available, but too
often unseen

Remotely 

Effortful, too often
lacking in resolution

Rail users' feedback highlighted three central pillars, and key principles, for good customer service



Structural / systematic

- ✓ **Consistency** across channels, across operators
- ✓ **Staff given space and agency** to be empathetic and
- ✓ **Ensuring customers know what services and information exist** – to avoid being passed around or left in the dark



Practical considerations for staff roles & responsibilities

- ✓ **More visible, easy to find and access, face to face staff**
- ✓ **Widened responsibility of any customer-facing staff** to more often meet more customer needs
- ✓ **Ensuring staff have knowledge to be able to help**
- ✓ **Clear, customer-relevant, pro-active information**



Attitudinal

- ✓ Open, approachable, pleasant, empathetic
- ✓ Pro-active, straightforward & pragmatic
- ✓ Honest

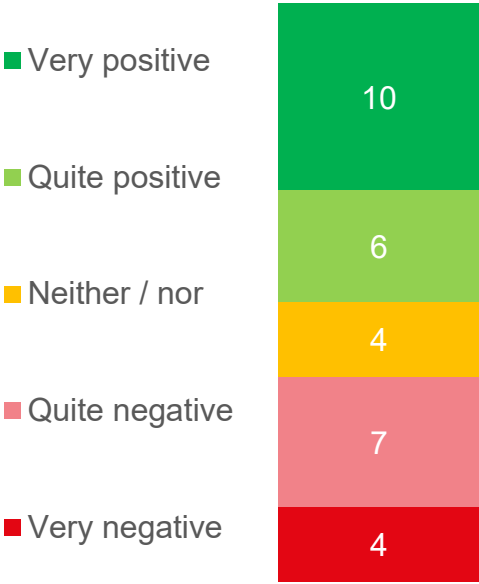
 Good customer service examples
 Poor customer service examples

"Traffic light" colours used give an indication of how often our community talked about poorer (red) and better (green) ways in which problems and assistance needs were handled.

A flavour of the community’s most recent experiences of customer service, confirming similar patterns and issues

At an overall level, the quality of customer service is still completely mixed

Overall rating of most recent customer service experience
(Task 78, Mar 2024)



Base: all community participants (31); figures shown are absolute number of people

...some examples including:



Help during disruption

My train was late and there were no information on replacements or when the train might come, so I asked one of staff members at the station. He immediately took a tablet from his pocket and provided me with an answer to my query... I think I was provided with excellent service, but ... it took some time to find a staff member.

Anna, commuter, suburban

...I was travelling home ...waiting on the platform. The electronic board ...changed to say the next train was cancelled, but the second and third train were still showing as 'on time arrivals'. The train arrived and a few train staff came onto the platform, boarded the train and (I assume) told everyone on the train that they needed to get off the train ...I asked a member of staff on the platform what was happening, he was quite rude ...[he] obviously just wanted to get ...the people on board off the train. He wasn't ready to deal with any questions, he really snapped at me ...I know it's a high stress environment, but I just wanted some information to help me decide [whether to wait or get a bus].

Stuart, commuter, suburban



“Everyday” assistance needs

I ...required assistance [I use a wheelchair]. The member of staff who helped me was so informative and lovely. She explained there were raised humps along the platform for wheelchair users and there would be [someone] there too with a ramp. She also radioed ahead to Brighton... She had such a kind voice and spoke clearly to make sure I understood ...so helpful and reassuring. ...At the other end, there was a member of staff waiting with a ramp and he knew we were connecting to Seaford and told us the platform to go to.

Sarah, leisure, urban

...I was having trouble with a ticket machine ...a ticket gate supervisor came over to see what the hold-up was ...Unfortunately ...I believe she just saw an incompetent old person slowing people down. So she demanded to know what I wanted but because of her possible pre-conception I don't believe she listened fully and almost ended up getting the wrong ticket. In the end, she gave up on me muttering that it wasn't her job anyway.... I did eventually select the right ticket but, including the intervention, the whole process took about 5 minutes.

Gavin, leisure, urban

...and some examples of the experience of remote customer service specifically

Contact centre assistance:

Before a journey

I did recently try to transfer my ticket to another date. I tried to do this online however I couldn't understand the instructions.

I emailed customer service ...after spending ages to find an email address and ended up having to use the complaints address as all I could find was FAQ's.

I was advised that I couldn't transfer the date of the ticket as it was an advance ticket. However I knew this ...was incorrect as the web pages said I could change it but only by getting a refund (less £10 fee), cutting the old ticket into 4 quarters and taking a picture and uploading it together with a picture of the new ticket.... after having to go to the station (30 minutes drive away) to purchase [it]. The claim was then accepted less £10.00 fee.

What a convoluted and stressful experience it was and even the staff didn't seem to know how to do it].

Clive, business, rural

During a journey

[On a recent journey to Gatwick Airport] my assist wasn't there [I am a wheelchair user and had booked Passenger Assistance] ...and given that it was so early [in the morning] I wanted to make sure assistance was [indeed] being provided.

So I hit the information/help point by the lift at [STATION]. The colleague ... greeted me politely but didn't really fully understand my concern of why I was panicking a bit that I hadn't seen anyone. She indicated that she checked and could 'see the assistance' on the booking and said not to worry as typically staff would come 5-10 mins before the service.... Whilst polite, she appeared wholly indifferent to my concerns and took no action that improved the situation. [It felt like]... an excuse just to get rid of me as the colleague who came later said they had no record (despite me booking)

The situation was very stressful as my trip was time bound - I was catching a flight and told her this. I just think it's too easy not to have empathy when you're not in a situation yourself and in a call centre

Joshua, leisure & commuter, rural

After a journey

...then it was delayed, then it was cancelled ...This went on for over half an hour until the announcement came that the [whole line] was cancelled ...

Next day I put in a complaint and claim for refund... I found it tricky finding a complaint form online...

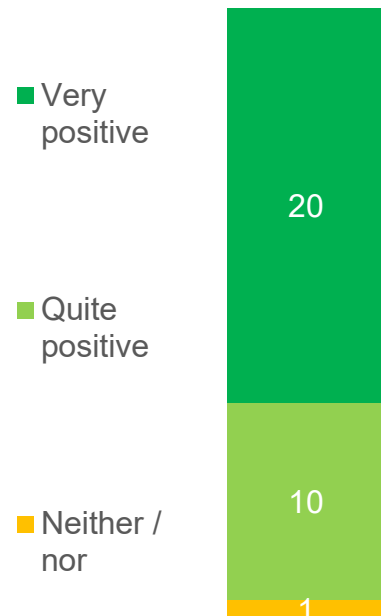
[But] I completed and sent off the form with a photo of my ticket. I was pleased with the response. I received a proper apology which was specific rather than a general apology. It explained what the problem had been that day on the line so it seemed someone had investigated what had happened and what the consequence was for me. It was acknowledged I had to take an alternative route so I was refunded for the whole ticket to Southend [which I was pleasantly surprised by].

Riz, business, urban

**Overall response
to the proposed
new standards**

Initial reactions to the standards – and the concept of having standards – is really positive

Initial reaction to standards
(Task 79a, March 2024)



Participants' feedback highlights the value in:

- ✓ **Standardisation & consistency**
- ✓ **Customer-centricity**
- ✓ **Accountability**



Publicising the existence of these standards could bring perception benefits in its own right, given the right communication (even if most rail users, outside of this community research context, won't read the detail)

This feedback is very similar to that for proposed standards around the customer experience during disruption to train services (see report, November 2023)

...I depend on public transport so these standards would improve my interaction with train travel and staff. Also I am concerned about the environment and would like to ...be in a position where I feel I could recommend train travel to others.

Riz, business & leisure, urban

All the issues I have ...would be resolved if they would put an effort on empathy, supporting customers in the station, and consistency [for] a service we can rely on being the same

David, leisure, suburban

I just think they'd make such a difference. So good to have a common set of rules and guidance.

Joshua, leisure & commuter, rural

It shows they are willing to start caring.

Charles, commuter, urban

Base: all community participants (31); figures shown are absolute number of people

A reminder that customer service is just one (albeit critical) factor in whether or not people willingly choose or advocate train travel; nevertheless, there is consensus that when implemented, the standards will improve experience

In light of these standards, likelihood to...
(Task 79b, March 2024)



Note that this is in the context that all participants in this community are at least occasional users of trains, and some have no choice

*The standards are encouraging if they are consistently followed. However, ideally things should not go wrong as often as they do ...a **service that often has cancellations and delays gives you reservations about recommending.***

Fiona, leisure, suburban

*The standards are perfect ...[But] on a personal level **my travel is based on cost, functionality and convenience** which are not hugely affected by [these standards].*

Neville, business, suburban

*...travelling by train is unfortunately a necessity either way so I would continue to use it in the same way irrespective of the new standards, **but the new standards would help me have a more positive outlook on train travel** and actually enjoy it vs just using it as a necessity.*

Jay, commuter, suburban

“

Customer service would be a third priority behind price and reliability... Nevertheless, this would be extremely desirable (especially as problems with the first two inevitably bring about a greater demand on the latter.)

...improvement in customer service would improve my experience of train travel and would incline me towards recommending it to others.

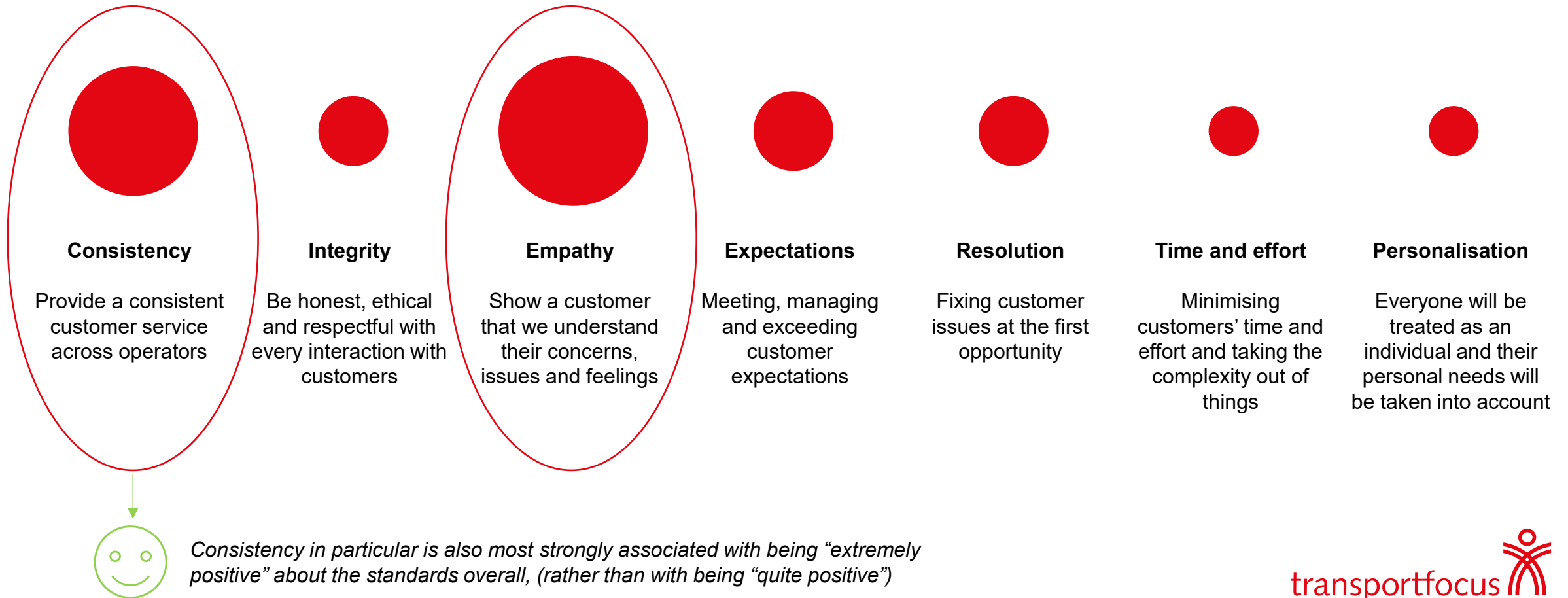
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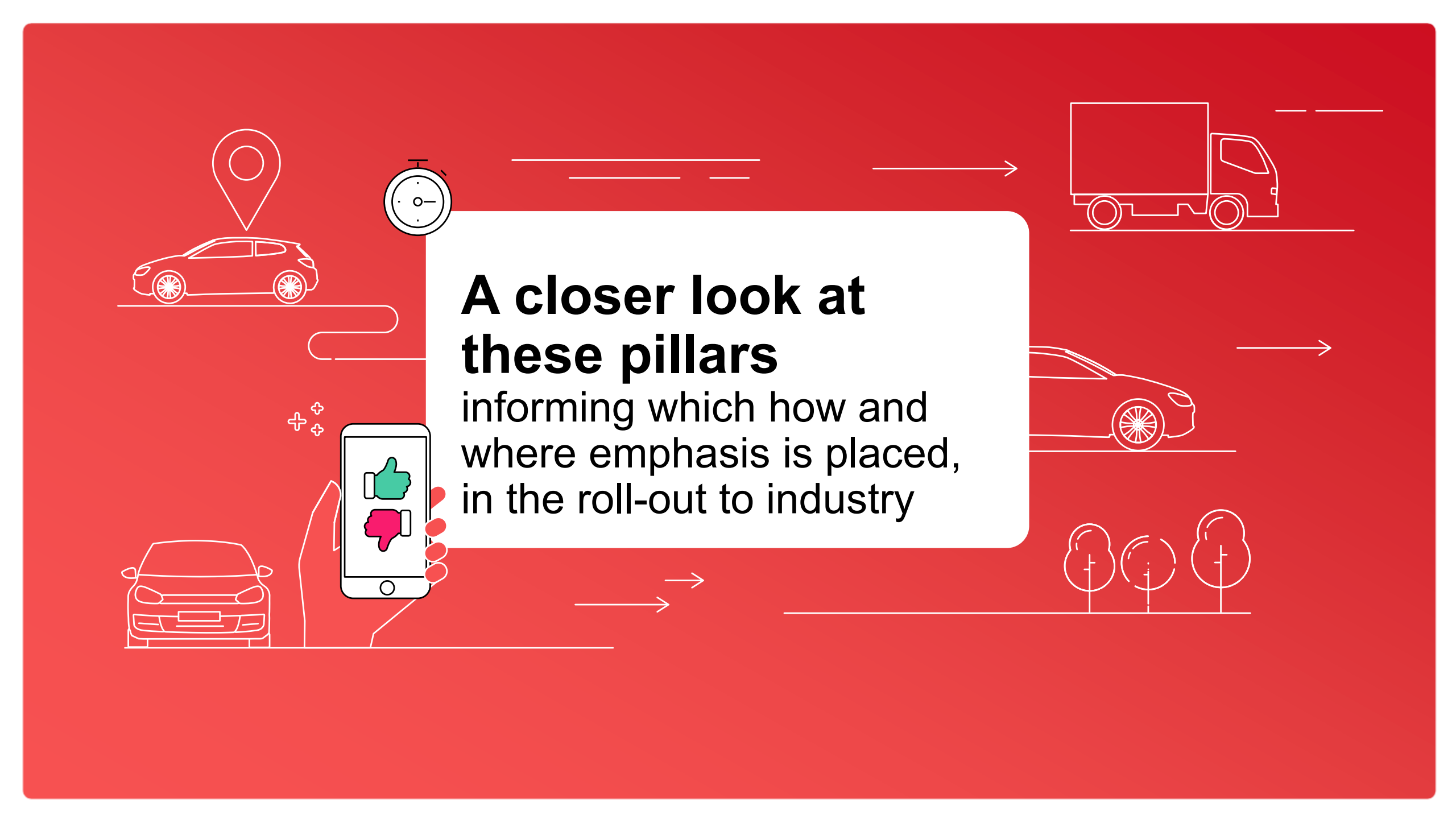
John, 40s, leisure & business, rural

The standards are proposed under seven pillars; all are meaningful to passengers (and are interlinked), but two resonate particularly powerfully: **consistency, empathy**

Themes in community participants' feedback about which of the standards mean the most to them

Bubble sizes provide a qualitative indication of the relative frequency with which each of these themes arise in participants' overall feedback





**A closer look at
these pillars**
informing which how and
where emphasis is placed,
in the roll-out to industry

“

I think [going “beyond transactional interactions”] would be most important to me.

It’s really important to feel the person understands the problem and responds with empathy, especially in a difficult situation.

”

Rachel, 40s, business, rural

Empathy makes people feel seen and heard in their own right, rather than just part of a logistical challenge – and necessarily leads to the best outcomes for individuals

It links closely with and is supported by the principle of **Personalisation**:

Being non-judgmental and open to individual customers' wide-ranging individual circumstances – and ready to adapt to and accommodate them

...doing their best to make me feel safe and secure [means the most to me]. I suffer from quite bad anxiety so this being in place would be helpful ...[so] I feel I can approach staff members and not be scared to speak to them.

Lucy, leisure, suburban

Understand why travel ...is so important to me and recognise the added stress when parts of my journey are let down....

Make sure staff put themselves in your shoes and show genuine care and interest - this ...can make such a meaningful difference.

Joshua, commuting & leisure, rural, wheelchair user

[I like the concept of being] ...inclusive and accessible to all customers, whatever their individual needs... [and] support ...when and where you need it.

...As a wheelchair user... I'm quite independent so if I do need help, it is because I really need it ...so easy access when I need it is important

Sarah, leisure, urban, wheelchair user

It impacts people

emotionally (including how the customer feels about travelling by train as a result)

I think it's just all about emphasising empathy in staff to be able to handle different types of situations well ...I think these are the fundamental building blocks to good customer service... where staff [are] able to detect that customers are maybe somewhat stressed is important in providing the best service for them.

Mike, leisure, urban

...and **tangibly**:

in theory, suitable help and resolution must inevitably follow from genuine care

I love the empathy part ...see[ing] everyone as a person instead of just random annoying customers....

If there were standards like this in place for my situation, the man would have come back, helped me with my journey, maybe allowed me on to the first train ... This would make me much more positive about getting and recommending the train.

Una, leisure & business, urban

...she just saw an incompetent old person ...but because of her pre-conception I don't believe she listened fully and [I] almost ended up getting the wrong ticket...

Gavin, leisure, urban

Inconsistency is currently a source of real frustration. It matters because it is **the root of setting and managing expectations** (and therefore facilitating confidence and fairness), **and making things feel more or less effortful**

To rail users themselves, consistency in customer service should span...

Processes and policies

*For me it would be really good if ...standards were consistent. This would be so **useful in knowing how to complete processes such as transferring tickets to a different date or claiming a refund.***

Standard 9 covers this as the industry would be working together to introduce consistent procedures and policies.

Clive, business, rural

*I regularly encounter problems where a **delay on one train causes further delays and confusion on subsequent trains** with other operators. If this could be improved and standardised, it would greatly improve my experience.*

John, leisure & business, rural

Information given to customers (via staff and any other channel)

*....this is **one of my pet peeves**, where you get conflicting information at a station... so this will greatly help ...I would expect **all staff to ...have the same information so they do not provide conflicting advice (and also the boards etc. should match** what people working at the station say, again to make it consistent).*

Jay, commuter, suburban

***This is a bug bear** In my recent example I got **certain advice from the ticket office but something else from monitors and announcements** ... I believe staff on the ground know better and should have authority and support to give clear and final information.*

Riz, business & leisure, urban

...supported by consistent information shared among staff and organisations

*I think part of the issue I experienced was the disjointed nature of the network, the issue on the particular day was a points failure... I assume this is a Network Rail thing, however I'm speaking to the Train Operators, who may not have the full information. I think **your 'one network' principle could help with that if you had integrated systems** that every person who plays a part in the rail network can access in real time.*

Stuart, commuter, suburban

Staff behaviour and attitude (training)

*Having standards across the board is important so staff are at the same level and not [variable] depending on the company [they work for]. **National Rail should be assessed as a whole, not separately and individually** depending on the network or company.*

Sarah, leisure, urban

Holding customer expectations in high regard, and striving for **tangible resolutions**, were the next most meaningful pillars of customer service

Expectations:

A common, frequent frustration amongst participants is being “left hanging”, not knowing what their next move should be – so commitments to avoid leaving them in the dark are naturally welcome

...the staff member said she didn't think [trains would] be running... for a couple of hours...she must have heard [this] from someone who knows what's going on. It would be nice for us to also know [this] ...instead of [the “official” boards] saying “delayed”, then waiting around ...for it to change to “cancelled” at the last minute..

Claire, leisure, suburban

- ✓ (Indeed this is one way to demonstrate genuine care and empathy)

Being kept informed [is the most meaningful idea to me] ...When things go wrong an information void is so frustrating. Being told when you will get the next update and actually getting it make you feel that you are valued as a customer and that the service provider has empathy.

Fiona, leisure, suburban

Resolution:

Standards to facilitate this are inevitably relevant when things go wrong

*...I think they are all very important valid points but [especially] those under “Resolution”. **If something goes wrong ...you want it fixed...***

Rachel, business, rural

These are underpinned by principles within the other pillars

Having and showing **integrity** is a fundamental, supporting attitude and way of working. In particular...

- ✓ **Honesty / transparency** is important in setting and managing expectations

[I like point 20:]...The main thing is being honest so I know what to expect

Sarah, leisure, urban

- ✓ **Accountability and ownership** necessarily leads to faster, better resolutions

***Taking ownership** ... even if they can't fix the issue themselves, **would significantly reduce a lot of frustration** that can be experienced when this does not take place.*

Mark, leisure, suburban

...mistakes are inevitable in ...so accountability is key... when rail travel goes wrong it's important to own up and rectify the situation ...

Alice, leisure, suburban

And deliberate endeavours to **minimise customer effort** is a valuable ambition

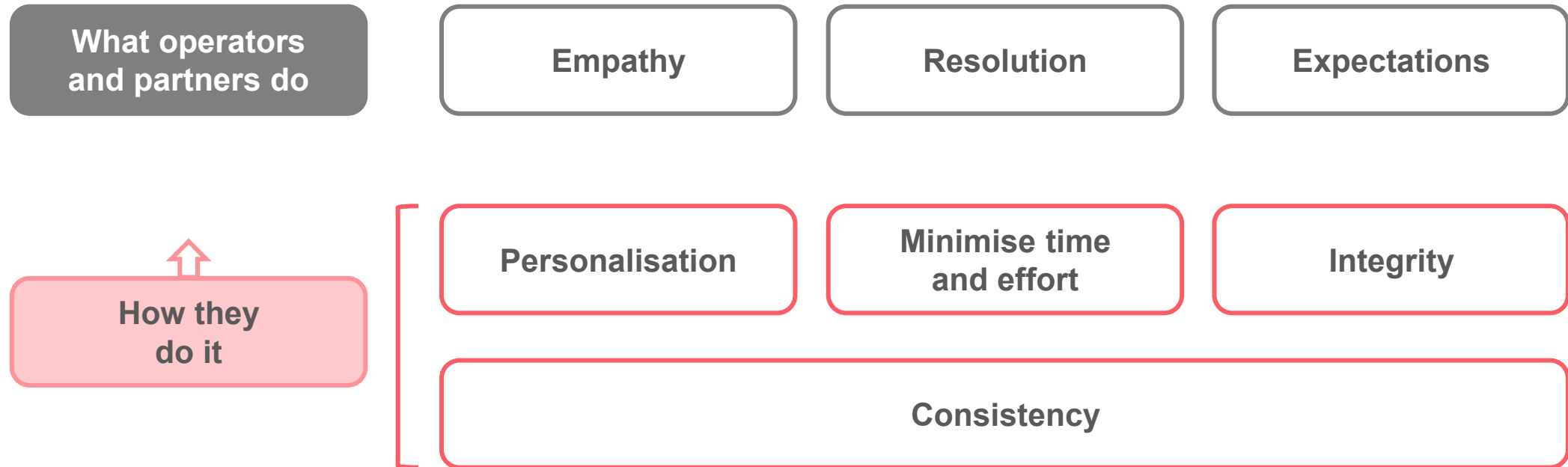
[I like the principles under] “Time and Effort”. Make it far easier for me to sort out issues and less burdensome. So if an issue arises, it's on the train operator to sort it out, and not all on me as it currently is.

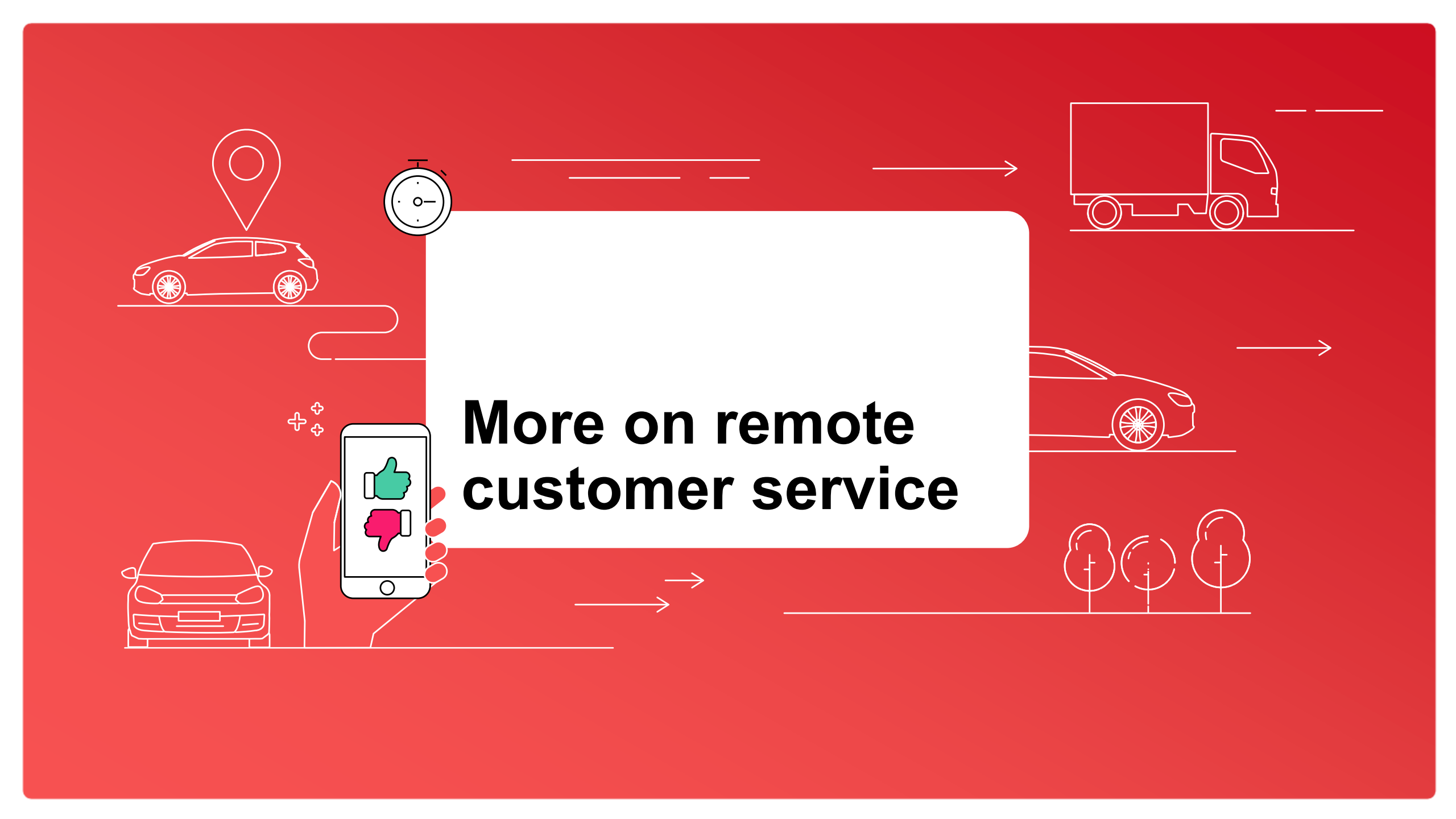
Rob, leisure, suburban

I accept things can go wrong [but inconsistencies and policies can be unhelpful] ...it was difficult to find a ...refund form online. I would appreciate a consistent ...process ...This is also related to Time and Effort. ...Trains were cancelled and I walked past the ticket office thinking why can't I just hand back my ticket for an immediate refund.

Riz, business & leisure, urban

The seven pillars might be further conceived of as...





More on remote customer service

Customers' descriptions of their most recent contact centre interactions confirmed issues highlighted in earlier feedback, which fall into three areas:

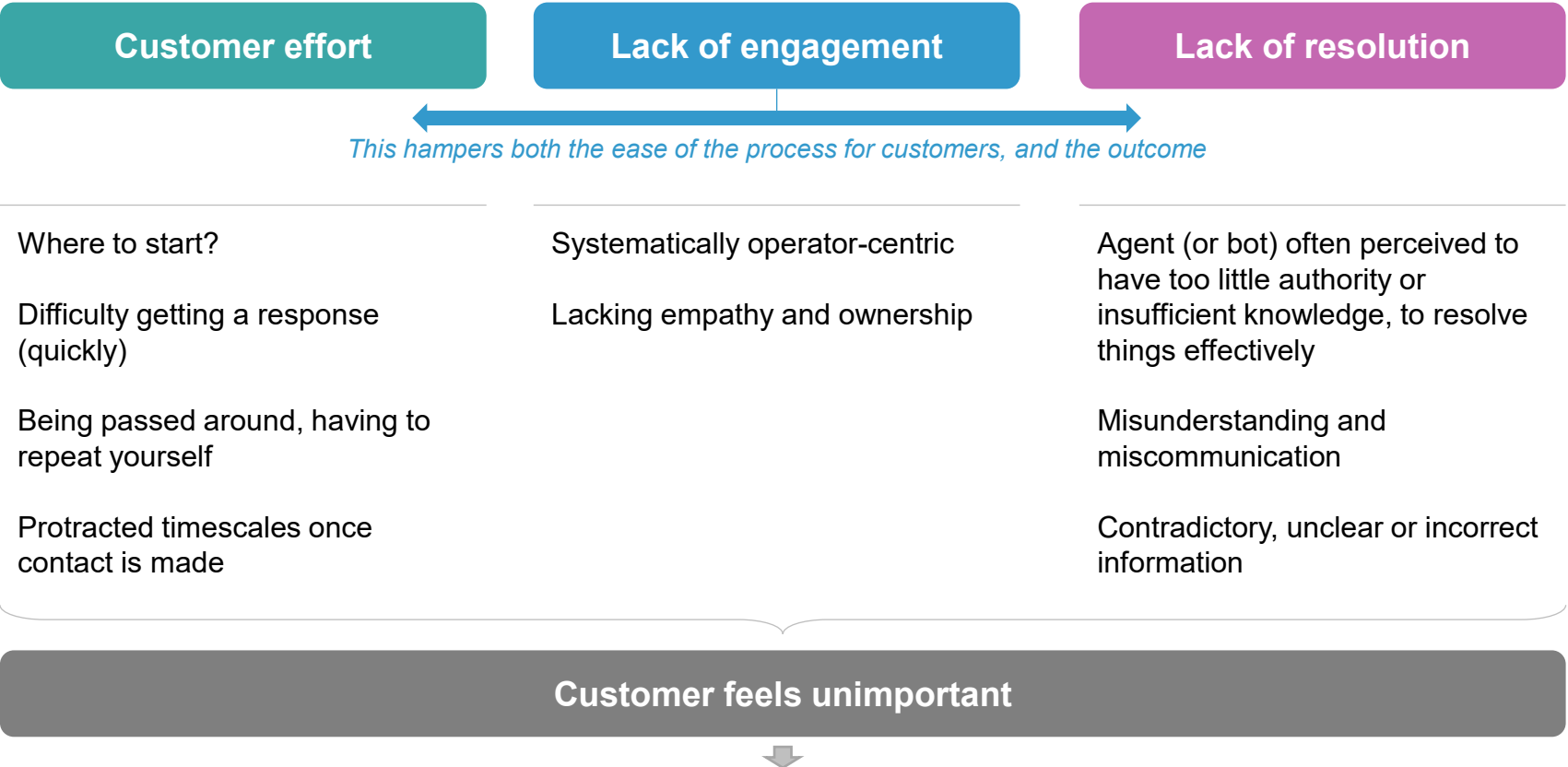


(Recap: July 2023):



Participants described dissatisfactory service overall in about half of all examples of their interactions with train companies by phone / email / webchat.

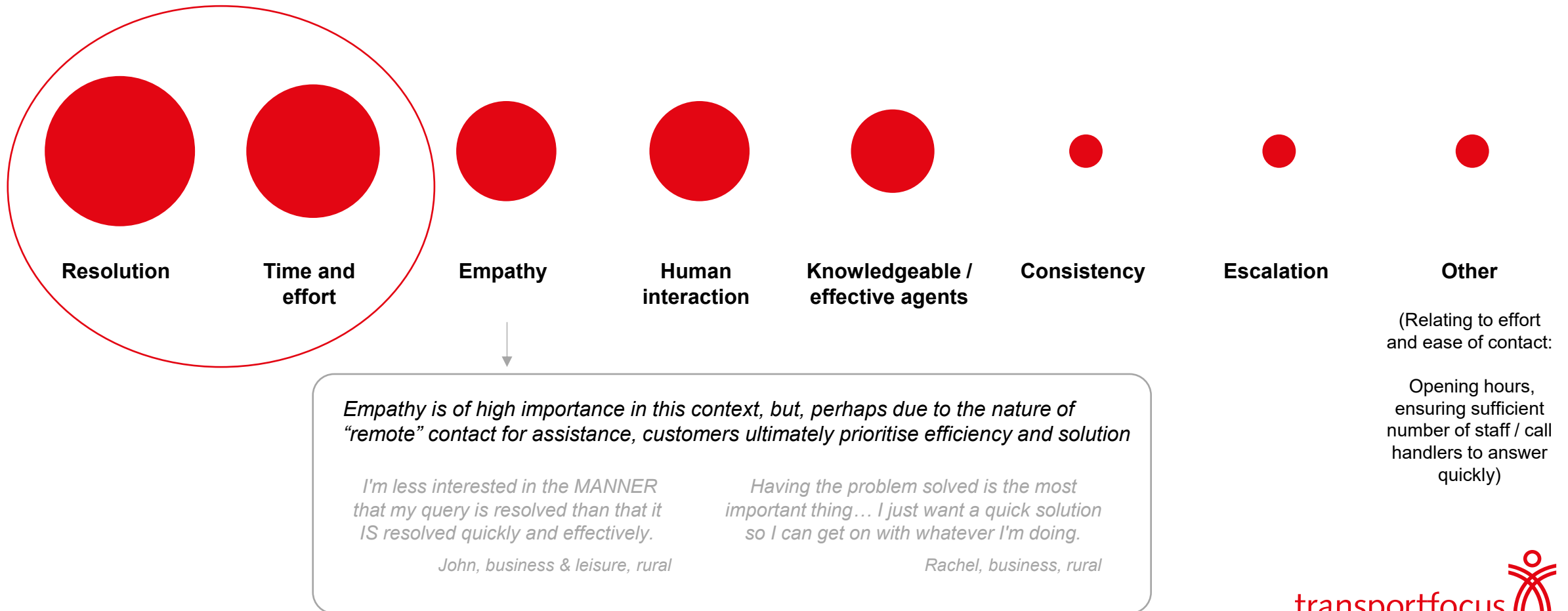
This is partly influenced by the often more negative context in which people make this contact, compared to other customer service. Many interactions here are about complaints, problems, and refunds.



By nature, being delivered remotely can make empathy and engagement more difficult (and this is not unique to rail). Operators and others need to work particularly hard in this context to overcome this.

The key themes which resonated with participants: **resolving problems and reducing the effort to achieve this** are the priorities

Themes in community participants' feedback about which of the remote customer service standards mean the most to them
Bubble sizes provide a qualitative indication of the relative frequency with which each of these themes arise in participants' overall feedback



“

I usually find remote interaction is ok. I would just like the process to be consistent across the board, [and] clear and prompt

”

Riz, 60s, business & leisure, suburban

“

Ease of contact is an absolute must.

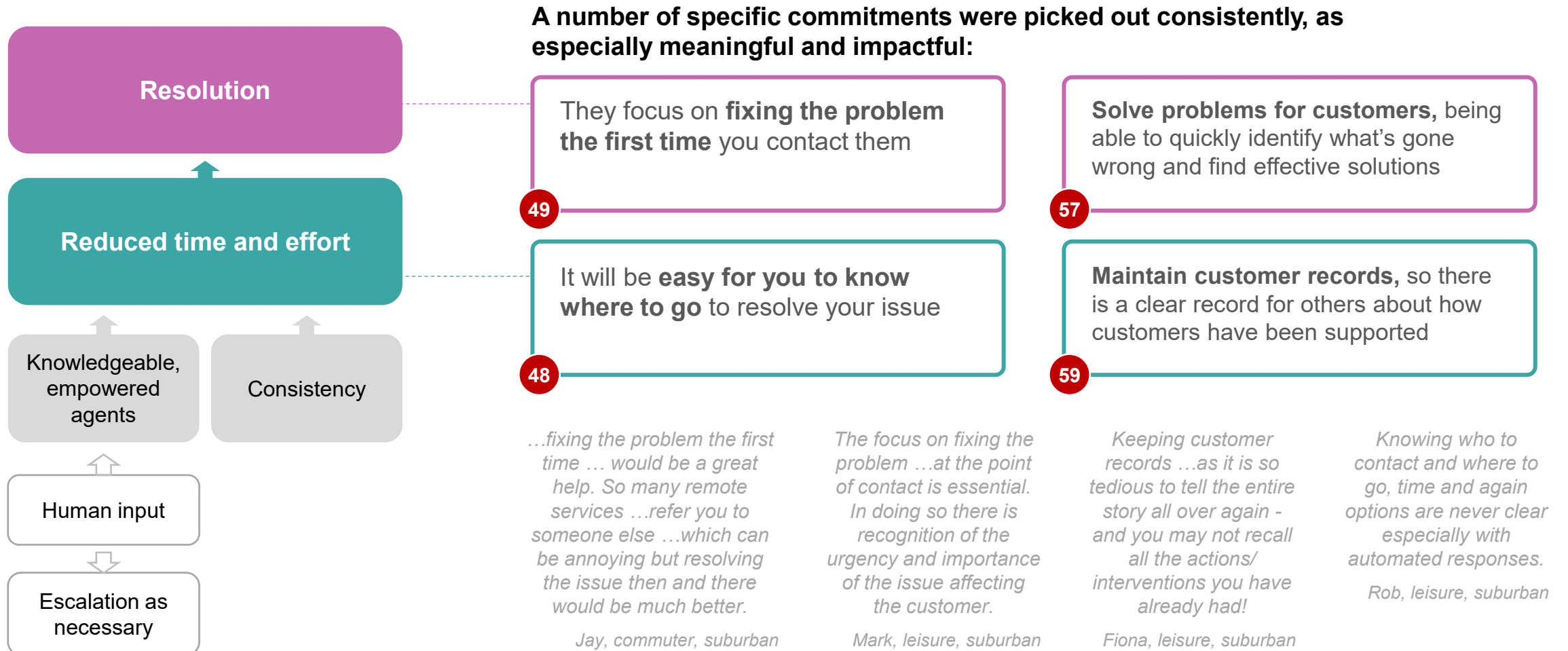
...corporations [in rail and elsewhere] are, seemingly, doing their utmost to avoid contact with the public. Therefore prominently displayed sources of contact must be available.

As much as possible, that contact should be with a person who is directly in touch with operations (i.e. not some person employed by a different organisation ...on another continent).

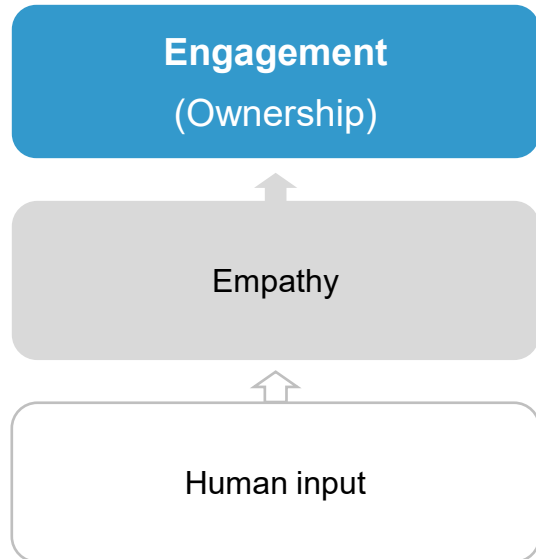
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Gavin, 60s, leisure, suburban

...indeed the majority of customers' feedback added up to highlight that **the focus must be squarely on solving their issues, efficiently**



Empathy is a part of demonstrating engagement to make customers feel valued, and as for other, in-person customer service, can help to expedite the right resolution



Further specific commitments which participants were drawn to, supported this principle

Understanding the circumstances of the complaint (including any loss or distress suffered), using all the available information and speaking to the key parties involved

61

"Understanding the circumstances" ...I like this, it sounds they are committed to following through with complaints made on online channels, not just a tickboxing exercise but checking how they can help the complainant.

Barbara, business, urban

[Similarly] interactions with staff will be of high quality, with trained and knowledgeable colleagues - whilst the colleague was trained I just felt I was palmed off and wasted my time and it had no effect on the outcome despite my best efforts.

Joshua, commuter & leisure, rural

Human contact will be available whenever it's needed

66

#66 shows they are willing [to have] a human touch and [it's] not left to machines

Charles, commuter, suburban

All the points on empathy.... Point 66 is incredibly important to me. Having real life interaction is very helpful for me, as online can be hard to understand.

Cerys, leisure, suburban

Third parties, working as an interface between train operators and customers, are a key contributor to the totality of customers' remote interactions with the rail industry

Some comments on this page were not given in direct response to the customer service standards, and are taken from discussions on other topics, but have relevance here

Third parties are often used precisely because they can act as an aggregator or umbrella across what can be perceived as a confusing industry

I usually try to buy tickets online, and often ...Trainline if I'm not sure of the route and who the train operator is on that line

Stuart, commuter, suburban

They can be equally consulted for help

...although [Trainline] is a popular website that provides information about train schedules, fares and ticket bookings, customers ...might ...assume it is the official website of the nation's railway network .

Charlotte, business, urban

They have the potential to both support or undermine the great work being done to standardise customer expectations



Given these points, work on baseline expectations for third parties should, if possible, keep pace with the work being done within the industry itself

They can work efficiently with partners (especially for refunds)....

I contacted the Trainline recently about a delay. They forwarded my complaint to [TOC]... and this week I received an email from [TOC]..., apologizing... [and with compensation] details . The response took a few weeks but [I'm] happy with outcome.

Anne, leisure, urban

...but can contribute to confusion and effort

I had to contact [TOC] about concessionary fares...Try as I did, I couldn't find anywhere online how to access the discounted fare... I was looking mainly at [TOC], Trainline, Network Rail, and local authority websites and it was a bit disjointed. I eventually went to [the] station.

I consider myself comfortable online, and was amazed at how difficult it was to find the details of this scheme.

Simon, business, suburban

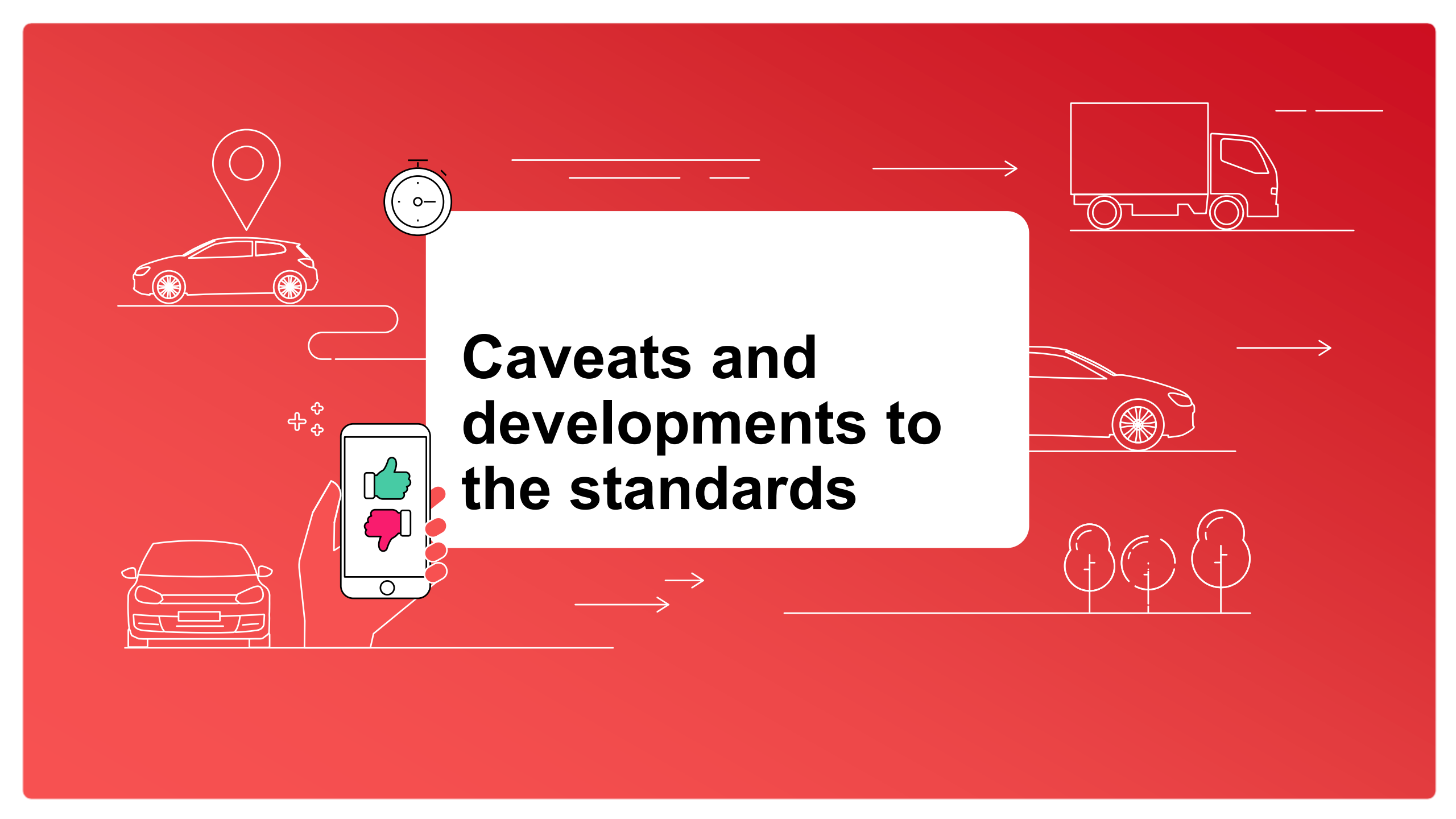
I think this would be hard to deliver for some players in the industry (like Trainline) who often are the interface between passengers and the train operators, but aren't operating under the same license obligations, etc. ...

The work you're doing with a shared vision between all Operators is a great start, but then we can't forget the third parties who support the processes (like Trainline)

Stuart, commuter, suburban

...there needs to be a way for train services to refund ...customers [including where you purchased indirectly]. ...When you don't receive adequate services..., say with Deliveroo, you get credit towards another meal ... I [have] found the service very convenient, using a chat system to discuss my missing food...and I [am happy to] ...use the service again. I think the rail industry can learn from [this]... [By contrast, using] Trainline for tickets is helpful, but there's no chat facility and it's difficult to get refunds ...

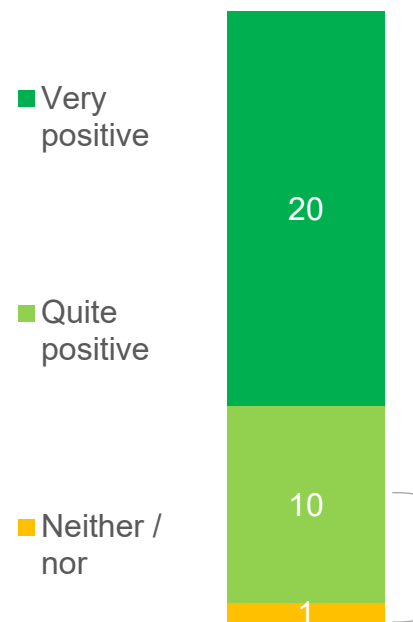
Peter, commuter, suburban



Caveats and developments to the standards

(Perhaps inevitably) there is some cynicism, even where the majority see the setting of standards as an important step

Initial reaction to standards
(Task 79a, March 2024)



Where there is cynicism, it's due to concerns about implementation , and / or the belief that these points should be a given	<i>Honestly, I think these guidelines are very well thought out and are very sound. My only worries would be around the implementation of this, and whether the guidelines may be too long to be of maximum impact.</i> Mike, leisure, urban	<i>I find the standards to be very comprehensive..., the implementation is where the rubber will meet the road.</i> Barbara, business, urban	<i>These are the type of standards you expect from any service to be honest, but it is extremely difficult for staff to be consistent and carry that out all the time...</i> Sarah, leisure, urban
There is some interest (from what is now a fairly engaged, knowledgeable group) in: ? How the standards will be measured / upheld ? Timings for (remote) resolution / response	<i>The standards are good, but ... there is nothing here that is ground-breaking... [However it's] great that they are written down and can be measured against</i> Tracy, leisure, urban <i>How will this be upheld?</i> Una, leisure, urban	<i>There should be a standard for how the operator gets back to you if they can't answer at the time. For some questions it might be ok to get a commitment to a reply in a reasonable timeframe.</i> Simon, business, suburban	

Consider making some reference to measurement / assessment, and timeframes for responses or resolutions (even if not in detail), if and when any of this is communicated publicly. This might help to make the commitments more specific and tangible, to further reinforce credibility.

Base: all community participants (31); figures shown are absolute number of people

Further themes which were loud and clear within participants' reactions were all centred around staff

Feedback emphasised the importance of sufficient numbers of visible (or contactable), approachable and knowledgeable staff, and company culture behind the scenes

Characteristics (recruitment)

Knowledge, skills and ability to help

*I think it's important that staff are aware of specific details for a journey as who am I supposed to ask if I need help? **All I ask is for a knowledgeable agent***

Michelle, leisure, suburban

*...I understand the difficulties of learning the language to a high level, [but] **anybody in a customer-facing role really should have a requisite level of English.***

Especially in remote situations, it can often be very difficult to understand and... this just makes a bad situation all the more frustrating.

John, leisure & business, rural

Willingness and openness to help

*...regular customer service training ...especially with accessibility training. **The fact that staff will be recruited based on their customer centric behaviours and attitudes... instils trust***

Sarah, leisure, urban

Deployment and resourcing

Suitable workload and capacity to help

I put in a claim for a delay ...I'm still waiting ...I have sent all receipts, etc. but I just get a response that they are overrun with refund requests .

*This is so annoying . Why could I not just do the click for automatic refund for both tickets - when they were [both] purchased through the LNER site.... **In my experience staff are kind and respectful but [have] too much work..** these [standards] would not help my situation*

Tracy, leisure, urban

*I hope that these standards could be easily implemented but **it would need a large increase in recruitment** to carry them out.*

Gavin, leisure, urban

The **particular importance of empathy** cements the relevance of customers' desire for seeing or having **access to staff, in person**

*I first [went via] the app, ...[then] webchat However, [the refund] did not happen. I tried the web chat a couple of times more and the same thing happened. In the end... after a lot of digging ...and annoying redirections ... I spoke to a human being! **This person was sympathetic and apologetic,** and the refund was immediate...*

Fiona, leisure, suburban

Working culture

Bringing all staff along to optimise and drive best outcomes

*...any raising of customer service standards **can only be achieved by concurrently raising work satisfaction standards...***

*There should be no problem in meeting these objectives with a happy and content workforce, and **I hope that a similar exercise to this one involving standards of the treatment of staff is also being carried out.***

Mark, leisure, suburban

(Keep in mind the **context** for the community's very positive response to the standards)

(As we also saw in relation to proposed standards around the customer experience during disruption):

- This community of rail users is **highly engaged**, and may have become **somewhat more knowledgeable** about various aspects of the rail industry
- **The standards come partly in response to their own feedback** about customer service, so in part it would be surprising if they were not pleased to see such a response
- Typical rail users will only experience the consequences of these standards. **Most people are unlikely to be so consciously aware of this type of change and progress being made behind the scenes.**

“

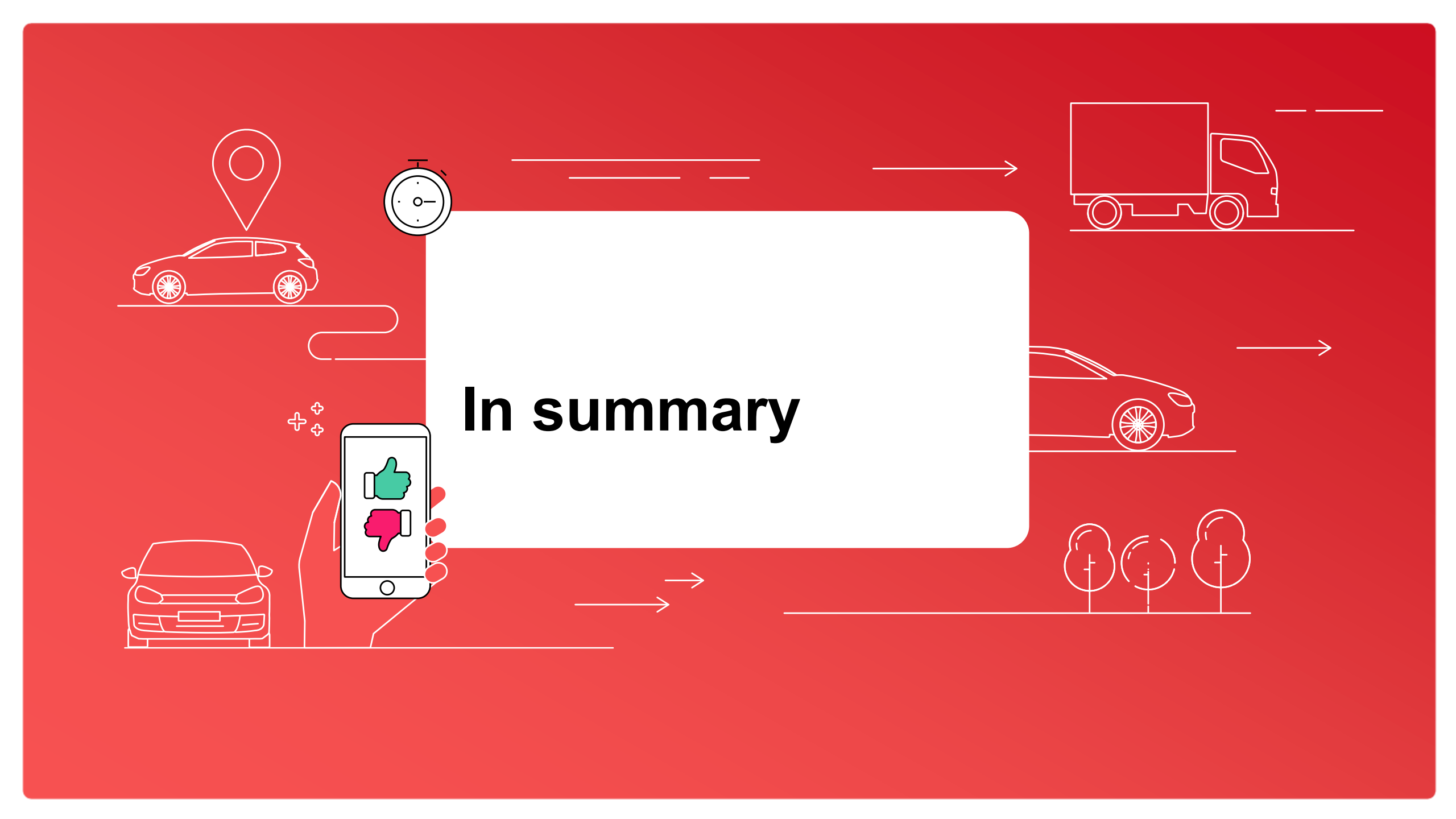
...[it's] extremely positive and shows the ethical standards you'd expect in a 5* train service

”

Alice, 20s, leisure, suburban

Nevertheless, the standards are clearly a very positive step forward from customers' perspective.

But the industry should not necessarily expect the strong response here to filter through to such strong, positive changes in attitudes to rail more broadly. More wholesale attitudinal change will, of course, be a slower process, and influenced by many other factors.



In summary

Summary (1)

Reactions to the proposed standards for customer service are very similar to the response to similar commitments for the customer experience during disruption:

Almost universally, participants in the community are positive, both about the concept of establishing baseline expectation for customers, and in terms of individual ideas.

The fact that standards and commitments are being developed is seen as a great advancement for some big ideas that customers will benefit from: **consistency** across the industry, a **customer-first (rather than logistics-first) mindset**, and **accountability**.

The seven key “pillars” under which the standards have been organised thus far make sense to customers.

Of these, **consistency and empathy are the most meaningful ideas**, which are likely to have the most salient impact. **Specific principles and steps towards delivering on these big concepts are worth emphasising in any roll-out activity to operators, partners, and their staff.**

Taking customers’ expectations and need for a solution to any query or problem seriously is also of paramount importance – especially (but certainly not limited to) remote customer service interactions, where genuine engagement and ownership is felt to be habitually lacking, both in the rail industry and in this type of customer service generally across many sectors.

The customer effort involved in remote, contact centre interactions is also a prominent issue currently, and all steps to minimise this are likely to be particularly appreciated and impactful.

Summary (2)

Some key additional actions and developments to the current proposals, from the customer perspective, are:

- **Consider publicising the existence of the standards**, with appropriate communication
- If this is done, reinforce credibility with some indication and **acknowledgement that standards will be measured**, and specifically for remote service standards, **attached to timeframe expectations**
- **Ensure that staff recruitment and deployment, and working cultures, are reviewed and developed to effectively underpin the great intentions** set out in the standards (and consider letting customers know about this in an appropriate way)
- Ensure that, where any standards are likely to affect third parties, or where customers might reasonably have the same expectations from **third parties, that they are also involved and supported to deliver on this**

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.