

Shaping Rail's Future: Customer Community

Report: Nov 2023

Workshop: the on-board experience
Space and environment



Shaping Rail's Future: the customer community



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

40

Participants with a mix of:

- Reasons for using rail, 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



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

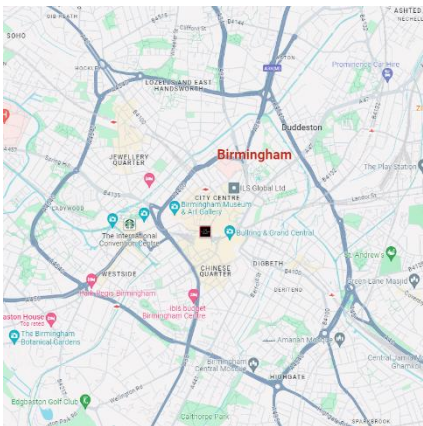
In addition, two face to face workshops to discuss topics further, generate ideas, and feed back on proposed concepts and solutions



12 months
from February 2023

Names have been changed throughout this report to protect anonymity

November 2023 saw the second of two in-person workshops with the participants



Saturday 4th
November 2023



Central
Birmingham

Full day workshop with
nearly all of the community,
joined by GBRTT, DfT and
Transport Focus colleagues



**Deep focus on customer experiences on
board trains:**

**Facilities &
services**

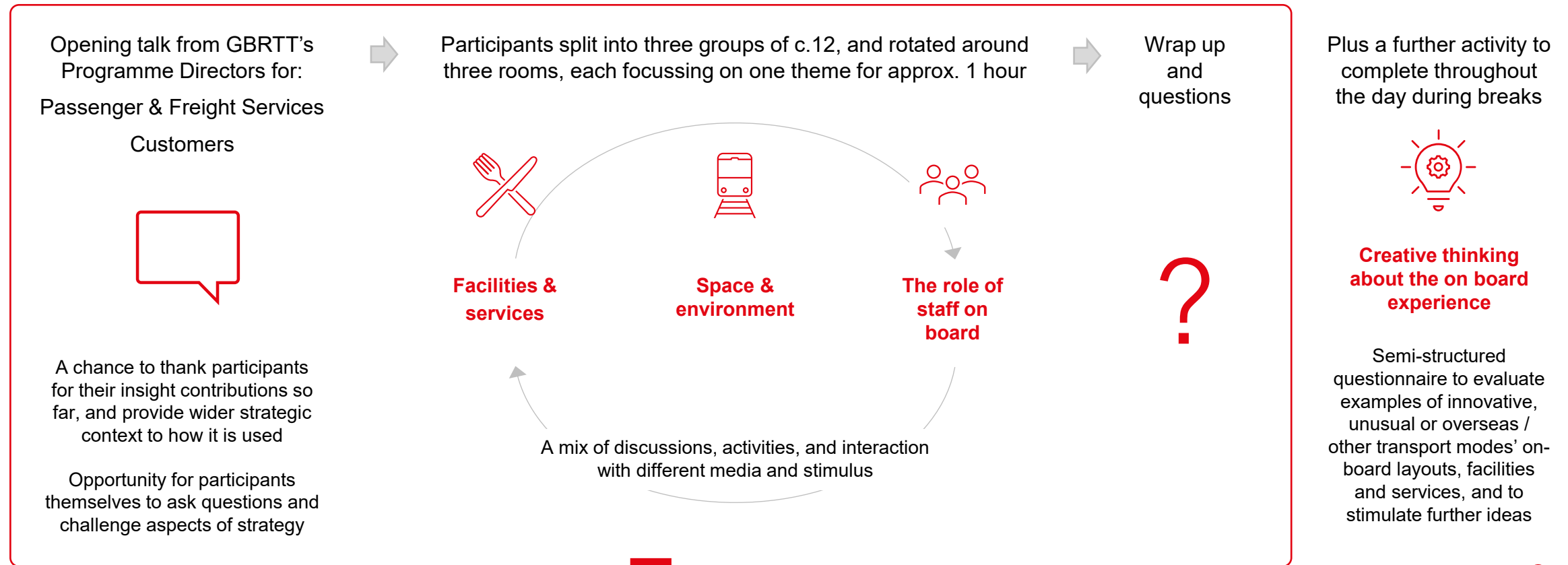
**Layout &
environment**

**The role
of staff**



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

....and they worked hard!

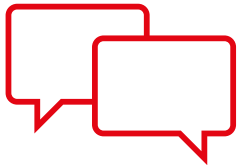


This report looks at what participants told us about **the space and environment on board**

Understanding customer experiences and needs for the on-board space and environment: overview of approach

Workshop “warm-up”:

Activities in the online platform, one week before the workshop



On your most recent train journey, what was it like on board in terms of...?

Seating

Workshop activities and discussion



Immediate reactions to a variety of existing and mocked-up interior layout options



Mini group discussions on experience and requirements for on board layout and environment

Luggage & equipment, etc

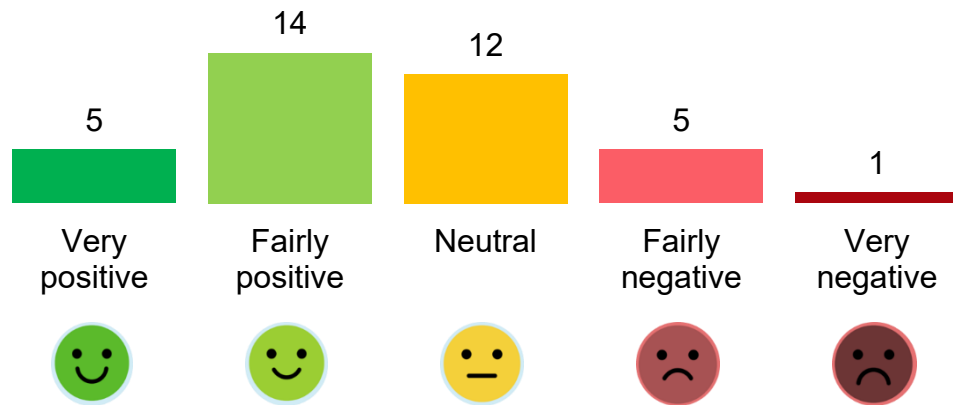
Seating & zones

Information about the space

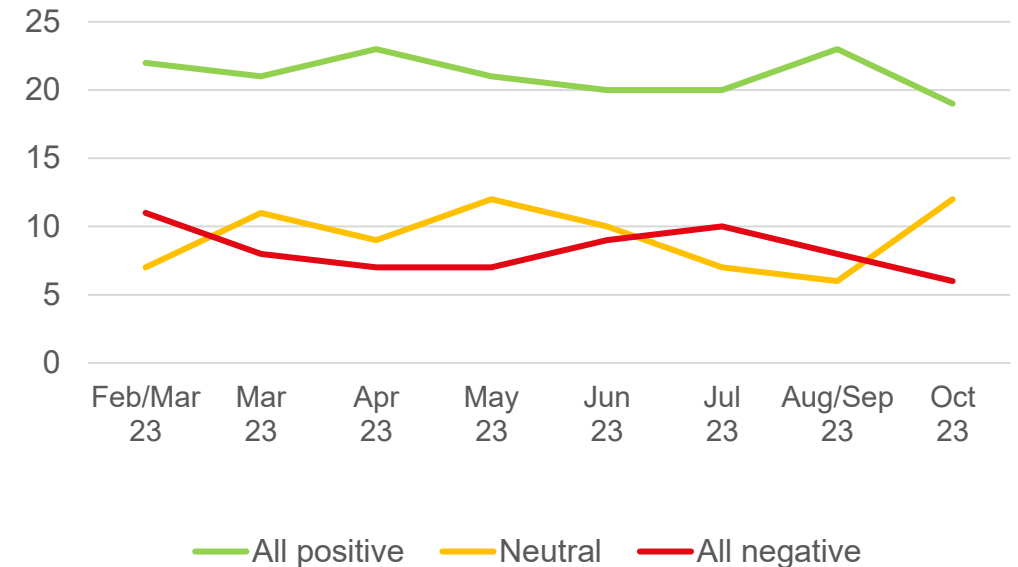
Cleanliness

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

How you feel about travelling by train at the moment: A snapshot
(Task 52, October 2023)



Trend so far



Participants are more likely to be positive when they....

- Typically travel for leisure, rather than work reasons (with regular commuters in particular being less positive overall)
- Live in more urban areas
- Do not have a disability or other health condition

Base: all community participants, Oct 2023 (37); figures shown are absolute number of people

Customer experiences
and needs for
**on-board space and
environment**

Current expectations for the on-board experience are quite basic (and low): rail users feel that **industry must get the basics right, before enhancements / innovations**

“

...just make sure it is clean, well maintained, safe, reliable and do this consistently

Stuart, commuter, suburban

”

“

[I want] a railway that gets you where you want to go, at times you want to go, for a reasonable price, and in reasonable comfort

Simon, business, suburban

”

...and the hierarchy of their priorities is:



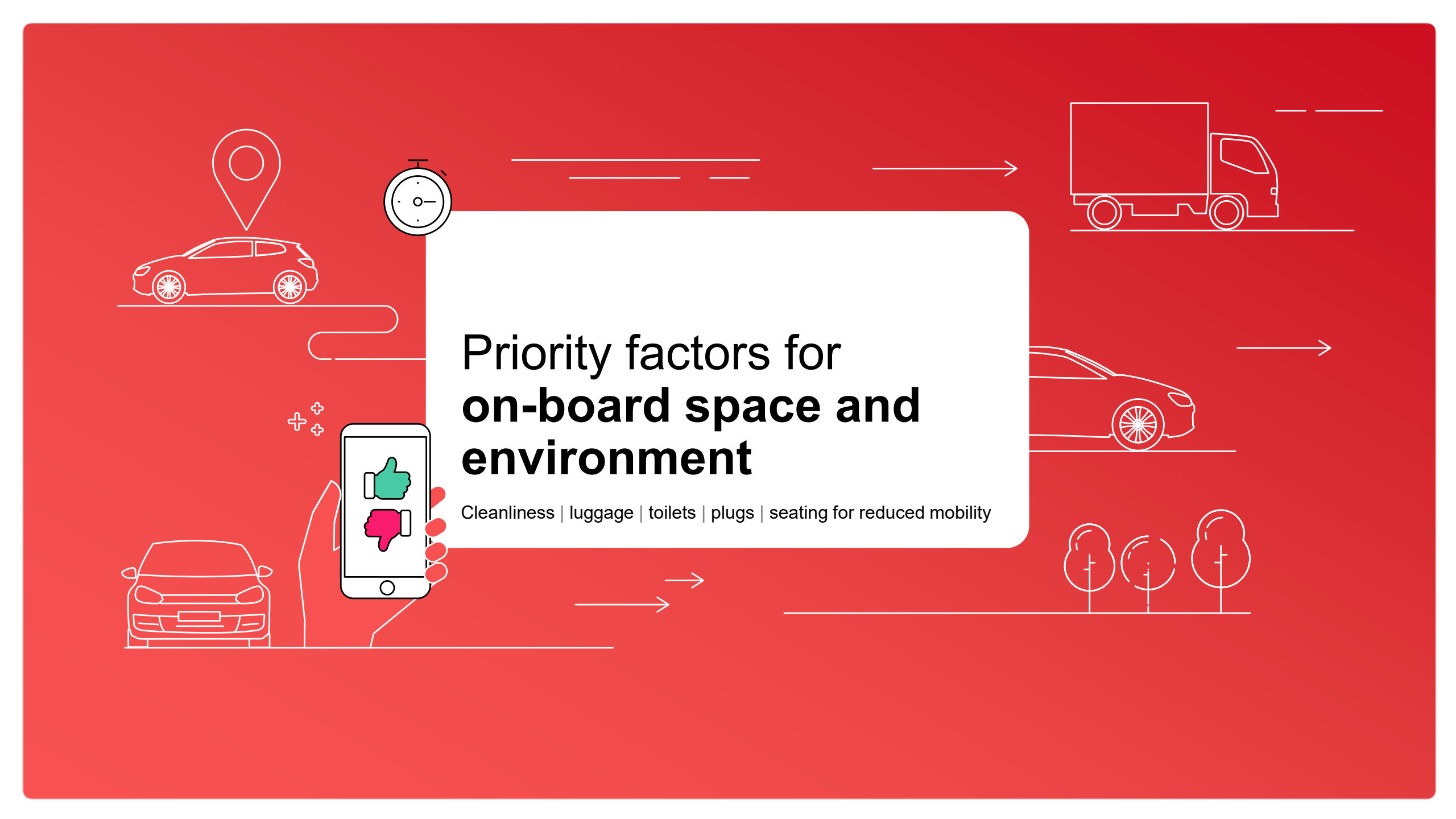
“

I am comfortable enough with the seats but would appreciate more cleanliness....

The main issue on a busy route is finding a seat.

”

Riz, 60, travels mainly for leisure, urban



Priority factors for on-board space and environment

Cleanliness | luggage | toilets | plugs | seating for reduced mobility

Cleanliness on board trains

Cleanliness is so important to train passengers because:



Being clean and tidy is necessary for obvious practical reasons!

- Preserving hygiene (which many people are more conscious of than ever, since Covid)
- Passengers being able to keep their own clothing and belongings clean
- Minimising clutter, with implications for health and safety



The broken window effect:

Passengers themselves admit that they are more likely to contribute to keeping their area clean if it already appears so (taking their litter away, keeping feet off seats, etc.), and vice versa

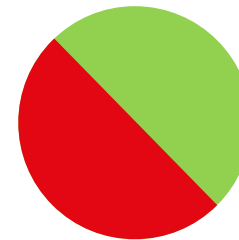


Broader perceptions of the industry

Poor cleanliness and maintenance can imply a lack of care for customers in general, confirming other negative assumptions that operators prioritise logistics over customers

Satisfaction with cleanliness is mixed

and varies by operator, time of day, and rolling stock



*...there was a very helpful guard ...the train was clean and on time. An all round excellent service.
(William, business, urban)*

*The older trains' seats are often dirty, stained, chewing gum stuck in them, falling apart, etc. The new trains seats are more comfortable.
(Fiona, leisure, suburban)*

Priorities and solutions for improving and standardising the customer experience of cleanliness

While the industry should rightly have standards covering a wide and detailed set of areas to be cleaned, and how, **the biggest factors influencing customer perceptions of cleanliness are:**

The inside of the train

(Rather than the outside)

With the exception that **windows** must be clean, and **graffiti**, which implies a lack of security as well as a lack of care, must be prevented / removed

(Graffiti is perceived to have reduced over the years)

Wear and tear

Cleanliness perceptions are linked to perceptions of upkeep generally, and so are influenced by age of stock

But from customers' perspective this isn't an excuse, rather **a reason to work equally hard, if not harder, to maintain (the perception of) cleanliness** on older trains

Litter

More bins are wanted on board, or (even better, if there is not space for large-enough bins, and given left-over drinks cannot be put in a bin) **in-person rubbish collections**

(Knowing there are) **bins at stations** could also lead more people to take rubbish with them, e.g. some leave coffee cups on tables, knowing they will be picked up, in absence of a bin at the destination

Seat coverings

Stains, gum, worn areas

(Perception that other surfaces are cleaned more regularly / thoroughly)

Some appetite for wipe-clean surfaces, but given this can also compromise comfort, no strong consensus here: a more **valuable solution for more customers would be knowing what cleaning practices take place, or seeing them in action**

Toilets*

Widely-held perceptions of being unclean, even if this is not always justified

Overall, there is a **lack of trust** around what cleaning happens, when, and how rigorous it is

So **there will be value in perception management more broadly, and making cleaning more visible**, in two areas:



Staff:

Particularly important to customers, who want to see...

- ✓ Enforcement around feet on seats (along with more pro-active action around other anti-social behaviour**)
- ✓ Cleaning in action, especially rubbish collection at intervals through a journey – indeed some question why this isn't done as standard already



Information and communication

- ✓ On board (e.g. signage informing customers what cleaning practices are in place / frequency of cleaning, etc.)
- ✓ Reminders to keep feet off seats and pick up litter (and why)
- ✓ Consider additional, detailed information about cleaning standards and practices, in other channels (e.g. similar to videos produced by some TOCs during Covid) – albeit that these have a more limited audience

Luggage storage: a salient issue, with high potential impact on the overall on-board experience



A widespread need

Luggage storage has **obvious importance for longer distance** / intercity services

But also **matters for commuter and shorter journeys** – bags, laptops, etc.

...and individuals' longer, door to door journeys **may involve legs on shorter, nominally “local” services**

As a general principle, rail **journey time is not dead time**: passengers want to use and/or enjoy it*, and this can be undermined by being encumbered by luggage and other items

Suitable provision for luggage is therefore desirable to some extent on all train services

(And storing luggage effectively can affect both those who bring it on board, and those who sit or stand near it)



A potential advantage of rail travel over flying

- ✓ There are (perceived to be) relatively few restrictions for luggage on trains
- ✓ Luggage stays with passenger, and is more within passenger's control – lower risk of loss or damage

Little awareness of existing rules and restrictions on luggage, and even less that there may be variation by operator

Participants accept that some limits may be necessary to prevent unreasonable behaviour, but airline-style rules and enforcement (though unlikely) would feel unacceptable. A balance between the two, and consistency across the industry (regardless of type of service) – as is currently assumed to be the case – is felt to be the right approach



Satisfaction with existing provision is mixed

Improvements would be appreciated, with the key principles being:

Size

Especially overhead space: Luggage trends in air travel mean people often own “carry-on” cases which are too large and heavy for overhead spaces on trains

Security

Proximity

For access, and linked to security

*...because rail travel is not cheap, and it needs to be an attractive option for those who have choice, and to be free of avoidable discomforts for those who don't

Traffic light colours used here to indicate the mix of sentiment overall within the qualitative feedback on this topic

Which luggage solutions work best to meet these needs?

Many trains are likely already suitably equipped, but could be adjusted for optimal use, with additional support measures in place to help fully realise this for customers

Overall, as a minimum, at-seat luggage storage is wanted and expected on all trains; ideally with overhead and other options where physically possible:

(On longer distance services) overhead-only is not sufficient

- 👎 **Difficult or impossible to access for some**
 - With less strength / mobility (inc. in wheelchairs)
 - Even where mainly accessible, can be difficult to access quickly enough when it's your stop

- 👎 **Often uncomfortable or self-conscious**

A need to lean across tables or other people; feels awkward for women in particular

- 👎 **Often too small**

Given common suitcase sizes

...overhead racks are good for nothing but an umbrella.
(Fiona, leisure, suburban)



Clearly there is a role for overhead storage, given rail users want their luggage to be close by, and to avoid clutter on floors and seats, but this needs to be a part of a mix in order to mitigate for inevitable limitations

Gaps between and under seats feel underused



- ✓ Visible, accessible and close to seat
- ✓ Suitable for smaller bags, leaving overheads and end / mid-carriage cages or shelves for larger items
- ✓ Customers would prefer to see this space used for luggage rather than bins, for example

Additional, dedicated storage is necessary on longer distance trains

Common end-of-carriage and vestibule storage comes with some drawbacks:

- Unseen = anxiety over security
- Fear of being stuck / not accessible quickly enough when disembarking
- Others' poor stacking
- Slows boarding process (especially frustrating when other storage is available within the carriage, which boarders may be unaware of)

...But they seem suitable in absence of genuinely better alternatives

- E.g. lockers and separate carriages appeal in principle...
- But may also slow boarding down, and customers would prioritise the space for seating

...there is a role for auxiliary support to help passengers get the best out of luggage space



Information in advance and on board

- ✓ About where luggage storage is located
- ✓ At point of booking
- ✓ Reminders as part of pre-boarding comms via email / app
- ✓ Signage both on platform and at entrances upon boarding

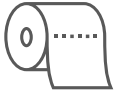


Staff

(in-person upon boarding and throughout, plus announcements)

- ✓ Alerting passengers to other luggage storage areas, to alleviate bottlenecks
- ✓ Help with lifting, and stacking efficiently
- ✓ Particular attention needed for those with limited mobility or other needs (consideration for luggage should become a part of Passenger Assistance as a default)

Toilets and charging sockets: essential facilities which the community felt must be an integral part of on-board layout and seating design



Toilets

This topic was covered more fully as part of dedicated workshop sessions about on-board services and facilities (along with wi-fi and catering).

A separate report has been produced covering each of these in more detail, but in summary the feedback around toilets was:



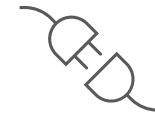
An essential facility on all “National Rail” trains – with some unable or preferring not to travel at all, if a toilet is unavailable



There are examples of good experience, but current overall opinion is more often negative

There are three main areas of concern, of which cleanliness is the biggest:

1. A strong and **widely-held belief that on-train toilets are unhygienic**, based mainly on perception, but reinforced for some by experience. Contributing to this are:
 - **Practical factors**, including cubicle size (making it difficult to avoid touching surfaces and making any mess more obvious), utilitarian look & feel, the efficacy of taps, flush, soap dispensers, etc., and the progression of cleanliness through the journey
 - **Attitudinal factors**, including direct comparison to other (more spacious, sometimes staffed) public toilets, and post-Covid hygiene sensitivity
2. Availability and accessibility
3. Door and lock functions



Plug sockets



Along with wi-fi, seen as essential and expected on all trains, if not a deal-breaker to travel, like toilets

Given increasing use of electronic tickets and digital information, not facilitating device charging feels unfair and hypocritical (and the same for facilitating internet access)



A lack of working sockets was not raised as a major problem, but provision of this is not completely reliable in the community's experience

Feedback also highlighted that...

- ✓ There is an expectation that sockets should ideally allow for charging via 3-pin, USB-A and USB-C, all common formats for laptops, smartphones, and other devices
- ✓ They are ideally placed so as to minimise the need for bending under tables / seats, or leaning across other passengers. Between seats at seat level or above, or in the back of the seat in front, were suggested as ideal
- ✓ And they should be for all seats, not just table seats

The layout and space on board trains for passengers with reduced mobility



(Some perspective):

Throughout this year-long study, **wheelchair users in the community have been much more concerned about receiving the assistance they need to get onto and off trains** (with constant anxiety about being unable to board, or being left on the train, and some real experience of this), **than about the on-board experience** more specifically, and the space available to them.

This is not to say that the on-board space and environment is unimportant, but that it is a part of a wider need for improvements to make the railways more accessible – and that **improving in-person passenger assistance is a higher priority.**



As for all passengers, those with reduced mobility have a **mixed experience of the space on board**

...though a common theme is that **wheelchair space can feel retro-fitted to fulfil legal obligations, rather than designed in** with a customer-first approach:

(and while this isn't the case all of the time, when it happens sometimes this creates a feeling that it could happen each time)



Wheelchair spaces are often positioned at the end of carriages and near to toilets. While this can be practical for accessibility (and appreciated as such), it can feel **separated and isolated**

They could make the area more comfortable looking ...I always feel that wheelchair users are slightly short-changed
(Joshua, commuting & leisure, rural)



This can be exacerbated by **other minor discomforts which other passengers might have the choice to move away from**, but those with reduced mobility do not

There is a spot for wheelchair users. It is directly under the vent for the A/C so I often find this too cold as you are not able to adjust it or turn it off
(Sarah, leisure, suburban)

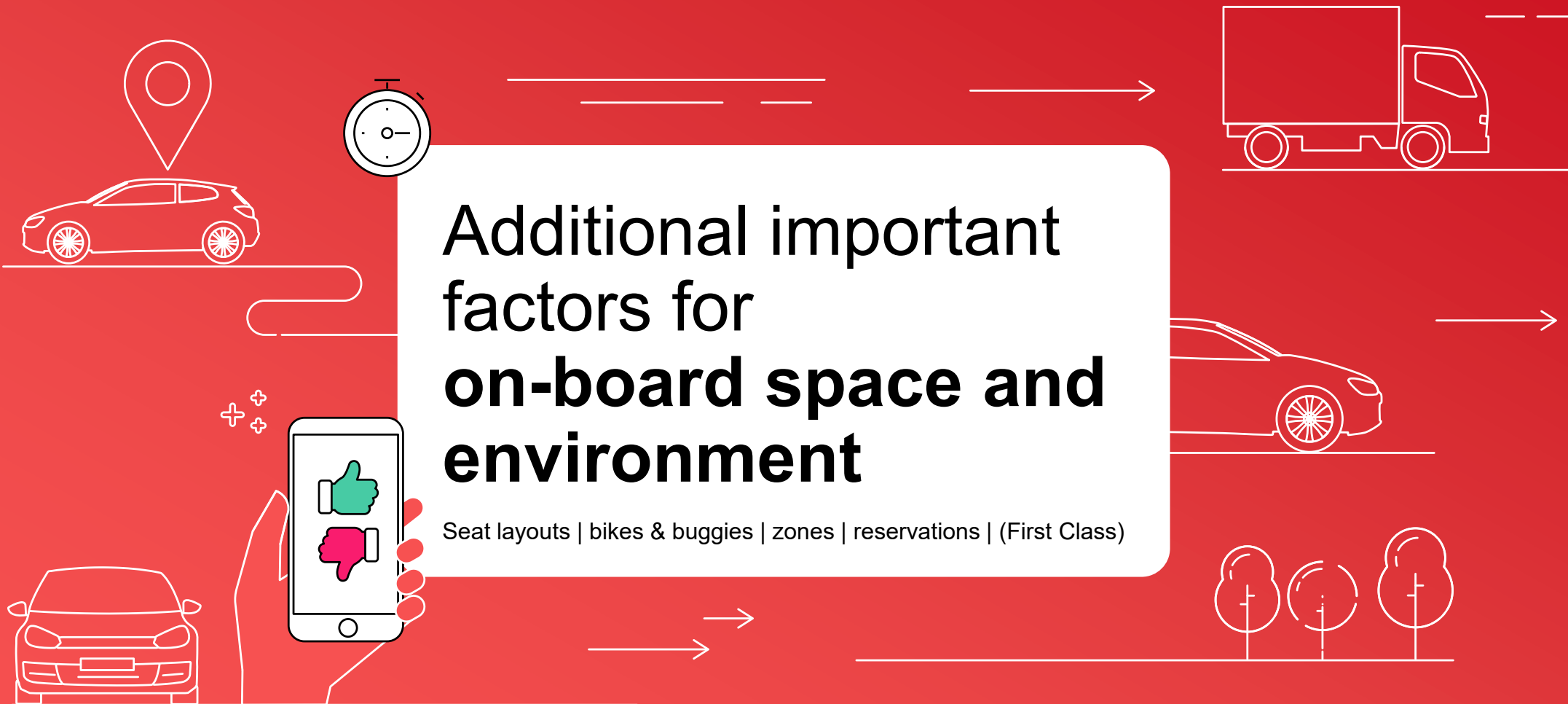


Specific principles for improving and standardising the provision for these customers include:

- ✓ Being made to feel a **part of the carriage**, not separated from it
 - With space for companions, recognising that wheelchair users might travel as part of a group (as well as sometimes, but not always, with a designated carer)
 - Not separated by barriers, doors, screens, etc.
- ✓ Having **the same facilities and experience as others**, including...
 - Tables, sockets, access to luggage, toilets, catering, etc.
 - The option to transfer to a seat (sitting in the same wheelchair for a long time can be uncomfortable; static seats are more stable) – requiring handles or a table to lean or pull on, and seats with space for a wheelchair alongside them
- ✓ **Information** about what space and facilities are provided, and **staff to help facilitate** equality in the use of the space, e.g.:
 - Assisting with luggage storage, checking toilets are accessible
 - ...and offering / asking about additional needs on boarding

There was an accessible toilet in the carriage, but unfortunately it was out of order ...[which] was not acceptable... Staff should have been aware and put me in a carriage with working toilets
//

[On a different journey] they asked if I was comfortable and if there was anything they could get me ...really nice of them to ask.
(Sarah, leisure, suburban)



Additional important factors for on-board space and environment

Seat layouts | bikes & buggies | zones | reservations | (First Class)

The customer perspective on seating layouts

Generally felt to be reasonable, and not a common “complaint”

👍 When trains are not over-crowded, seating is usually found to be **“good enough”**

👍 And are **usually clean enough**

👎 There is some inconsistency by operator, however

*One of the best things about [local service TOC] is the seating. It is spacious and comfortable without sacrificing numbers... [Long distance TOC], on the other hand, is awful. Uncomfortable and far too cramped - like economy flight seating
(John, business & leisure, rural)*

Key principles in rail users' needs for seating itself

(beyond getting a seat in the first place, and not including needs for luggage space)

Able to own / protect
personal space

Choice:
airline vs 4-seat configuration

Practical
for on-board activities

Visible
cleanliness

Comfort

*Eating / drinking, working
/ storing belongings,
charging devices*

Cushioning, incline, back support, leg room, etc.



The research community's evaluation of how well these needs are delivered on

🟡🟢 Variable: depends on busy-ness, layout
Emotive: a big negative when compromised

🟢 Needs usually met

🟡 Needs often met, but not guaranteed and makes a real difference

🟡🟢 Variable (by operator, time of day, etc.)

🟢 Needs usually met

There is some distinction drawn between services for short local journeys and longer distance journeys, with higher expectations of comfort and choice on longer distance services

*I suppose it was comfy enough for the price I paid ...I wouldn't have high seating expectations for a journey like this as it was only like an hour's journey ...If it was a longer journey like to London, then I would expect something a little better.
(Michelle, leisure, suburban)*

Key principles in rail users' needs for seating itself (further detail)

Personal space

No more common or salient as a factor in on-board experience than others here, but **can create greater discomfort when compromised**

Important for personal **comfort**, as well as for **privacy** when using a device or working

Important influences on the feeling of personal space are

- **Proximity** of seats
- **Demarcation** of seat space (arm rests, separate seats generally preferred over bench-style)
- **Facing direction / configuration** (Underground / sideways layout and 4/6 "bays" can feel exposing, especially without table; single seats lack privacy)

Has **implications for seating configuration** in particular, as well as for tables, seat widths, and leg room

Configuration choice

Most participants preferred either airline style, or 4-seat + table. Both have benefits in different scenarios, and preference depends on journey context and personal criteria

Some prefer forward-facing

Having choice between 2 or 4 seat configurations is key

The feedback questions the value in 6-seat layouts

- Unpopular in terms of seat proximity and size – does not alleviate crowded feeling when it's busy and for some is no better than standing
- When they can, most avoid middle seat, or use for bags

Underground-style sideways seating can feel exposed and lacks comfort and amenities (tables, etc). However, feedback here is not conclusive, and other research has indicated that this can be appropriate and indeed preferred for certain services

Practical

Regardless of journey length or purpose, customers want to their time on board to have value: work, entertainment, time out from others, charging devices, etc.

As a minimum, this means some facilities are a must, regardless of airline or 4-seater configuration:

- (Retractable / pull down) tables
- Plug sockets inc. USB

This also has **implications for seating configuration** in particular, as well as for seating reservations, separate zones, and seat comfort

Cleanliness

A priority for the on-board environment in general (see more on later pages)

Both are linked to signs of wear and tear: a clear difference perceived between older and newer rolling stock

Customers are pragmatic around comfort and presentation of seats: **expectations are not for a premium experience, and within reason there is some tolerance for wear and tear**

But **lack of cleanliness** – specifically perceived cleanliness, including as a result of wear and tear – is **less acceptable**

Comfort

Factors influencing comfort, in order of the difference they typically make to people, are

- Leg room
- Cushioning and fabric texture
- Back / neck support
- Size of seat

(Not discussed at length here, but can be important to individuals)

- **+ carriage temperature**

(Not linked to seating, but called out as important by some)

““

...I prefer a double seat as it means I only feel like I'm sitting close to one stranger rather than three! I like to be able to hide in a corner and ignore other people ...I do always like to have a working, clean table to use though, that really makes a difference

Becca, business, suburban

””

““

Generally cramped and uncomfortable, not enough leg room and on some trains in poor repair (ripped seats, heavily stained)

Rob, leisure, suburban

””

““

I think seating was just comfortable enough. It could have been more comfortable, but my neck and back didn't hurt after an hour on the train

Asja, commuting, urban

””

““

The seating is good and generally comfortable.... I like the fact that you can put down the arm rest ...between you and the person next to you... [and] that when you reserve your seats you have a choice between airline and table

Clive, business, rural

””

Bringing bicycles, buggies, other large items, and dogs on board

As for other luggage, people feel that all of these should always be accommodated well and easily on trains

- ✓ The rail industry should be **facilitating greener modes of travel** (i.e. using bikes) as part of end to end journeys
- ✓ ...and **avoiding any exclusion of certain groups** or types of travellers, like those who inherently “come with” children or pets
- ✓ As for other luggage, this is a **potential advantage of rail over flying**, where bringing these items is possible but with rules and red tape

→ This does not happen in practice, for all these passenger groups equally



Those currently making the effort to travel with a bike usually find the process reasonable

(based on feedback from a small number of cyclists among this research community)

As for luggage:

- Cyclists' **priorities for storage on board** are that their bike is **secure, close by, and visible**; non-cyclists' priorities are that bikes are stored neatly and sensibly
- **Ideally cycle storage is located within the main body of the train.** Leaving a bike (locked) in a dedicated carriage is felt to be suitable only for long distances, where you will travel to the end of the line and feel confident about having time to collect it
- Cyclists want **better, easily accessible information in advance of the journey** about the space available, any rules (which should be standard across operators), and the ability to reserve a space



Travelling with a pram / buggy (and with small children in general) is **felt to be difficult, and not worth the effort.**

- **Sufficient space cannot be guaranteed** (some perceive that operators and other passengers expect that buggies should be folded, which is rarely practical in reality)
- Can feel there is no choice but to use wheelchair or luggage space... making those with young children unpopular with other passengers, or at best that they feel self-conscious about this

Together with **small, dirty (as perceived) baby changing facilities**, and **self-consciousness about noise** (and the **price** of train travel), this contributes to an overall feeling that young children are not welcome on trains, and / or that train travel is impractical.

Few see a solution to this and avoid trains entirely when travelling with young children. (Providing dedicated zones on board may help, but there is little appetite for this currently – see following page)



Passengers with dogs **usually have little trouble**, though again **more clarity about rules and where to sit could be helpful**, and **being able to guarantee suitable space** – especially for assistance dogs – is the biggest issue.

Non-dog-owners would also like greater clarity about where and how dogs may travel, so that they can choose to keep away if they wish.

The idea of **distinct zones on trains is appealing**, but getting it right feels too far away currently, and **other issues are a higher priority**

Broad agreement that separate zones within trains are a good idea in principle

(Less needed or appropriate on shorter distance services designed for local journeys)

They have potential to meet some of the needs identified earlier, especially with:

- ✓ Quiet areas
- ✓ Areas where families can feel more welcome, with:
 - More space, where it feels more acceptable to move around and/or make more noise
 - Plus potential enhancements like “activity packs”, free drinks and healthy snacks
- ✓ Areas designated as ok, and not ok, for dogs or other pets



This is a quiet zone

But current experience with quiet zones is very unreliable and often a disappointment

Meaning many don't have any expectation for quiet zones even if they would appreciate one, and many take little notice of quiet zone “rules” when they don't

...creating **a vicious circle**

Creation of any zones within a train also has the potential to reduce capacity overall, **undermining one of passengers' biggest priorities: getting a seat in the first place**

I think it would be good to have quiet zones, as a man close to me was drinking cans of lager (at 7am!) and watching very loud YouTube videos that I didn't really want to hear. But I think quiet zones would be too difficult to enforce
(Rachel, business, rural)

As a result, most participants have little appetite for broadening the idea of zones further

A strong feeling that **any zone implementation needs to be done:**

- ✓ **Once other fundamentals are provided for well, and consistently**
Reliable, clean trains, with seats for everyone
With working toilets, followed by sockets and wi-fi
- ✓ **For the right reasons**
For customers', not operators' benefit (e.g. used for upsell potential or as an excuse to allow standards to fall elsewhere – as First Class can be seen to be, for instance)
- ✓ With **enforcement baked in**, meaning visible, pro-active, assertive staff

Staff, staff, staff
(workshop participant)

The customer perspective on seat reservations



The choice to reserve a seat is appreciated and expected on any longer-distance train, and often on many others

This is about ensuring necessary seating arrangements, rather than a trivial comfort, e.g.:

- High potential for crowding = concern for getting a seat at all
- Ability to work
- Vital personal need to ensure a group sits together



The experience of using them is very mixed



Booking seat reservations in advance is rarely called out as problematic



At-seat indicators showing whether seats are reserved or free, are largely understood and fit for purpose *(although differences in style by operator are queried and can draw attention to other inconsistencies across the network)*



When trains are not too busy, the process typically works well



When trains are busy (when the benefit of reservations should, in theory, be realised), fulfilling a seat reservation can be **unpredictable** = anxiety, potential confrontation, and potential discomfort in practice



In more severe **disruption, policy** around whether seat reservations are in place **is extremely unclear**



Many people receive automatic reservations without being aware, end up travelling on a different train, or decide not to use their allocated seat. Because everyone knows this happens, **many disregard seat reservation indicators by default**

Like zones, customers don't want to see resource going on reservation systems **unless they are executed well, and fully.**

This means improvements in two areas:



Staff presence

To help manage and enforce (or clarify and assist, if reservations are abandoned during disruption)



The way in which passengers manage their seat reservations *(including when booked via 3rd party retailers)*

- ✓ Ability to choose a specific carriage or seat, including for a group
 - A popular idea, with potential to overcome some concerns around accessibility and comfort identified elsewhere in the workshop
 - But awareness that this is possible on some services is varied - participants want to be alerted to this option at point of booking
 - Not consistently available on all operators currently
- ✓ Ability to cancel / give up a reserved seat if not used in practice, freeing up space for others and improving trust in the system overall

“

...a couple had occupied seats reserved by another couple and would not give it up.

What does one do under such circumstances!

Not a member of staff was around.

I dread such encounters.

*Charles, commuting & leisure,
suburban*

”

“

...my family travelled to London [from Scotland]. It was only after I booked that I had noticed... [we were] all seated separately...

We spoke to a conductor who said there was nothing they could do just now...

My son is disabled and could not sit by himself. Luckily we managed to do some swaps ourselves ... No staff on the train ever came back to us.

Marie, leisure, suburban

”

“

One issue is the reserved seats are not always truly reserved.

I have noticed apparently reserved seats where passengers have not turned up and I do not believe they have changed their mind or missed the train.

I wonder whether the reserved sign has not been amended.

Riz, business & leisure, urban

”

(Feedback for a number of topics indicated that **First Class may have had its day** on most types of train service)



Participants in this community rarely use First Class and question its relevance

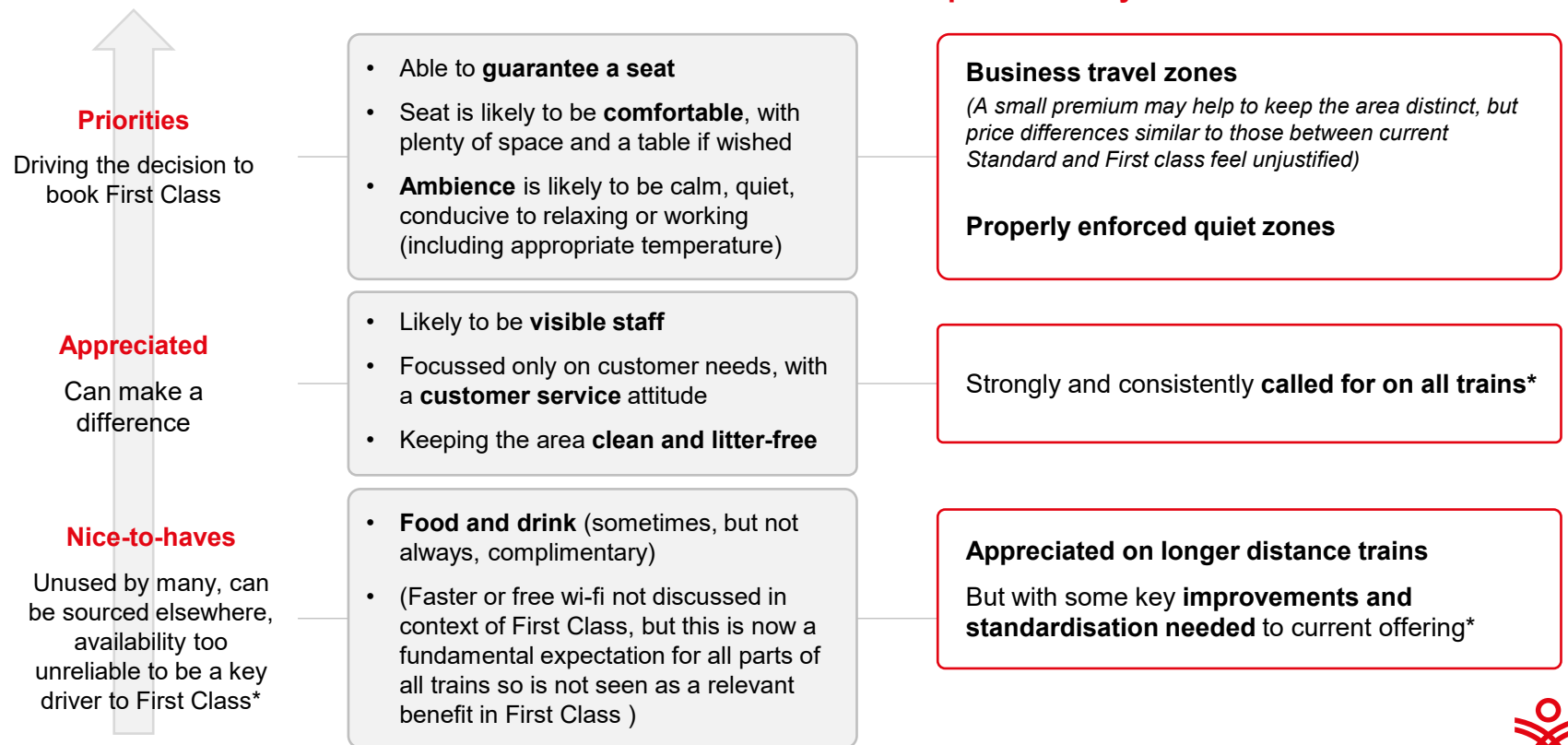
When they do, it is **appreciated and enjoyed**

...but it is commonly entered into as a **novelty**, often where a cheaper ticket has been secured, and with little intention of repeating it often

For most, **drawbacks of First Class outweigh potential benefits**

- Seen as **outdated and elitist**
- Big on-board priorities for customers are having sufficient seating capacity, and visible, accessible staff – First Class is seen as **turning these fundamentals into a luxury**, which feels unacceptable

When people do book First Class, the factors in this decision are typically:



First Class: some feedback in participants' own words

The key benefit



I have sometimes felt it worthwhile paying extra for first class to get **a bit more peace and quiet to do some work** on the journey



Simon, business, suburban

Some current benefits, which many feel very strongly should not be exclusive in this way



The train ...was cancelled, so we had to [travel later] at 2am! **We upgraded to first class to feel safer** [with the] the two gentlemen looking after first class



Cerys, leisure, suburban



I was really impressed with how I was treated [in First Class], and I really enjoyed my journey. The **staff members were courteous and friendly**



Peter, leisure, suburban

Frustration with the concept



My train was therefore ...overfull and [seat] reservations no longer applied. I spent the journey standing, crammed ...in the area by the toilets ...it was impossible to do the work I had intended on my laptop...

Why, in such circumstances, can common sense not override policy and First Class be utilised?



John, business, rural

Comments are taken from responses given to various activities throughout the year-long research study, and is not limited to feedback specifically given in the workshop

Summary: space and environment on board (1)

Participants in the workshop were clear that:

- **The space and environment on board trains is important**

The journey itself is a part of a trip in its totality, be it for business, commuting or more personal or leisure reasons; therefore the time spent on board is valuable and must be facilitated well, as part of making rail attractive and value for money overall

- **However, they do not wish for effort and resource to be given to on-board comforts and enhancements, at the expense of simply getting a seat in the first place**

Along with wider improvements to reliability and the complexity of rail travel, being able to sit on board is customers' top priority for delivering a good on-board experience

Providing that crowding and capacity is also top of the industry's agenda, **essential elements in planning and delivering other aspects of the on board and environment**, from customers' perspective are:

- Being **demonstrably clean**, and genuinely hygienically clean
 - With focus on the inside of trains, and on what is visible and/or likely to come into contact with passengers – litter, seat coverings, toilets, general wear and tear
 - And on the visibility or evidence of cleaning in action
- **Luggage provision** – to some degree, on all train services
- **Everyday fundamental facilities**: toilets, plugs / USB sockets
- The general **accessibility** of the space and the seats

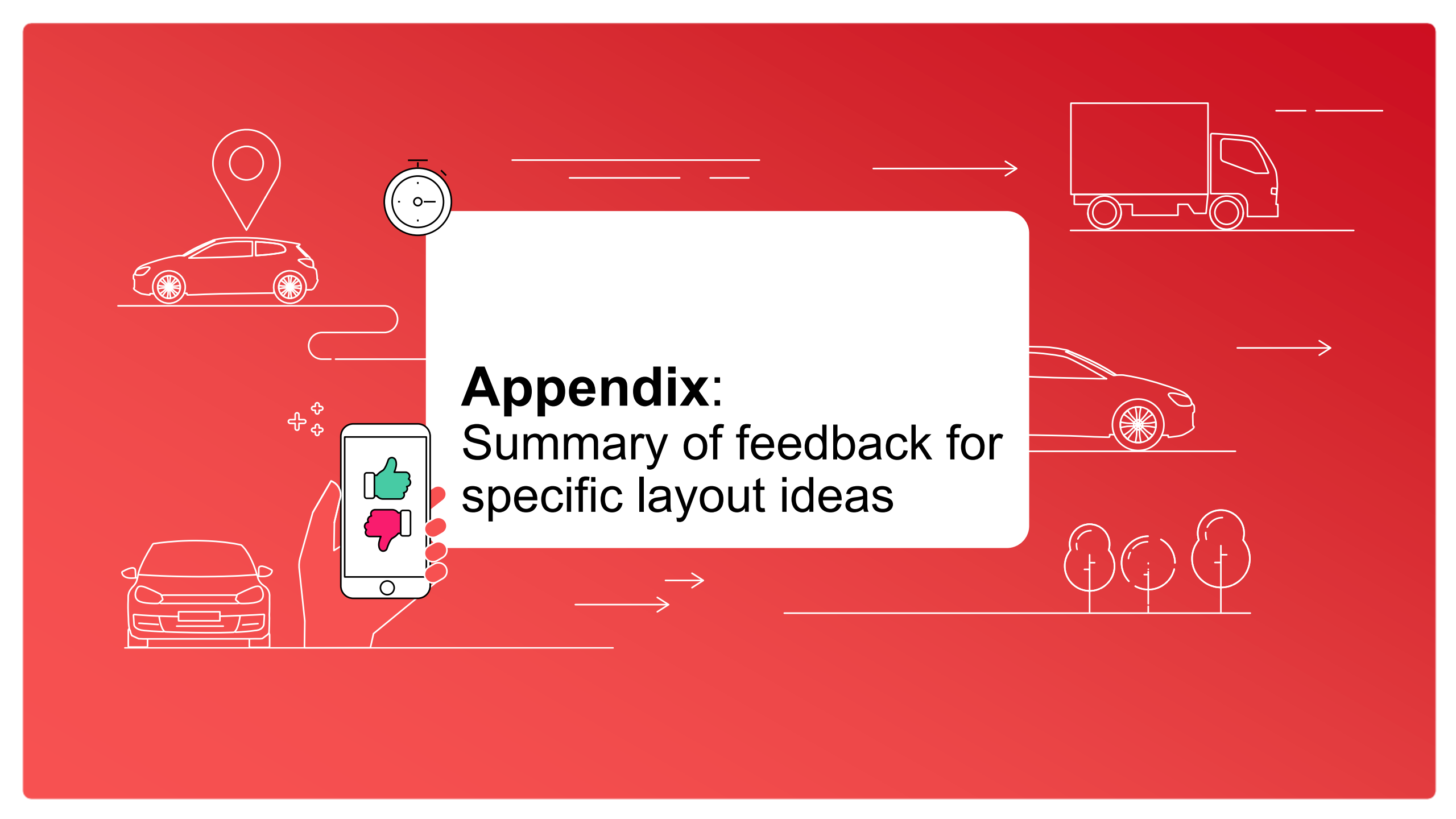
Currently, all of these essentials are delivered well much of the time, but none of them completely reliably. This can make a real difference to people's journeys and in some cases prevent travel: the standard here needs to become more consistently better.

Summary: space and environment on board (2)

Other on-board concepts are also important, but the benefits of these can only be realised once the above priorities are in place:

- The precise **configuration and design of the seats and seating areas** (including tables, etc.)
For most passengers, on most journeys, the seating is fit for purpose – though this is not consistent, and older rolling stock in particular is less comfortable
However, some guiding principles to inform planning and design for the future are highlighted in this report.
- Being able to bring other **large and bulky items on board**
Note, this is a relatively lower priority because it affects relatively small groups of rail users, and often only at certain times rather than all of the time. But, this links to accessibility in general, and some people can feel excluded from rail travel in some scenarios, most notably people travelling with young children
- Being able to **choose and/or reserve certain areas or seats within the train**, for specific purposes or to meet specific individual needs and preferences
Seat reservations are a popular idea: they work well when things are running smoothly, but have lost their credibility and therefore advantages for customers when trains get busy. Some clear improvements to the way passengers manage their reservations, and to communication and information in general, could optimise this
Zones on board potentially have a place in certain circumstances – but only if they are invested in more fully, especially with better management by staff; without this they are relatively meaningless to passengers
First Class is a particularly extreme version of this, which feels outdated to customers and may be better replaced with a more widely relevant, more functional business travel offering – providing this meets the requirements above for effectively managed zones

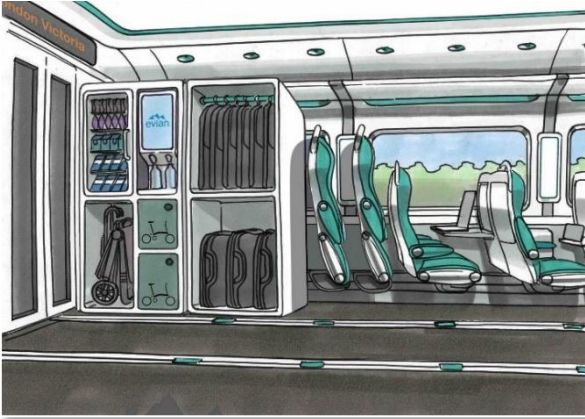
In addition to the physical delivery of all of these aspects of the on-board environment, for most if not all of them, ensuring that customers can use and benefit from them effectively requires **auxiliary information, and input from staff**, in person, on board



Appendix: Summary of feedback for specific layout ideas

Summary of feedback on some specific layout ideas (overview):

(Forming part of the evidence behind findings, and illustrating principles highlighted throughout this report)



A Popular overall but with concerns



C Most pragmatic of all options here



E Overall lowest appeal



B Cycle space liked but limited relevance (more niche)



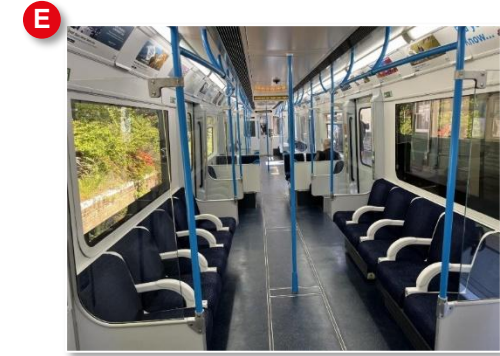
D Seen as lower-appeal alternative to C



F Popular in principle with some caveats, and not always realistic

Summary of feedback on layout concepts which are familiar currently

(Forming part of the evidence behind findings, and illustrating principles highlighted throughout this report)



Most pragmatic of all options here

- ✓ Mix of **4-seat and airline configuration + tables**
- ✓ Appears **comfortable but realistic**, no over-spend / overkill
- ✓ **Mix of luggage storage** options (if still looking a bit **small** and limited)

Seen as lower-appeal alternative to C

- ✓ **Functional**, practical, but **not comfortable**
- **Large vestibule and standing areas** may have a role on some services (though standing not liked in principle)
- **Fold down seats** useful, but **no table for wheelchair users**
- × **Lack of tables**
- × Narrow gangway and handles / poles contribute to **lack of visibility (= feeling of security)**, and feeling quite claustrophobic

Overall lowest appeal

- **Function over comfort**
- × **Sideways seating not generally favoured** except on some specific types of services – feels exposing, uncomfortable
- × **No luggage space**

Summary of feedback on layout concepts which are less familiar currently

(Forming part of the evidence behind findings, and illustrating principles highlighted throughout this report)



Popular overall but with concerns

- ✓ **Vending machine / water dispenser**
- ✓ **Clear space for different items**
- ?
- ...but could appear unnecessarily restrictive: apparently dedicated space for certain items can raise **questions and disagreements over what is “allowed” to be stored** (has parallels with existing spaces marked out for wheelchairs or buggies or bikes)
- ×
- ×
- Potentially **not visible** when seated
- ×
- Combination of refreshments and luggage may **concentrate foot traffic** in a small area... and heighten concerns for security of belongings



Cycle space liked but limited relevance (more niche)

- ✓ **Flexible use of space** / options for large items + seating
- ✓ **Does not feel cut off** from rest of carriage



Popular in principle with some caveats, and not always realistic

- ✓ **Comfortable** looking seats; **open** and spacious
- ✓ **Flexible** / options for seating (though lacks airline configuration); fold-down seats assumed to allow **wheelchair space which feels part of the carriage**
- ×
- ×
- Bench-style seats with **no separation** / demarcation
- ?
- Bar-style / work stations intriguing but niche appeal** – not comfortable for long distance, no privacy for working (laptop screen visible)
- ?
- Unclear (from picture) how to behave**: is this space for quiet working or social travel?
- ?
- Concerns about keeping it clean: **unrealistic in practice** (and money for this more premium style could be better spent on **other priorities**)

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.