

Shaping Rail's Future: Customer Community

Feedback report: December 2023

**Feedback on proposed Standards for
Customer Experience during Disruption**



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



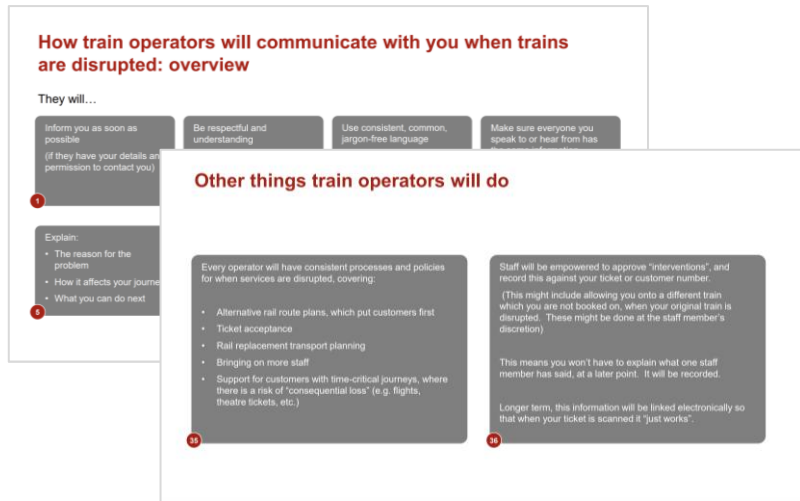
12 months from February 2023



Topic focus in
Nov-Dec 2023:

**Standards for
customer experience
during disruption**

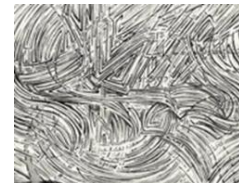
In November and early December 2023 the community...



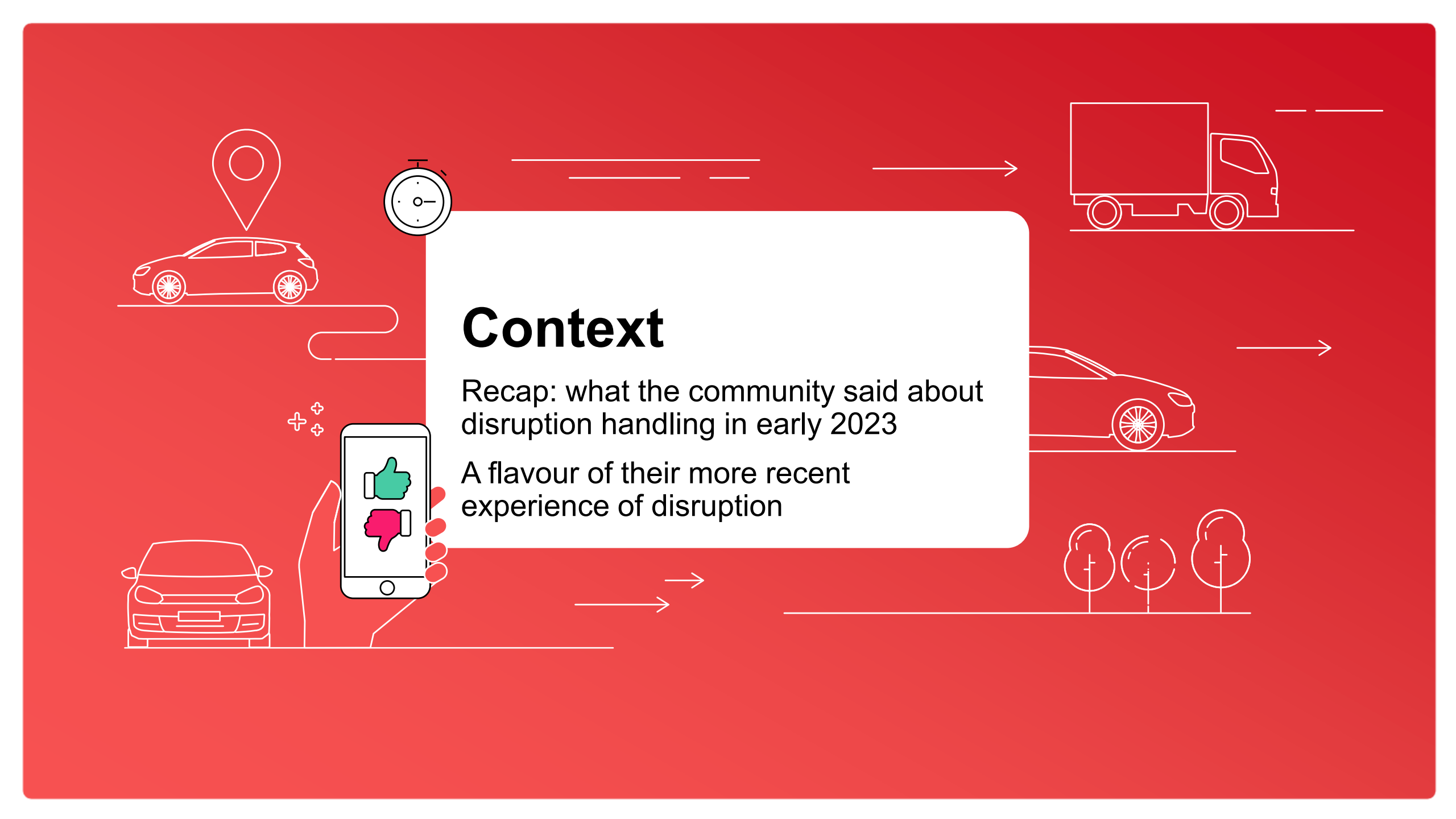
Evaluated industry-wide customer standards which have been proposed for when train services are disrupted

(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
- ✓ Private and discussion-based responses



Context

Recap: what the community said about disruption handling in early 2023

A flavour of their more recent experience of disruption

Recap (Feb-Mar 2023): customers' experience of disruption and how it is handled

Three main types of disruption that stand out as “problems with rail travel” **to customers**



Cancellation



Delay



Termination en route



Other

....plus a **variety of other issues** that they count as journey “disruption”

E.g. overcrowding, problems with facilities / services (lifts, first class, etc.), perception of ongoing, low-level unreliability

Some of which may not always be registered in this context by the industry, but to which it needs to give more attention

Sizes of bubbles give a qualitative indication of how often, relative to each other, these types of disruption are felt to make a difference.

“Traffic light” colours used give an indication of how often our community talked about poor (red), good (green) or neither / nor (amber) ways in which problems were handled.

Pockets of excellence, but on the whole **disruption is (remembered as being) managed quite poorly**

Experiences of poor handling fall into key themes:

Information & communication

Systemic or structural issues / processes

Handling the operational consequences of disruption

Lack of customer centricity in industry culture

Plus, through all of this: **inconsistency across the industry**

The features of good disruption handling:

What

Practical help

Information & communication

Financial / tangible recompense

How

Tailored

Pragmatism

Empathy

Accountability

Low customer effort

Sense of urgency

A flavour of the community's most recent experiences of disruption



Cancellation / termination

I [was] going to the theatre. I checked ...about an hour before we left the house ...and everything was fine. When we got there **it showed up on the board as cancelled. So we waited for the next train... [but] it came up saying delayed. There wasn't a staff member there.**
...We missed half of the show.

Claire, leisure, suburban

Two trains were cancelled which delayed [me] by quite some time. Lovely lady on the station came and spoke to me. **She kept me updated and also asked if I needed any help with anything. Was very pleasant. Think she went out of her way and it was excellent customer service**

Katherine, commuter, suburban

There was a **disruption on the line and the train stopped**, then... a long delay before it pulled into the nearest station. **There was a lot of confusion and the member of staff was inundated** with people.... As I was only a 40min drive away I [had] family pick me up. It was late at night and cold and I was pleased I didn't need to wait for help...

Rachel, business, rural



Delay

My train was delayed unexpectedly, and **I asked a staff member at the station about it. They were very helpful and gave me a few alternatives.**

Anna, commuter, suburban

My most recent experience was a train delay which I guess is minor and pretty normal (unfortunately). **There was an announcement** saying that we'll be reaching the destination later than expected and we were told we're running ten minutes behind schedule. **I think that's a good way to let everyone know. However, those with headphones on ...will miss that information.**

Alice, commuter, urban

...my train was delayed ...**I asked a guy at the gates if he knew how long the delay was; he just said no and [that] I should watch the screen** ...I don't think this was *bad* customer service but it was not good ...**The staff at gates need to be given more access to information ...so customers can plan.**

Lara, business, suburban



Other

A recent work trip from Cheltenham to Paddington was **delayed as someone forced their way through the doors, which meant ...they did not open the rest of the journey.**

The driver communicated well what was going on throughout this, and at the end of the journey reminded passengers of the delay/repay.

Mike, leisure, urban

....the train before mine had been cancelled[so] **the train was exceptionally over-crowded** ...**The conductor apologised over the loud speaker for the fact that the train was overcrowded and also reminded passengers that they could claim compensation** for the cancellation of the previous service. This was very good and **made you feel less stressed and less angry. ...The tone of the announcement was also reassuring.**

It would have been nice if free refreshments were available to passengers given the fact that the trolley service had [to be] cancelled however this may have been difficult due to the numbers of passengers on the train.

Clive, business, rural

And a (nearly) gold star example!

“

I was travelling from Edinburgh to Birmingham ...I was on the platform ...when the screens changed to say passengers should travel to Glasgow instead, and get a connection from there. **I saw a Network Rail employee and asked what the situation was. He was really helpful and found an Avanti employee who confirmed I should go to Glasgow for a connection. 10/10 for customer service so far.**

On the train [they were] checking tickets and of course I did not have an Edinburgh-Glasgow ticket. When I explained ...she immediately said “that’s right, you have to get the 20:06 from Glasgow”. **I was amazed that the employee on the local train was [able] to tell me exactly what to do for onward travel ...10/10 again.**

At Glasgow the Avanti staff explained to the large assembled group that the 20:06 was only going as far as Preston, and replacement bus or taxi would be available there. ...the Avanti staff had to keep repeating the information as ...I think people, even if they have been told previously ...often seek confirmation ... “just in case” ... **They were polite, patient and professional in the face of quite a large crowdso still 10/10.**

On the train staff came along to check where passengers were going so they could relay this to Preston staff arranging onward transport. As we got nearer to Preston the **announcements explained what to do at Preston depending on your final destination. My only criticism here was the sound quality** ... It was difficult to make out ...and I would have appreciated ...possibly a display in the carriage. ...**So 9/10, one mark down for the quality of the sound.**

At Preston ...there was no Avanti person on the platform... [but] I found two buses and asked the first driver if he was going to Birminghamhe [said]... to wait for the Avanti employee to clarify A few more passengers joined... and, as at Glasgow, needed the reassurance of asking the bus driver what was happening ...

The Avanti employee then arrived and **very impressively took control of the situation and ...ushered us all back inside out of the rain** ...After a couple of minutes he got [everyone onto the right buses].... Despite initial confusion **I would single out ...this Avanti employee ... With an air of calm authority he managed to reassure everyone that we would all get to our destinations and had the compassion to take us into the warm while we waited for him to sort it all out.**

All this experience showed me was that **it is most definitely possible to maintain a high standard of customer service in the face of a difficult, unplanned, train cancellation.** All the staff were polite, even smiling, and despite a disrupted journey, arriving about three hours late, I got to New Street thinking what a good experience it had been. **Handled differently I could imagine arriving feeling angry and resentful of the failure of the rail system.**

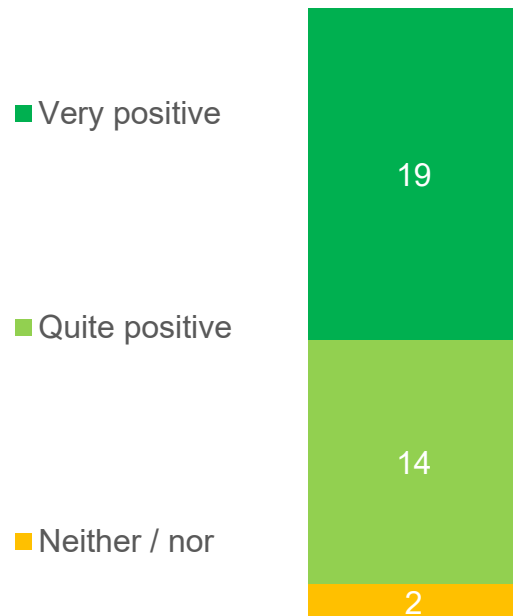
Simon, 60s, business, suburban

”

**Overall response
to the proposed
new standards**

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

Initial reaction to customer standards
(Task 59a, Nov-Dec 2023)



Participants' feedback shows that the very fact that standards and commitments are being made is a positive thing:

- ✓ Standardisation and consistency across the industry and the country is what the community has been calling for, and is a great first step in what these rail users hope will be a new way of thinking and acting more generally
- ✓ Having ambitions which are customer focussed (rather than logistics focussed) is a step forward
- ✓ Making commitments is a powerful admission and acceptance of accountability.... These rail users hope to see this bear through in reality



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

Base: all community participants (35); figures shown are absolute number of people

“

It sounds very well
thought out, and with
the interests of the
customer at the centre

”

Rachel, 30s, business, rural

“

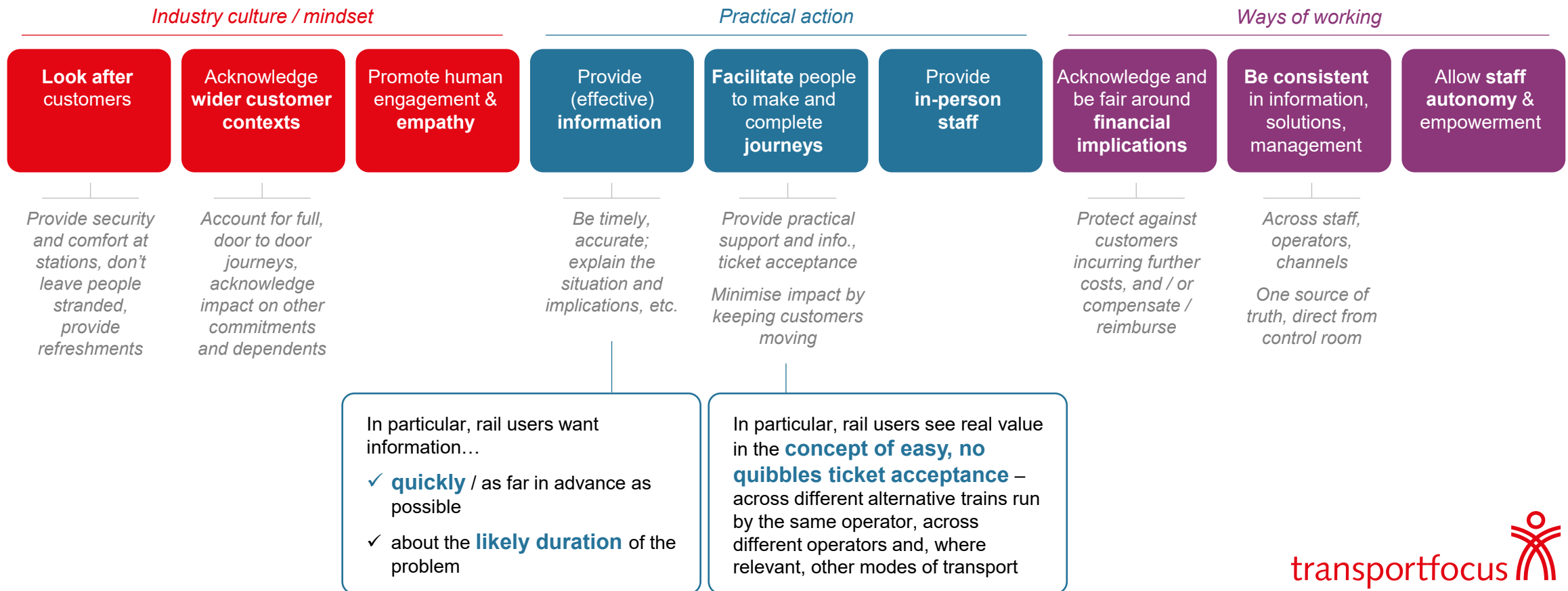
In all walks of life there can be disruption ... What makes the difference ... is how the organisation handles the disruption. Having a set of standards is very reassuring that, no matter the particular route or operator, you will be able to rely on the same pattern of assistance.

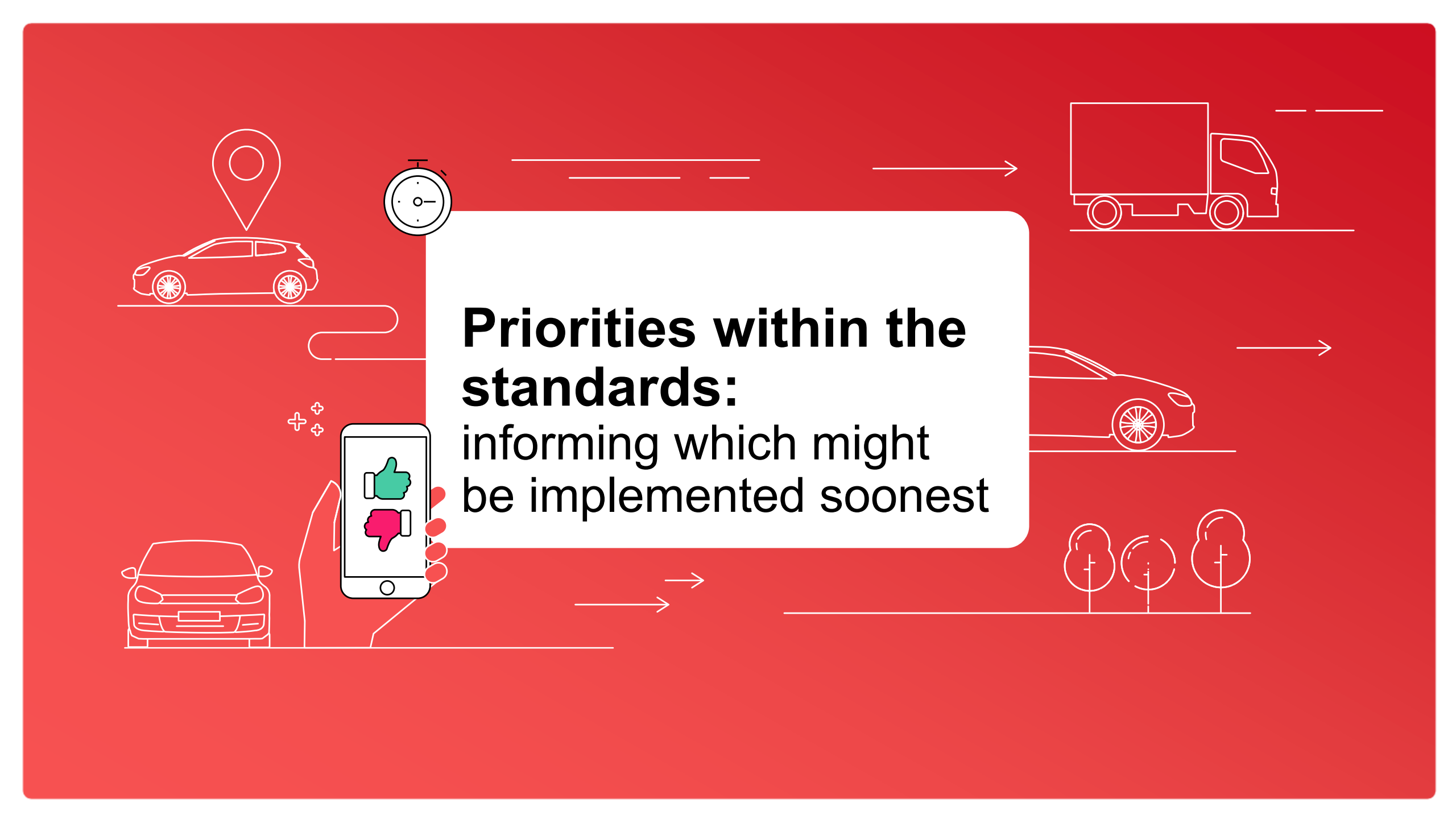
”

Simon, 60s, business, suburban

There is no one commitment which resonates more or less than others with customers; rather the standards exhibit some **key principles** which matter to them

Nine key themes arose in community participants' feedback about which of the standards mean the most to them

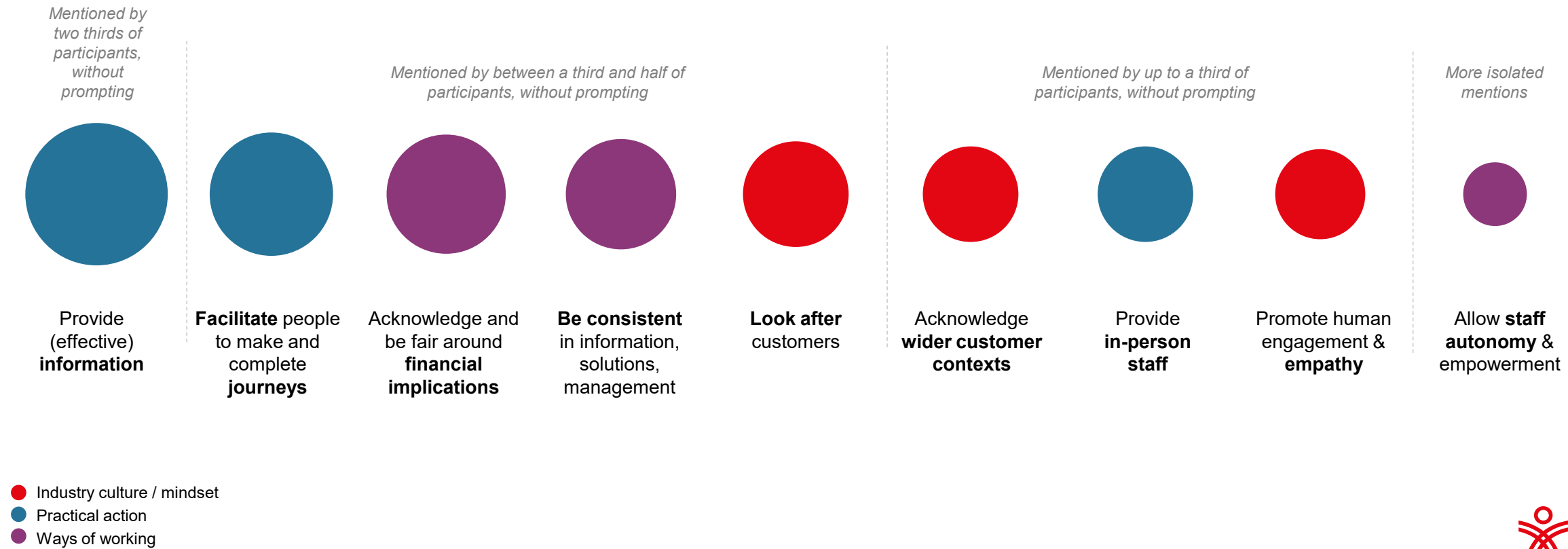




Priorities within the standards:
informing which might
be implemented soonest

Of these principles, those likely to have greatest customer impact are **information provision and quality, practical journey support, and averting financial injustice**

Nine key themes arose 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



Providing effective information is the most important part of disruption management for customers: this is the highest priority area for developing standards

Provide effective information

All of the following commitments* work towards this key principle:

	1		5		6	
8		9		11		13
						14
		18		19		21
24		25		26		27
						29
						33

But those which resonate particularly strongly are #1 and #9

Operators will inform you **as soon as possible**
(if they have your details and permission to contact you)

1

Information you can access during disruption will include:

What the problem is

How it affects you, and the operator's advice:

- Estimate of **how long it will take to resolve**
- Any alterations, part-cancellations, diversions, or delays
- Any platform changes or pre-boarding information
- Which trains are expected to run, and a warning of any train where the operator is not 100% sure if it will run as planned
- How busy trains are expected to be
- Alternative travel options if trains aren't running
- Real-time status and movement info. of 'rail replacement' buses

9

And #11, which has many similarities to #9 shown above



The outcome of these types of standards for customers:

- ✓ Empower customers to make their own alternative plans
- ✓ ...meaning the more time available, the better
- ✓ Avoid further mistakes and disruption (due to missing, conflicting, inaccurate, or misinterpreted information)
- ✓ Make customers feel that operators value them

*See Appendix for references

Next priority is practical help, and removing unnecessary hurdles, to **facilitate customers in making and completing their journey**

Facilitate people to make and complete journeys

All of the following commitments* work towards this key principle:

5 | 12-16

20 | 28 | 31-33 | 35-36

(and those about information for, or enabling alternative arrangements)

But those resonating particularly strongly are **#13, #15, #16, #36,** demonstrating:

- ✓ **Practical help, tangible suggestions**
- ✓ **Clear rules for eligible alternatives**
- ✓ **Seamless ticket transfer**
- ✓ **No additional costs**

Clearly explain options to help you make an informed choice to meet your needs

These might include waiting, using another service, another operator or another mode including rail replacement buses, or asking you to travel later or not at all

13

In disruption:

Your tickets will be valid for any alternative service we suggest

15

You will not have to buy a new ticket

If your reserved train is cancelled, you can travel on any other train that day, the day before or the day after, at no additional charge

16

Staff will be empowered to approve “interventions”, and record this against your ticket or customer number...

Longer term, this information will be linked electronically so that when your ticket is scanned it “just works”.

36



The outcome of these types of standards for customers:

- ✓ Simply being able to get home or to the destination, and making this as easy as possible
- ✓ Making operators feel more accountable: a shared problem, not just a problem for the customer
- ✓ Alleviate some of the inevitable stress that comes with disruption, with an unambiguous plan for how to get to the destination
- ✓ ...and avoid making it worse (as can be the case currently) with
 - Lack of clarity about what you may or may not be allowed to do
 - Anxiety over the potential need to spend more money

The community also saw real benefits in the commitments around **financial fairness**, and **consistency** across the industry

Acknowledge and be fair around **financial implications**

Be consistent: in information, solutions, management

The following commitments* work towards these key principles:

7 | 15 | 16 | 31 | 33 | 34

3 | 4 | 10 | 19 | 22 | 27 | 35 | 36

Those resonating best featured **clear policies** for which trains or scenarios would bring no further fee, and a promise of **simplicity for making claims**.

These were:

Your tickets will be valid for any alternative service we suggest

15

You will not have to buy a new ticket

16

If your reserved train is cancelled, you can travel on any other train that day, the day before or the day after, at no additional charge

34

If you are entitled to compensation, you will be able to do this easily, either through a form, or one click depending on how bought ticket

Those resonating best promised **"singing from the same hymn sheet"** across operators and via different touchpoints, and **minimising customers' need to repeat / defend themselves** due to working silos (as they do, or fear, currently):

Operators will ensure everyone you speak to / hear from has the same information i.e. staff, online, info. boards, announcements

4

Staff will be empowered to approve "interventions"... (e.g. allowing you onto a different train which you are not booked on, when your original train is disrupted.)

36

...This means you won't have to explain what one staff member has said, later on.

The outcome of these types of standards for customers:

- ✓ Simply, not being out of pocket
- ✓ Removal of one of the elements that can make rail feel poor value for money
- ✓ Clarity and understanding of their rights
- ✓ Alleviate anxiety over whether compensation / reimbursement will be provided

- ✓ Less (perceived unreasonable) effort and time spent working out next steps and clarifying information
- ✓ (And associated benefit to staff, using less of their time on repeated clarification)
- ✓ Curbing further stress (as is the case currently)
- ✓ Greater trust in rail

*See Appendix for references

...and those which **focus on people rather than logistics**

Look after customers

17 | 23 | 30 | 33

These cover provision of safe, warm places to wait, refreshments, and not feeling abandoned, as well as acknowledgement that sufficient on-board seating and things like toilets are genuine essentials for some

Acknowledge wider customer contexts

12 | 17 | 26 | 33 | 35

These cover an acknowledgement that disruption can have a knock-on effect for connections and other transport, as well as the fact that journeys may be time-critical (including for work, appointments, reaching dependents, etc.)

The following commitments* work towards these key principles:

#17 attracted particular attention given the potentially **greater impact (and cost) of being in this situation:**

If the last train of the day is cancelled or you miss your last connection because of delays, we won't leave you stranded

You will be provided with suitable transport or overnight accommodation as close to your destination as possible

...followed by **#12 and #33**, emphasising **practical help with the full door-to-door journey**, and fairness around **customers' needs beyond simply travelling from A to B:**

Operators will consider your whole journey, from door to door, when supporting you with alternative options

If your train is overcrowded and you can't get a seat, or if something is not available that you needed (e.g. no toilets..., etc.):

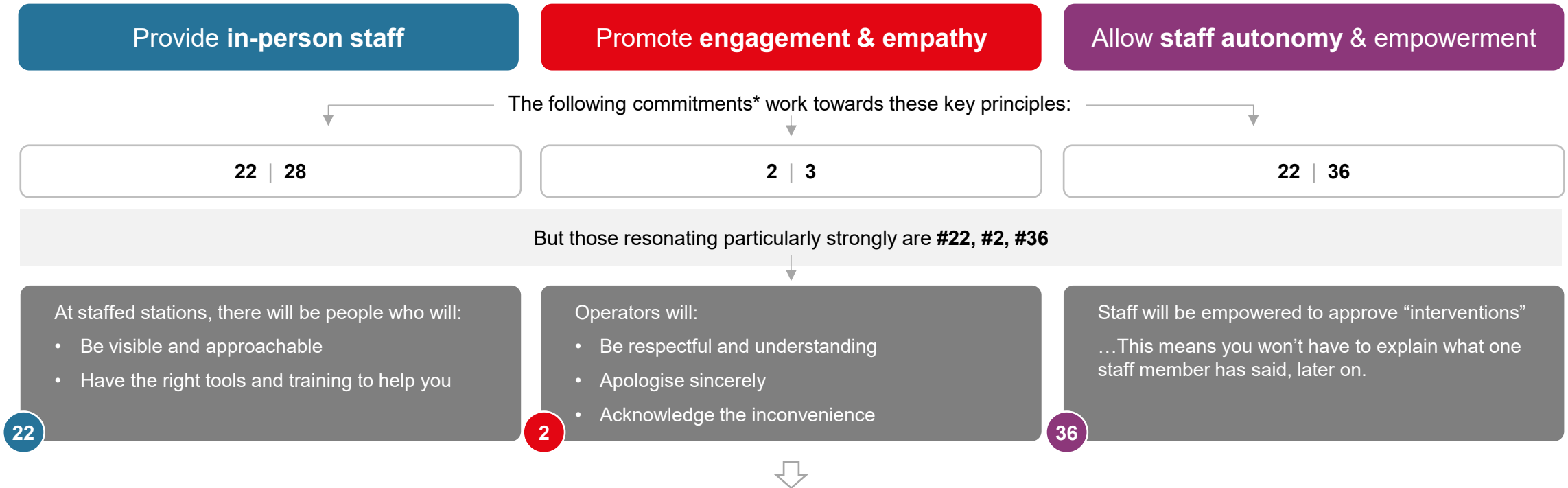
The operator will tell you... and allow you to move to the next suitable train... for no additional charge, or you can ...get a refund with no admin fee

The outcome of these types of standards for customers:

- ✓ Removal of additional discomforts (from safety fears to being cold and hungry) that currently only make disruption feel worse
- ✓ Feeling acknowledged on a human level
- ✓ Practical assistance, including with any knock-on effects for other transport, and in extreme cases (e.g. being stranded)

*See Appendix for references

The presence, behaviour and capabilities of staff make a real difference to customers



The outcome of these types of standards for customers:

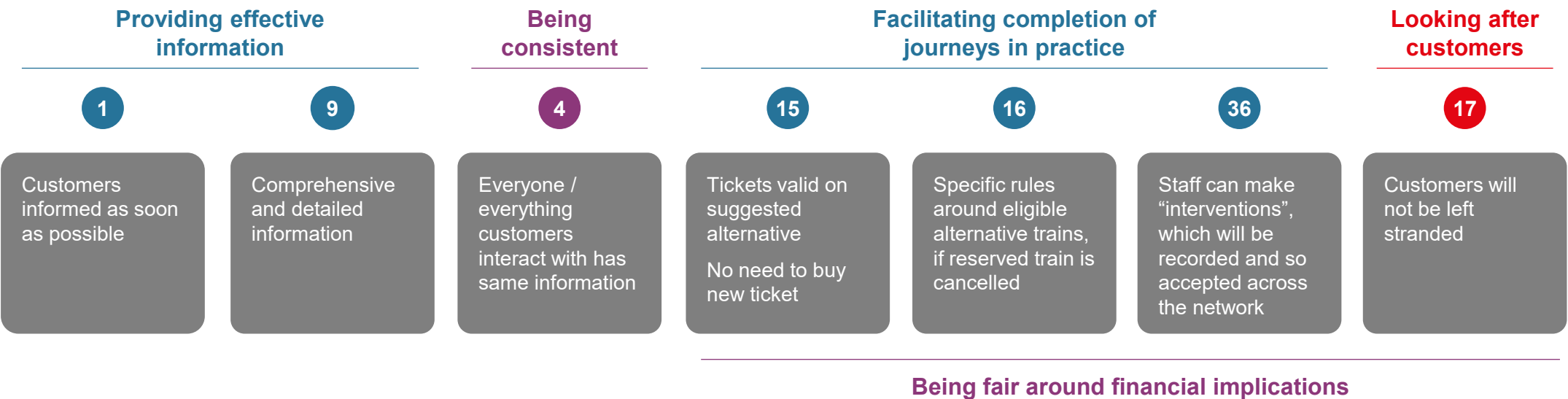
- ✓ Reassurance and assistance when customers might be feeling their most confused, stressed or vulnerable, and especially for those who already find travel more difficult or stressful (including those with disabilities or neurodiversities, those less tech-confident)
- ✓ More tailored, specific advice and assistance relevant to own circumstances
- ✓ Feeling acknowledged and understood on a human level
- ✓ Appreciation that staff will also be able to help more effectively, providing more satisfaction for staff themselves

*See Appendix
for references

While community participants mainly fed back in terms of principles, **some individual commitments stand out** and may warrant prioritising

These stand out because they **hit several different needs or principles** (#36), or are particularly popular – either for their **practical benefits**, and/or more because they **resonate more emotionally**

Also note: overall, **commitments relating to stations are a little more popular** than those for on board (since at stations is where people feel most “stranded” and where things can feel most chaotic)

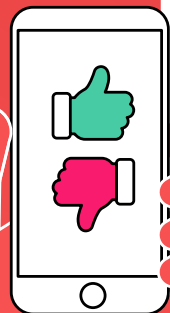


- Industry culture / mindset
- Practical action
- Ways of working

Wording of standards has been shortened here for brevity, but the full wording (as shown in Appendix) should be considered when implementing and developing these commitments in practice

*See Appendix for references

Caveats and developments to the standards



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

- This community of rail users is **highly engaged**, and may have become **somewhat more knowledgeable** about various aspects of the rail industry
- This includes a face to face workshop which took place only days or weeks prior to responding (depending on when individuals responded)
- **The standards come partly in response to their own feedback** about disruption and 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, and only in situations where they are actually disrupted. **Most people are unlikely to be so consciously aware of this type of change and progress being made behind the scenes.**



I cannot tell you what a relief it is to read this!

It really makes me think we might be achieving something here



John, 40s, leisure & business, rural

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.

There is (perhaps inevitably) some cautiousness, indifference and even cynicism from some, based on previous experience

The standards are logical and simply to be expected, and therefore to some extent overdue

“

To be honest all the things in the new standards I'm surprised aren't already consistent across all rail operators, they seem pretty obvious to me

”

Stuart, 40s, commuter, suburban

The standards build on what is perceived to be a fairly low base for customer service in rail – so shouldn't be oversold

“

There is a lot more information to be provided to customers in [this] minimum set of standards than I feel is currently provided so that of itself is a positive thing

”

Jay, 30s, commuter & leisure, suburban

There is cynicism around whether, when, and how consistently the standards will be implemented in practice, especially when it's very busy

“

The standards are the least one should expect ...it's good to have these standards in protocol, however applying them and ensuring they're being followed is a whole other thing

”

Alice, 20s, commuter, urban

Some point out that there are steps needed to lay the groundwork, especially in terms of consistency, for some standards to be fully realised

“

[I like the idea of using tickets on other trains, e.g. #15 / #33]

...but considerable work [is needed] to align all the different companies and their [ticket] restrictions. It is currently so confusing that no one has any hope of understanding what trains you could transfer to. Ticketing needs to be standardised.

”

Fiona, 60s, leisure, suburban

There is a need to be more precise about language and rules, in places



Some of the standards use ambiguous terms

In these cases, **at best, rail users simply want some clarification**

*[#30] is not clear to me ...I would want to know what constitutes a 'long time'.
Clive, business, rural*

...but **at worst, some perceive a (deliberate?) opportunity for operators to interpret commitments to their own benefit**, or to allow the continuation of (what customers can perceive as) sub-standard service more generally

*[#29] Maybe there is a ...route I would rather take that hasn't been "suggested"
Lara, business, suburban*

*[I dislike] the use of vague terms such as, "as soon as possible", "at the discretion of.." that can manipulated in favour of the operator.
Gavin, leisure, urban*

*[#29] says "if there is only a driver on board".... this doesn't look very good... there should be someone manning the train at all operating hours ...The driver isn't always contactable ...there is no one [to] turn to.
Michelle, leisure, suburban*



There are commonly queries around what exactly is covered, for example:

The rules, resolutions and compensation in relation to **"time-critical" journeys**

*I was glad to see ...support for ...time-critical journeys, but how could this be practical? ...[would the] train company liaiseto delay the flight? Surely not!.
Mark, leisure, suburban*

Whether rules apply regardless of the point a customer is at during their journey, and if they decide to abandon even when it might still be possible to continue with inconvenience

*Do the standards apply both in stations before a journey and whilst on the train?
Fiona, leisure, suburban*

*...if due to the disruption I had to decide to abandon my journey and return home half way through, [could] staff ...approve "interventions", in a similar way for a forward journey?
Mark, leisure, suburban*

Whether specific commitments apply within or across operators

*#16: ...would have to be on ANY other train line... #36: a great idea but I would be paranoid ...to come across the ticket guy who says sorry your ticket is not valid on this train... both need to be ANY operator and train to make sense
Colin, business, urban*

Some confusion and lack of confidence in the standards comes from ambiguity around the fundamentals of what a train ticket entitles you to



Does the ticket / contract represent a commitment to **get someone from A to B?**



Or is there also a commitment to **do this within a specific time period, with the comfort of a seat** (rather than having to stand), and so on?



Community participants themselves had different views on this (and nobody knew for sure)

...even if there is an alternative 'suggested' route, [it] should be up to the customer ... If they decide to use another service due to an issue with the train they booked, a full refund should be given

Lara, business, suburban

I think the customer enters into a contract to get from one point to another and that's that [so an alternative route should be accepted]. Imagine if customers could demand refunds every time there was a change. It would be a logistic nightmare and add cost to all travel

Neville, business, suburban

...though on balance, it might be argued that, if GBR intends to take a customer-first approach, then tickets should cover more than the logistical A-B exercise

This has implications for several of the standards, but **#15 and #33 in particular raise questions:**

15

In disruption:

Tickets valid on suggested alternative

No need to buy new ticket

What if the “suggested” alternatives don’t suit me and I want a different alternative, or I just want a refund, and not to travel at all?

33

If ...you can't get a seat, or if something is not available that you needed (e.g. no toilets..., etc.):

The operator will tell you... allow you to move to the next suitable train... for no additional charge, or you can ...get a refund with no admin fee

What if all subsequent trains are also overcrowded (as is inevitable on certain routes and at certain times, and even more so at times of disruption)?

Who defines “suitable”?

There may be some ways in which the standards could be pushed further

Are groups with additional needs fully considered?

(Are separate or supplementary standards required?)

One or two in the community query whether the needs of disabled and other potentially disadvantaged rail user groups have been fully considered (no real criticisms that they haven't, but some would like this reassurance)



Specific points mentioned were:

- Commitments around booked assistance being transferred to alternative trains are extremely important
- Whether provision is made for service dogs and carers
- Staff presence particularly important to those likely to need any kind of special assistance



Ensure those less tech-confident are not left behind

...smart phones enable many of these improvements but ...people not conversant with them might not receive the same standard of assistance

John, business & leisure, rural

Is there a role for auxiliary tools / systems / processes, to aid or optimise the commitments

For example:

- ✓ Centralised, go-to information hub (or triage point) for disruption

...a method to communicate with the train company. For passengers where the standard announcement does not answer the question, there should be a universal way to get to the correct helpline or something similar,

Simon, business, suburban

A more central information app, for all delays or something along those lines.

Lucy, commuter, urban

- ✓ Standardised and fully streamlined, even automatic, compensation process

[Operators] should ...know if you should be able to claim compensation or not.... [it] should be one click, well promoted, [and] not just on the App / online . Do staff have forms that can be filled in ?

Tracy, leisure, urban

Will standards extend to / integrate with other transport networks?

I would be interested to see how it interacts with the Metro travel tickets (train only or multi-modal) we have in West Yorkshire.

We ...get none of the benefits like Delay Repay.

Oliver, business, suburban

The customer-first mindset behind the conception of the standards must be maintained as they are implemented in practice, by all involved, and in the long term

This is paramount to avoid any risk of slipping into tick-box or deflection exercises

(Language will ideally be tightened to reduce opportunities for the latter to happen, but if ambiguities and alternative interpretations arise over time, a customer-first approach should be treated as the guiding principle in how standards are understood and fulfilled)

[I'm concerned that this all means that] protocols are in place, but it's more of a response policy towards an incident, and doesn't really focus on the experience of the customer, but rather towards staff procedure to ensure all boxes are being ticked

Martin, commuting, urban

All the above standards do not really prevent statements like "This train is cancelled due to a short term timetable change", or [other] disingenuous statements.... the above examples are classic 'customer expectation management' ruses designed to deflect rather than inform

Gavin, leisure, urban

And both office and front-line staff themselves, who are involved in managing disruption, **must fully buy in**

This has implications for training, ongoing management, and recruitment of personnel with the right attributes

It would require a very high standard of staff training. Not only to instruct these standards but also the ability to apply them in real life. Unfortunately, the levels of disruption on our railways are such that staff would have to expect to deal with numerous of these issues at any one time. I certainly don't envy them having to do that.

John, business & leisure, rural

The standards look comprehensive, BUT...staff have to be trained and have to take pride in their work ...All the standards in the world will not help if staff don't follow them through. It only takes one member of staff ...to make everything difficult

Tracy, leisure, urban

Some specific feedback and queries about certain individual standards

1

Operators will inform you as soon as possible
(if they have contact details and permission)

Many in this community are happy to register for communications, and/or they buy tickets electronically and expect to be contacted as a result

However:

- They want **options for which type of communications** they do or do not receive (including marketing, the ability to specify details of interest, or to default to information relevant to a specific service only)
- Those not (willing to) sign up would expect to find **relevant, up to date information on relevant websites**, and / or be able to speak to **knowledgeable staff**

2

Operators will be respectful and understanding, apologise sincerely, acknowledge inconvenience

This sparked debate about the value of apology over action

On balance, **most participants preferred a sincere apology providing it is also backed up by some form of tangible action**, or genuine change to prevent or improve the response to a similar problem in future

9

Comprehensive information, including

- Warning of trains not 100% to run as planned
- How busy trains should be

Mixed views about the value of being told that a train...

...**“might” not run as planned:**

Some want to start contingency planning, some see this as creating extra, possibly unnecessary anxiety

Suggestions included giving a timeframe, i.e. “the train may not run on time, but we will tell you for sure in X minutes”

...**is busy**

Can be helpful, as long as implications and solutions are also outlined (i.e. not everyone will get a seat, but there is an alternative service in X minutes)

But can be meaningless, if there is not another, better service

17

Customers will not be left stranded

Note that there is some feeling that this standard in particular is rightly to be expected, thanks to similar policies for airlines, which are now well known and relied upon

Some participants feel that **in-person staff must also be available to help deliver on this commitment in practice**, given stranded rail passengers are likely to feel vulnerable, stressed, and in an unfamiliar place

36

Staff can make “interventions”, which will be recorded and so accepted across the network

Some highlight the **data privacy implications** of a system that “just works”, and that customers need to have agreed to sharing of information across operators (if this is relevant in the long term), in advance

Separately there is also **cynicism about whether and how long it will take for digital systems to be set up** to enable this, and until then **whether staff will have the knowledge, tools and time, to look up and verify interventions**

...and specifically on information: this needs to be meaningful and actionable, and (over time) show progress in resolving the problem at hand

Information must....

- ✓ **Be comprehensive (considerate of wider journey context and other transport modes)**

I also think it would help if staff had an app for other transport such as buses to give out that information as well.

Julie, leisure, suburban

- ✓ **Acknowledge and inform of implications of problems, rather than simply stating operational facts**

The train arrived packed ...I noticed the next train was 11 carriages so waited for that. ...I heard the announcement say the train is 4 carriages but that just stated a fact. There was no advice given that this may mean lack of ...space and passengers should consider the next train...

Riz, business and leisure, suburban

- ✓ **Ensure customers can find / access / receive information**

(The quality of audio information is a particular frustration, currently)

Point 29 [is good in theory but I] had updates from the train driver when travelling to Birmingham and couldn't make out a word he was saying. It would be good to have all disruptions, etc. on digital boards on trains as well as driver updates

Marie, leisure, suburban

Don't let less tech-confident or data-private people get left behind

I am personally not signed up via email to receive these updates ...I would look for there to be live updates on relevant websites so ...these should be updated in real time with information

Jay, commuter & leisure, suburban

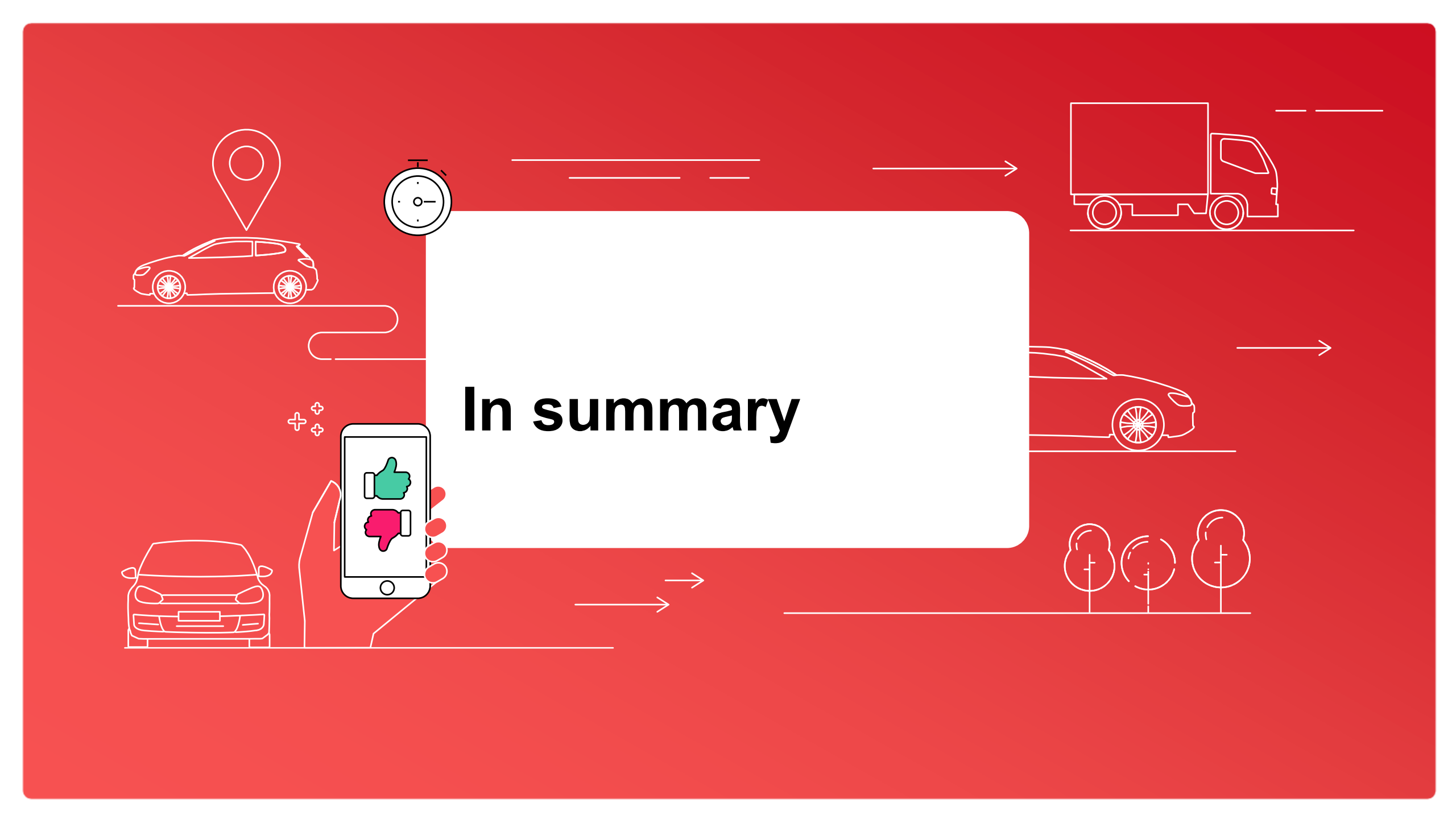
...we can't all use our smart phone to check [the] journey.

Tracy, leisure, urban

- ✓ **Be constructive, and show progression**

5 & 6: being advised about the issue and your options, when the next update would happen - but you would expect that ...rather than simply being told that there is no change to the previous update, [you would also receive] some further information about the issue to make you feel that you are not forgotten, and some resolution is actively being sought..

Fiona, leisure, suburban



In summary

Summary (1)

Almost universally, **participants in the community are positive about the standards**, both in terms of the concept of establishing a baseline expectation for customer experience during disruption, 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.**

There may be some benefit in publicising the existence of the standards, with the right communication.

In their current form, the standards demonstrate **nine key themes in customer service behaviours** which make a difference to rail users during disruption: **these should be guiding principles in any further development and refinement.**

In particular, the **highest priority standards for implementation are those which relate to providing information** to passengers: with some further guidance in this report about how, when, where and what this looks like.

The next priorities are standards relating to the **practical help and support** that customers receive to make and complete their journeys during disruption, followed by commitments around **compensation and other financial implications** that passengers may face when disrupted.

As part of and in addition to these priority themes, **some individual standards stand out as resonating especially well***:

- #1 – informing customers about problems as soon as possible
- #9 – providing a range of detailed information to empower next-step decisions
- #4 – being really consistent and coherent in communication with customers, across all operators and touchpoints
- #15 – ticket acceptance
- #16 – being really clear on which specific trains or other services are eligible for ticket acceptance
- #36 – empowering staff to make interventions, and enabling these to be followed through across the national network
- #17 – ensuring passengers are never left stranded as a result of disruption, especially late at night

Beyond these, other standards presented here all have their benefits and are worth pursuing. **None of the standards were felt to be redundant.**

Summary (2)

Despite the very positive response overall, there are some caveats and suggestions for further development:

Of course, in reality, people are unlikely to read the standards in detail, nor perhaps even consciously notice a difference. The industry should not expect a fast and wholesale shift in attitudes towards disruption and the way it is handled as a result, but there is real evidence that if implemented well, customer (and staff) outcomes can improve overall

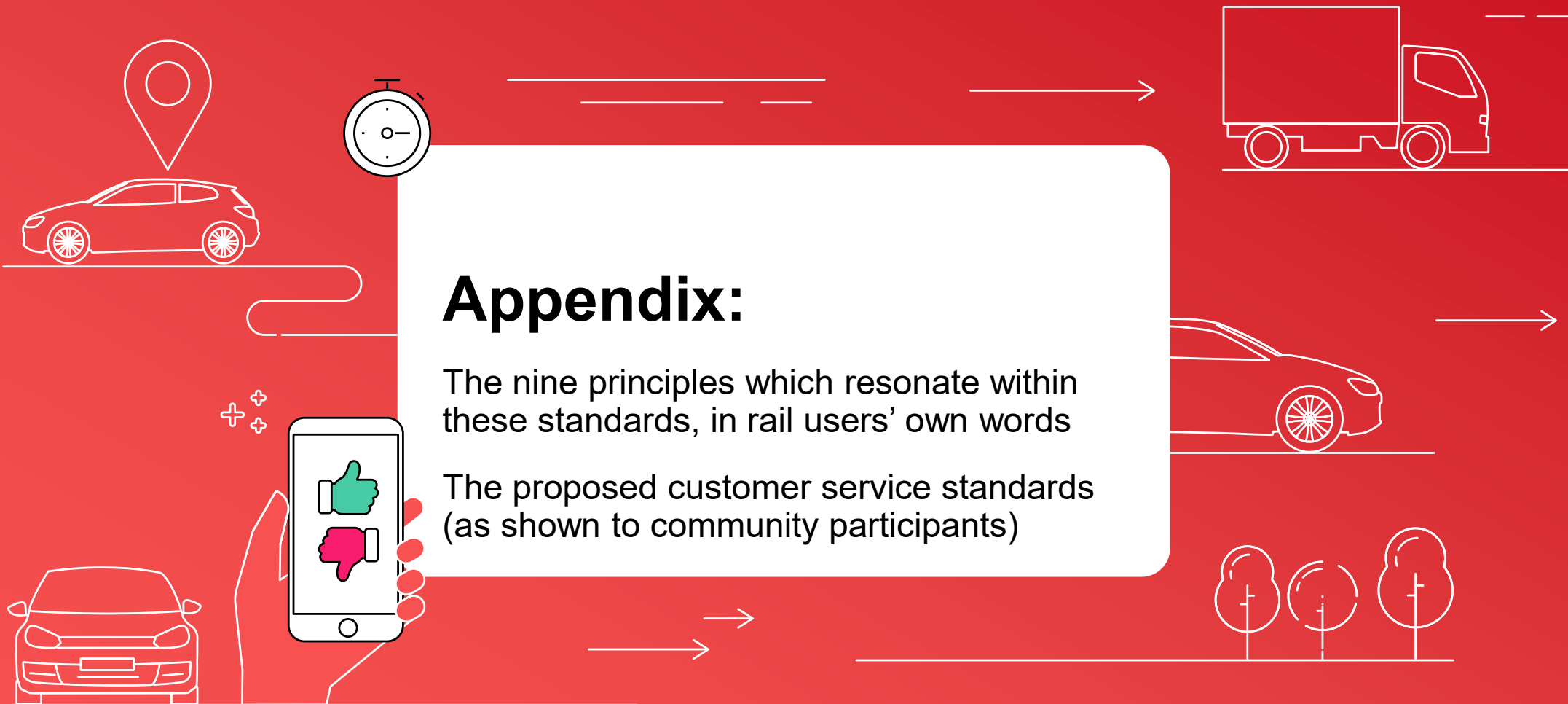
There is a need to be more precise about language and rules in places. In particular it may be beneficial to **make it clearer for customers what the “ticket contract” entitles them to** (is it getting them from A to B, or doing so at a certain time and with a given level of comfort, for example): the interpretation of this entitlement affects the expectations some people have from the standards.

There may be **some further developments to the standards**, especially in terms of:

- Double checking that smaller and more **vulnerable passenger groups** are fully accommodated
 - Potential development of **centralised customer interfaces** for information and communication
 - **Integration with regional transport authorities**
-

There is (perhaps inevitably) some cynicism around whether and how well the standards will be implemented in practice. It is clearly highlighted that **the customer-first mindset behind the conception of these standards must be maintained as they are executed, by all involved, and in the long term.** This includes recruiting, training and ongoing management of the right staff, to secure their all-important buy-in.

There are also some specific queries and clarifications around individual standards (including some of the priorities listed above), which should be taken into account.



Appendix:

The nine principles which resonate within these standards, in rail users' own words

The proposed customer service standards (as shown to community participants)

The importance of **timely, accurate, detailed information**, in rail users' own words

I think that being told as early as possible is so important so that you can make other arrangements. Like when I was going to the theatre [and trains were cancelled], if the information was available earlier then I could have made alternative arrangements.

Claire, leisure, suburban

I think getting the information as soon as possible is vital to allow planning. It would allow me to make alternative plans by giving me time, so I can get the appointment on time. For me this would be the biggest benefit.

Julie, leisure, urban

Keeping me informed so that I know what's going on and can plan around it is crucial especially being a wheelchair user and relying on others to assist with getting on and off the trains. I usually have my journey planned out so knowing what's going on will help me figure out how I will continue with the rest of the journey.

Sarah, leisure, urban

I think its great knowing of delays, what's going on ...I like that you will have rough idea of how long delays will be and why there are delays

Katherine, commuter, suburban

Being given an estimate of how long the issue will take to resolve allows me to make a personal reassessment of the journey and to contact (if necessary) people at the other end to advise of the situation.

Mark, leisure, suburban

Right now when disruption happens, information is sparse or none existent. so if this was put in place, it would go along way to help

Rob, leisure, suburban

Number one is key. It's important to know asap so alternate methods of transport can be arranged if needed.

Knowing asap reduces anxiety and makes the customer feel that the train company cares.

Alice, commuting & leisure, urban

The importance of **practical help to complete the journey**, in rail users' own words

Clarification on the different ways you can use your ticket for alternative travel routes - this would be helpful as it is sometimes stressful figuring out your alternatives and if it would cost you more etc. I'd expect staff to be able to give you this info in person as well as online if you booked online.

Jay, commuter & leisure, suburban

...I would also appreciate the suggestion of taking another service where appropriate.... I often feel overwhelmed and anxious with delays

Lucy, commuter & leisure, urban

The other big things for me are:

- Help and information regarding onward journey/connections. I would want real time updates on my journey from door-to-door and reassurance that I wouldn't be charged for taking alternative means ...

- Connected to above, 'interventions' (point 36) sound like an excellent idea. If this makes it easier to get on unbooked trains - especially those of other TOCs - with the reassurance that you won't be penalised, it would be a huge improvement.

John, business & leisure, rural

Ticket acceptance with the paperwork cleared up afterwards is probably a real step change. It has always been incumbent on the passenger to do this - so it is incredibly welcome!

In case of delay or cancellation tickets would become seamless.

Joshua, commuter & leisure, rural

The importance of acknowledging financial implications of disruption, and of consistency across the industry, in rail users' own words

Acknowledge and be fair around **financial implications**

As long as you know asap and we are kept in the loop about things and know that we can claim compensation back for certain things missed then it does make you feel better.

Claire, leisure, suburban

It will be good to have an agreed standard so that customers know what their rights are. This is especially good in situations where you are stranded (e.g. stuck overnight) or are unable to attend planned events such as theatre trips / flight bookings.

Clive, business, rural

...[I like the standards about] help and reassurance in terms of compensation (points 7, 14, 34). I would want to be able to claim this immediately and simply. Disruption is infuriating enough but doubly so when it is an ordeal to claim compensation.

John, business & leisure, rural

Accountability is displayed.

Charles, commuter, suburban

Be consistent: in information, solutions, management

Point 4 ...would be the most important thing - I'm quite a chilled out person but if there is asymmetric information then that could be something which could escalate a situation from going from bad to worse.

Mike, leisure, urban

Number 4 - not getting different answers from different people, this will build trust, and number 36 - staff being able to solve the problems for you and then you don't have to spend ages on the phone or online to sort things out!

Becca, business, suburban

Pont 4 about having consistent information is very important. If there is any inconsistency I start to worry that maybe what I've been told is not correct. Then I probably waste staff's time checking and checking again what is happening.

Simon, business, suburban

The importance of looking after customers fully, and acknowledging the wider context of their journeys, in rail users' own words

Look after customers

Finally, I think refreshments when delayed will help immensely, as I would not have to leave the platform or station if I did not feel safe enough to do so.

Julie, leisure, urban

Knowing that in the event of a disruption that causes me to become stranded, there will be somewhere safe and comfortable to wait, especially late at night, generates a feeling of safety that otherwise would not be there in such a scenario.

Mark, leisure, suburban

17 - As I would be traveling long distances when I use the train and if I was in the situation where the last train got cancelled, then accommodation is definitely needed

Martin, leisure, urban

[I like] the points that offer support and information over next best options, and in particular support if accommodation is required. My biggest fear over cancellations is not just inconvenience but being stranded in some unfamiliar place.

Riz, business and leisure, suburban

I often get the last train out of London ...if that was cancelled ...knowing that I wouldn't be stranded in London would be a great relief. I've got the means to pay for a hotel ... but I remember a time when I had no money ...and no credit cards, so I'd have had to literally sleep at the station and take the first train home, regardless of whether I could claim the cost back at a later date.

Stuart, commuter & leisure, suburban

Point 30 is very good. There may be people travelling with extra needs such as a diabetic.

Marie, leisure, suburban

Acknowledge wider customer contexts

I think the standard that would make the biggest difference to me is staff considering my whole journey (door to door) when offering alternatives. This would make a difference to me as I often take journeys which involve changing trains once or twice. I would expect the staff member to look into different options for me and the company to reimburse all costs, even if it includes traveling by bus.

Anna, commuter, suburban

I also like the [point acknowledging the impact of trains being] overcrowded, and getting off when there is not seating. This happened recently to me ...the train arrived packed. I got on but got off straight away since I would have been left standing around 45mins to London.

Riz, business and leisure, suburban

It makes a big difference that the operators will consider the journey from door to door, so I can take a train with confidence knowing that I will be able to get home one way or another even if there is a disruption.

Rachel, business, rural

The importance of staff interactions, in rail users' own words

Provide in-person staff

*Most of these communications seem to be aimed at online users...
I want to follow up any information I have been given. Online sources of 'information' are often automated and lead you down rabbit holes. Face to face service is often more productive.*

Gavin, leisure, urban

I think no. 22 is very positive. For me I would like to physically speak to someone. When there is disruption I sometimes find it confusing going on [TOC's] website to find this info. Speaking to someone on the phone isn't always the best either but having someone physically there for info, advice and reassurance is... important.

Marie, leisure, suburban

...visible and approachable staff make a positive difference to me.

Mark, leisure, suburban

Just being reassured and that staff are aware that I am on board so I am not forgotten makes a huge difference. If I am stranded far away from home or my destination, it is useful to know staff will be around at the station to help with any queries

Sarah, leisure, urban, wheelchair user

...more important when it is late at night. [After long delays I arrived] at Edinburgh station at 12.30 [and] the train was deserted, only cleaners and no other staff around. It would have been scary if I had been travelling onward. We can't all use our smart phone to check journey.

Tracy, leisure, urban

Promote empathy

The soft behaviours (like genuine empathy with customers) are very welcome

Joshua, commuter & leisure, rural

For a staff member to be polite and respectful at all times is also very important. This is because it can be a stressful time for a customer ... The customer will want to feel helped, not like they are a burden to someone.

Michelle, leisure, urban

Staff autonomy & empowerment

I especially like that you shouldn't need to rely on what individual staff have said as it will be on record against the ticket number

Rachel, business, rural

Point 36 is great... if you are on a journey potentially coming across various members of staff and discretion is given for something but then another member of staff doesn't believe you. This could be hard for people who find it hard to communicate and explain the same story again and again.

Marie, leisure, suburban

Love the flexibility that 'interventions' give - it means that colleagues can do what's right in the moment

Joshua, commuter & leisure, rural

36 - empowering staff would facilitate rapid changes of plan and alternative arrangements whilst minimising the impact both on the customer and other station staff.

Fiona, leisure, suburban

How train operators will communicate with you when trains are disrupted: overview

They will...

- 1 Inform you as soon as possible
(if they have your details and permission to contact you)
- 2 Be respectful and understanding
Apologise sincerely
Acknowledge the inconvenience
- 3 Use consistent, common, jargon-free language
- 4 Make sure everyone you speak to or hear from has the same information

i.e. staff, online, information boards, announcements
- 5 Explain:
 - The reason for the problem
 - How it affects your journey
 - What you can do next
- 6 Keep you informed about:
 - Any more changes,
 - When the next update will be
- 7 Make you aware of your entitlement to compensation.

This will be done in advance, and again if you are disrupted

More detail on **information you can access during disruption**

Information will be:

Clear
Accurate
Relevant
Consistent
Timely
Accessible

8

It will include:

What the problem is

How it affects you, and the operator's advice:

- Estimate of how long it will take to resolve
- Any alterations, part-cancellations, diversions, or delays
- Any platform changes or pre-boarding information
- Which trains are expected to run, and a warning of any train where the operator is not 100% sure if it will run as planned
- How busy trains are expected to be
- Alternative travel options if trains aren't running
- The real-time status and movement information of 'rail replacement' buses

9

This will apply wherever and whenever you access information (websites, apps, alerts, information screens, announcements)

10

Online journey planners will take account for disruption in real time, so you can use them to accurately re-plan your journey

11

More detail on **your options** when your train is disrupted

Train operators will...

Consider your whole journey, from door to door, when supporting you with alternative options

12

Clearly explain options to help you make an informed choice to meet your needs

These might include:

- Waiting - taking no action is the best option
- Taking another train service, where possible
- Using another route or operator (which might include other public transport)
- Using and providing a rail replacement bus
- Asking you consider travelling later or not at all

13

Provide clear information on how to access alternative travel options, including:

- Easy-to-follow signs
- Estimate of how long it will take to reach your destination
- What facilities are available on the alternative

14

What your ticket covers:

Your tickets will be valid for any alternative service we suggest

You will not have to buy a new ticket

15

If your reserved train is cancelled, you can travel on any other train that day, the day before or the day after, at no additional charge

16

If the last train of the day is cancelled or you miss your last connection because of delays, we won't leave you stranded

You will be provided with suitable transport or overnight accommodation as close to your destination as possible

17

What you can expect from these standards **before you travel**

If your ticket is for a specific train, and if you have opted to receive notifications:

The operator will inform you...

- As early as possible if there is likely to be a problem
- What the problem is
- How it affects your journey

18

If your ticket is flexible:

You will be able to check the status of your train online, with staff in person, or through the customer contact centre (phone, email, webchat)

19

If your train is cancelled, the operator will support you with re-planning your journey

This includes any assistance you have booked

20

You will be kept informed if there are any more changes

21

What you can expect from these standards **at stations**

At staffed stations, there will be people who will:

- Be visible and approachable
- Have the right tools and training to help you

22

There will be somewhere safe and comfortable for you whilst you wait, especially late at night

23

More detail on what you can expect **on board**

If the train stops or is delayed, operators will:

Let you know what is going on as soon as possible

Update you at regular intervals throughout

24

If the train will not complete its entire journey (for example, it terminates early or won't be calling at all stations):

You will be given clear information about how this will affect you, and operators' advice

25

If you may miss a connection, or if your connecting train is disrupted:

You will be told as soon as possible

You will receive helpful suggestions about what to do

26

You will hear announcements on board, directly from the operator control room, giving more detail about what is being done to fix the problem

27

If there are staff on board:

They will be visible and available to help:

To answer questions

For other types of support you may need

28

If there is only a driver on board:

They will be able to provide regular updates

29

If the train is delayed for a long time, they will:

- Provide free refreshments, including bottled water
- Have emergency kits to support your needs

30

Other things you will be able to do

You will be able to reserve a seat on another train or cancel your booking

You are encouraged make a reservation if you use another train

There will be a simple process for this, with no admin fee

31

If you have booked assistance, your booking will automatically be moved onto your new trains for you

32

If your train is overcrowded and you can't get a seat, or if something is not available that you needed (e.g. no toilets, no advertised Wi-Fi, no advertised catering service, no advertised first-class service, etc.):

- The operator will let you know
- They will allow you to move to the next suitable train
- This will be for no additional charge, or you can choose not to travel and get a refund without any admin fees

33

If you are entitled to claim compensation, you will be able to do this easily, either through a form, or one click depending on how you bought your ticket

34

Other things train operators will do

Every operator will have consistent processes and policies for when services are disrupted, covering:

- Alternative rail route plans, which put customers first
- Ticket acceptance
- Rail replacement transport planning
- Bringing on more staff
- Support for customers with time-critical journeys, where there is a risk of “consequential loss” (e.g. flights, theatre tickets, etc.)

35

Staff will be empowered to approve “interventions”, and record this against your ticket or customer number.

(This might include allowing you onto a different train which you are not booked on, when your original train is disrupted. These might be done at the staff member’s discretion)

This means you won’t have to explain what one staff member has said, at a later point. It will be recorded.

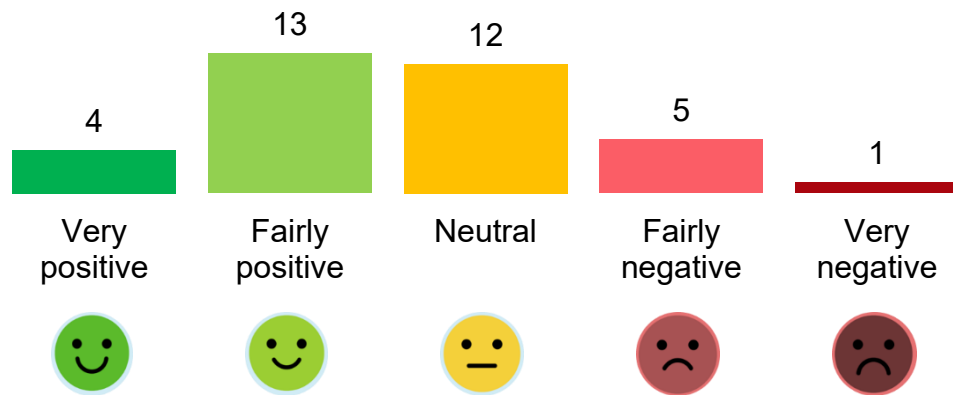
Longer term, this information will be linked electronically so that when your ticket is scanned it “just works”.

36

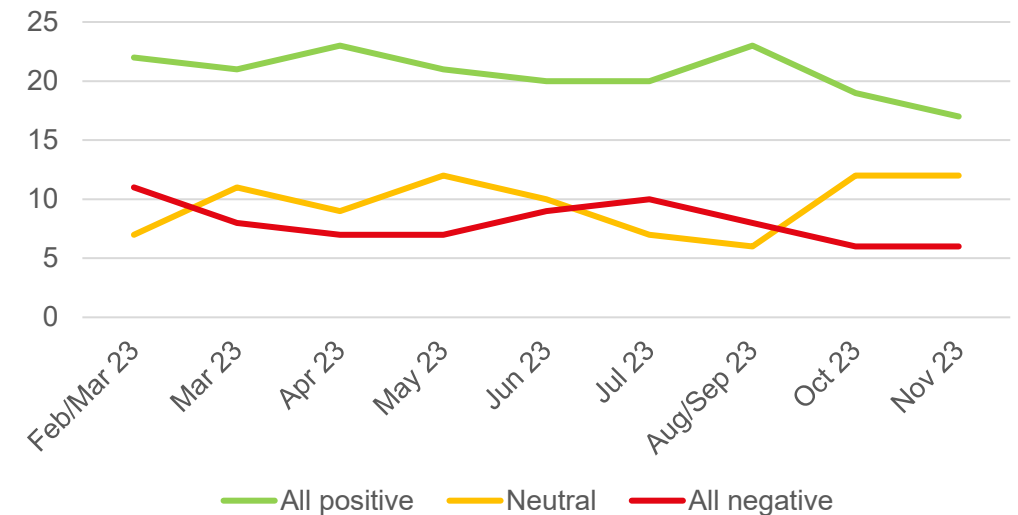
**Update on how the
community feels
about rail travel
overall**

Most feeling fairly positive or neutral about the railway in general in the Autumn

How you feel about travelling by train at the moment: A snapshot
(Task 57)



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, Aug/Sep 2023 (35); figures shown are absolute number of people

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.