

Shaping Rail's Future: Customer Community

Report: Feb-Mar 2023

Disruption handling



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 our 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



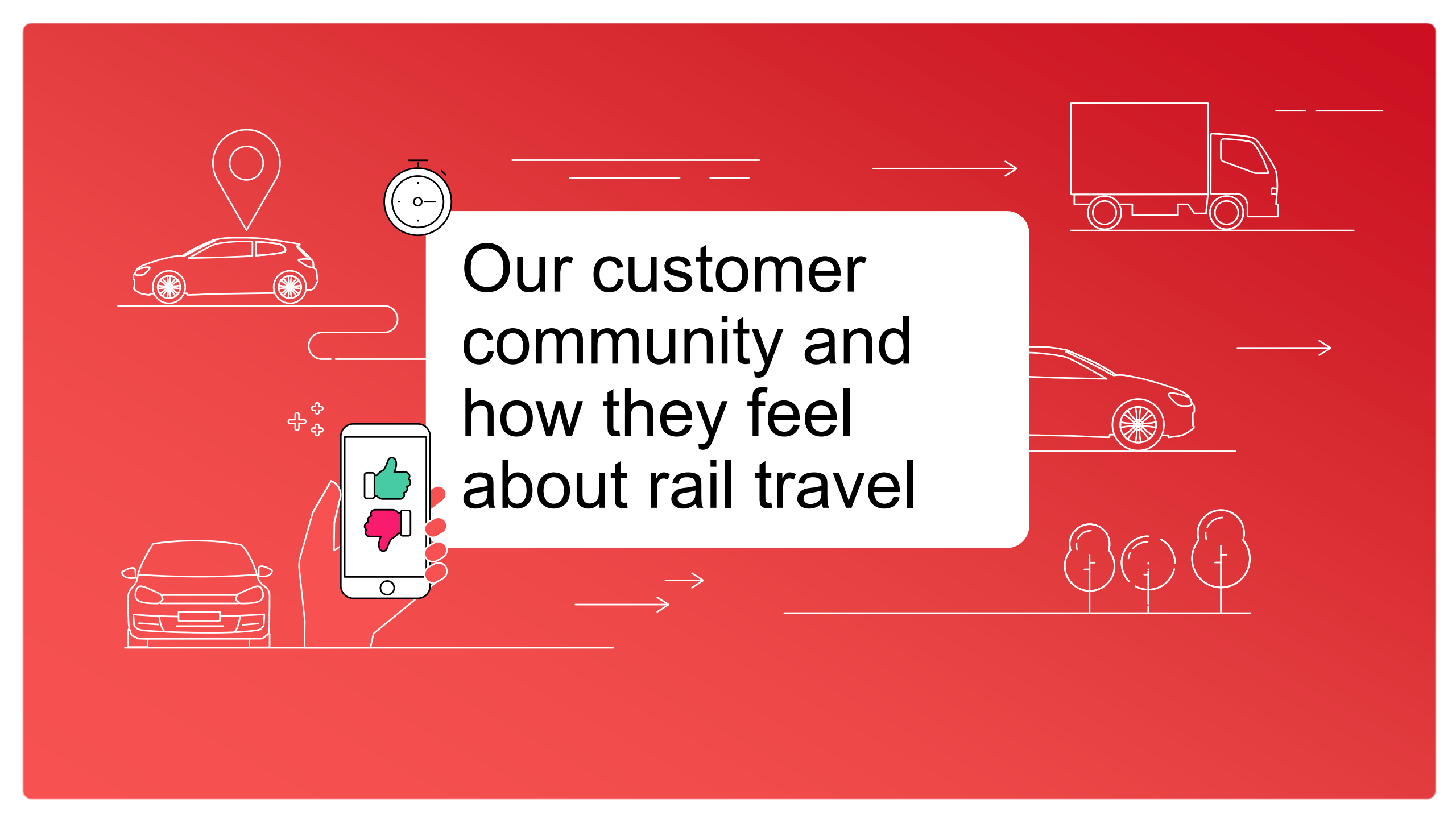
Topic focus in
February /
March 2023:

Introductions

Disruption handling

In February and March 2023 our community...

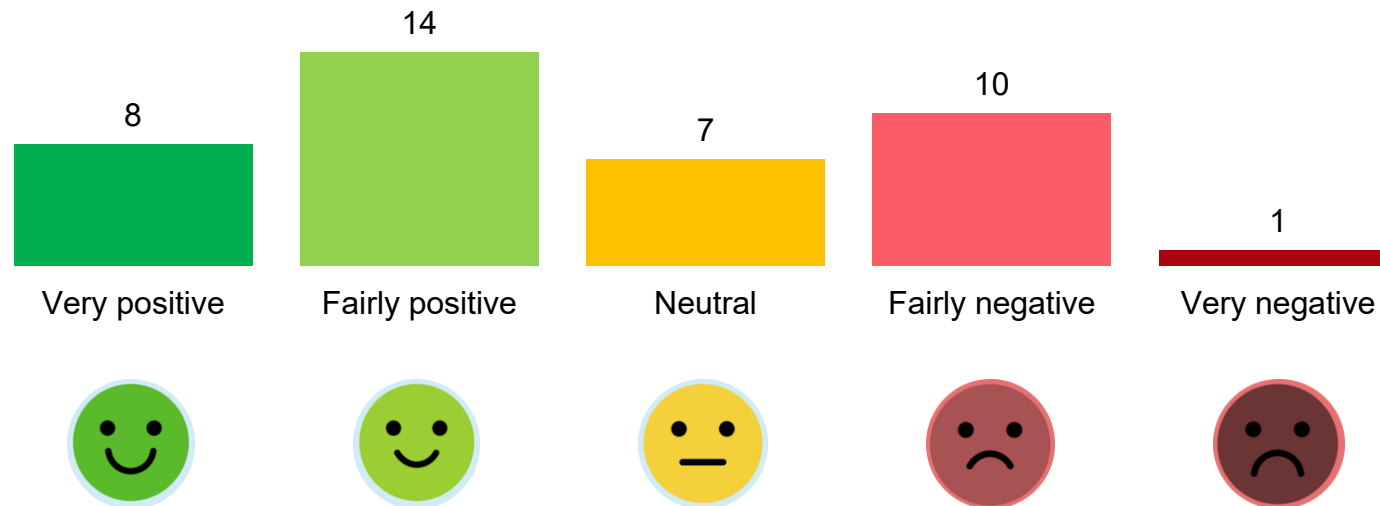
1. Introduced themselves
2. Described how they typically use trains
3. Gave us an overview of how they feel about travelling by train
4. **Talked about times when something had gone wrong with a train journey, and how it was handled**
5. **Gave examples of when problems have been handled really well in other service sectors, to provide us with some learnings**



Our customer
community and
how they feel
about rail travel

There are very mixed impressions of rail overall among our community

How you feel about travelling by train at the moment: A snapshot
(Task 4)



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

Customers come to the service with huge variation of perception, meaning and experience – for many **a train journey has meaning in its own right**: so much more than a means to an end

These ideas are often – but not exclusively, and not automatically – held by those able to use trains out of choice, and for reasons not related to work

Relaxation



Productivity



Efficiency



(Environment)



Facilitator



Adventure /
interest



Comparisons often drawn directly with other modes, especially car

Community participants provided a non-literal image to represent how they feel about travelling by train, with a brief explanation of their choice (Feb-Mar 2023)

But a range of factors can limit this potential

Some customers also begrudge the cost associated with rail travel, which often feels unjustified in the face of these issues

Unreliability



Chaos... trains delayed or worse cancelled last minute... I have given up on train travel.
(Charles, urban, commuter)

Overcrowding



Customer effort



I don't take the train enough to fully know the routine of buying a ticket (knowing what to ask for), where the train stops etc, for it to feel stress free.
(Cameron, suburban, leisure)

Indifference



Tangible factors, ostensibly within industry control

Partly coming from individual customers' context – but which the industry needs to embrace

Community participants provided a non-literal image to represent how they feel about travelling by train, with a brief explanation of their choice (Feb-Mar 2023)

...leading to frustration and disappointment at worst, and at best, generally conflicted feelings towards rail



I feel so conflicted. ...it can be ...quite pleasurable... [But] I always have to put such forward planning into [it, due to disability, and damaged trust] and it can be exceptionally stressful... unbelievably frustrating.

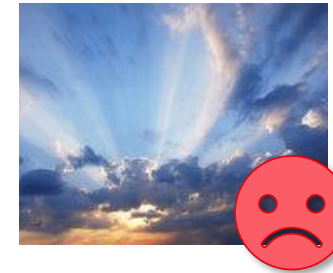
(Joshua, wheelchair user, rural, commuter)



Indifference with some disappointment. Travelling by train is a necessity for the most part. ...[I'm] more negative than positive
(Jay, suburban, commuter/leisure)



My overall thought of my experience with train travel is that it can change so that is why I choose a pendulum. For example my recent trip was amazing on my outward journey but coming back was [disrupted]
(Barbara, urban, business)



Train travel as a concept - incredible. I would love to do it more.

Train travel in the UK - I actively avoid it because of how expensive and run down everything is.
(Andy, suburban, business)



Trains are cleaner, safer, and better than other public transport (like the tube and buses). However, I am getting really frustrated with all the train strikes that always disrupt my plans, and also the trains are often late.
(Anna, suburban, commuter)

Reducing the times when things go wrong, mitigating them better when they do, and driving down everyday friction, are so critical in fulfilling the railway's otherwise multifaceted potential

Acknowledging huge variety in customer context is likely important in service and product design, marketing, other comms, customer service and beyond; rail is a service unlike many others in this respect

Community participants provided a non-literal image to represent how they feel about travelling by train, with a brief explanation of their choice (Feb-Mar 2023)

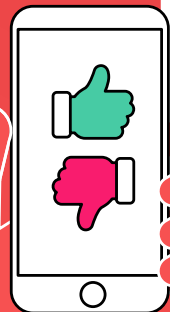
“

When it works it's great, but it seems to me you can never be sure you're going to get somewhere when you're using the train in 2023

”

Colin (57, urban, travels for business and leisure)

When things go wrong in rail travel



Some examples of journeys made by our community, where they felt that they experienced some kind of disruption

Charles

Short notice cancellation, meaning subsequent train had **no allocated seating**, and Charles and his wife stood for 7+ hours.

Jay

Stressful rush hour: **short notice information and sudden platform changes**. Eventual pragmatism when gates opened to reduce congestion

Alice

Train **unexpectedly terminated early**, leaving Alice and her father stranded after midnight. Promised taxis never materialised

Rob

Train unexpectedly stopped short, and other delays, meant missed connections and a tired young family. Poor information throughout

Andy

TVM printer failure, meaning he couldn't access his ticket, and **unhelpful staff** led to what Andy saw as a ridiculous, stressful waste of time

Barbara

Short notice cancellation, leading to **missed connection**. Efficient provision of taxis meant Barbara avoided being stranded late at night.

Anna

Anna feels her short distance commute across London is **"almost always" late**, causing inconvenience and **overcrowding**

John

Severe delays followed by train terminating early meant a missed connection. Frustration that TOC was only concerned with A-B, not A-B-C

Marie

Train **halted due to a fatality**. Marie had some sympathy, felt that information was good, and compensation was generous

Colin

Two-carriage train provided during busy sport weekend; Colin felt this was **poorly planned**

See more detail on each of these examples in the appendix to this report

In summary, there are **three main types of disruption** that stand out and feel like “problems with rail travel” **to customers**

Sizes of bubbles are not intended to provide a robust, quantitative measure of how commonly these types of disruption are encountered. Rather, this is a qualitative indication of how often, relative to each other, they are felt to make a difference.



Cancellation

Of which, about two thirds of examples were on longer (1 hr +) journeys, and were made relatively infrequently, for leisure reasons



Delay

Equally likely to be memorable and impactful on both longer infrequent, and shorter familiar journeys



Termination en route

All examples given were for longer distance journeys

Of course, it's the more impactful cases which get talked about most, and in practice these may be relatively less frequent. But, in their nature as memorable examples, **these types of issue are what contribute to varied and often conflicted customer perceptions of the railway.**

So it goes without saying that the frequency of such cases must be reduced, and they must be mitigated effectively where unavoidable

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



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

Other



For example:

Overcrowding

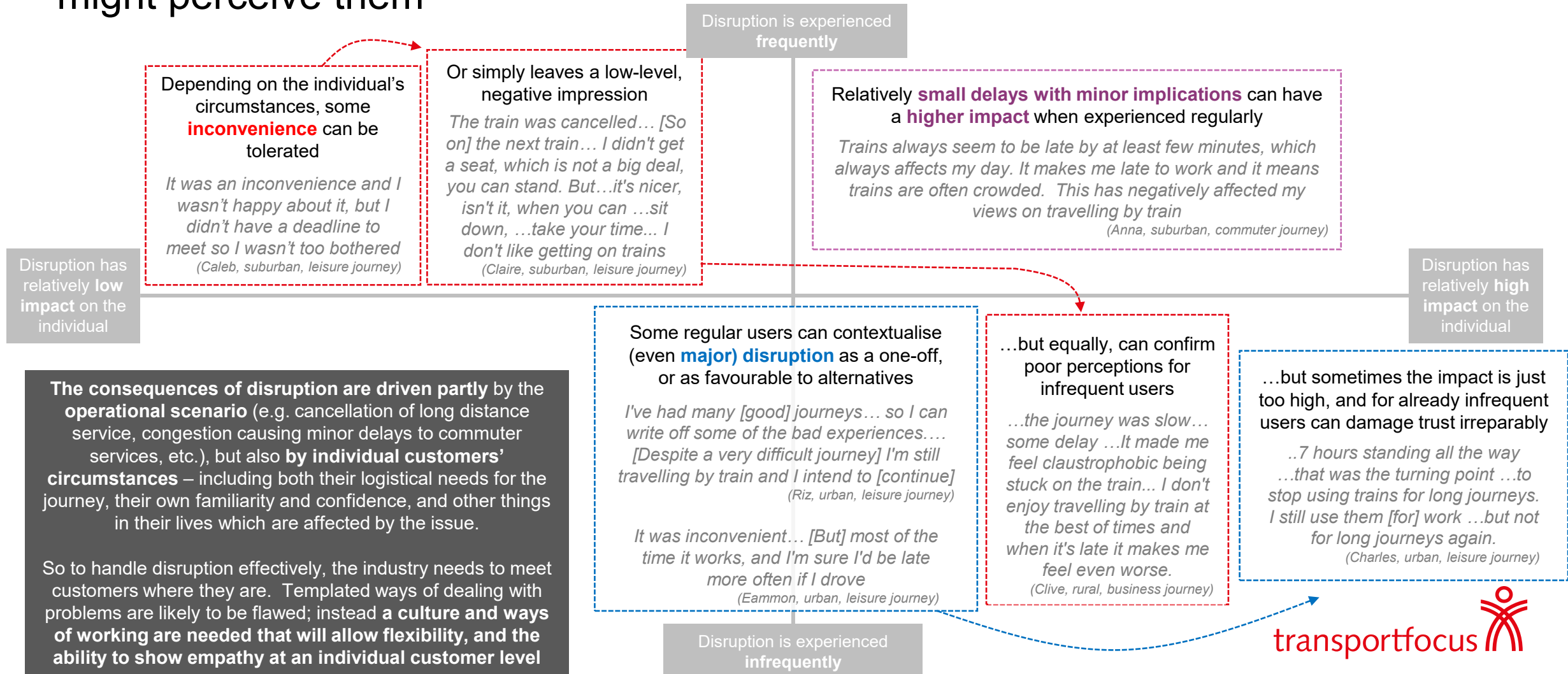
Overheating (due to weather)

Problems with facilities / amenities (e.g. lifts, first class, allocated seating, TVMs, Passenger Assistance)

Customers' own mistakes (missed stops, etc.)

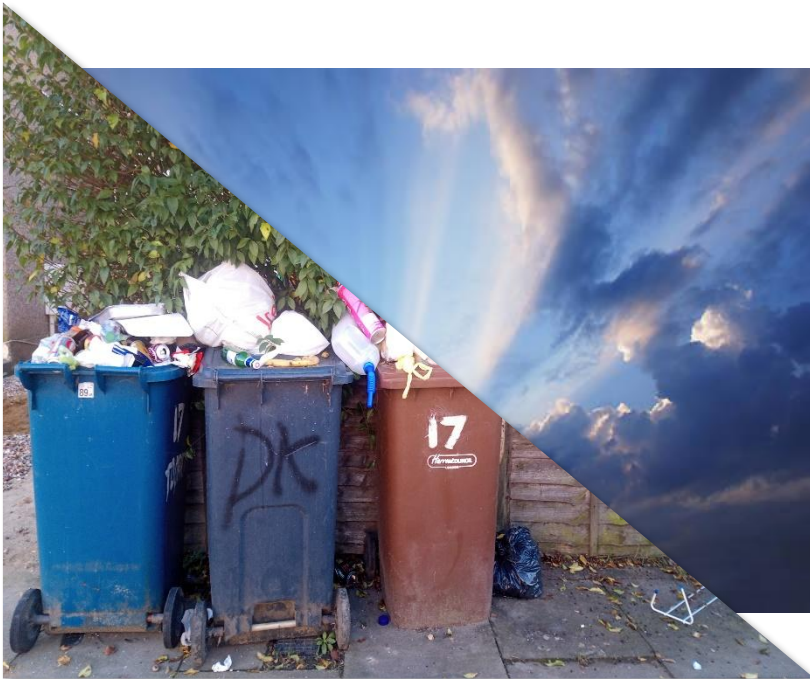
And for some customers, no specific disruption examples stand out, but they have an overall perception of ongoing, low-level unreliability

The implications of disruption are incredibly varied, and not necessarily linked to either the type of scenario, or to the operational severity of issues as the industry might perceive them



All of this also has a business implication: while some instances of disruption can be overlooked, it also has longer term consequences for the public's relationship with rail, which are more often negative

This takes various forms, **reinforcing perceptions that undermine rail's potential**, including damaged opportunity for advocacy and for nurturing customers of the future:



Images are examples of the way participants' express how they feel about travelling by train.

I write off the bad experiences and **continue to see train travel as a good option**

I pay for more flexible tickets just in case, and **I know I'm not getting the best deal**

I plan lots of contingency just in case, which compromises my time and my plans, and **I feel some resentment**

I use train reluctantly and natural confirmation bias means **I am predisposed to see negatives**

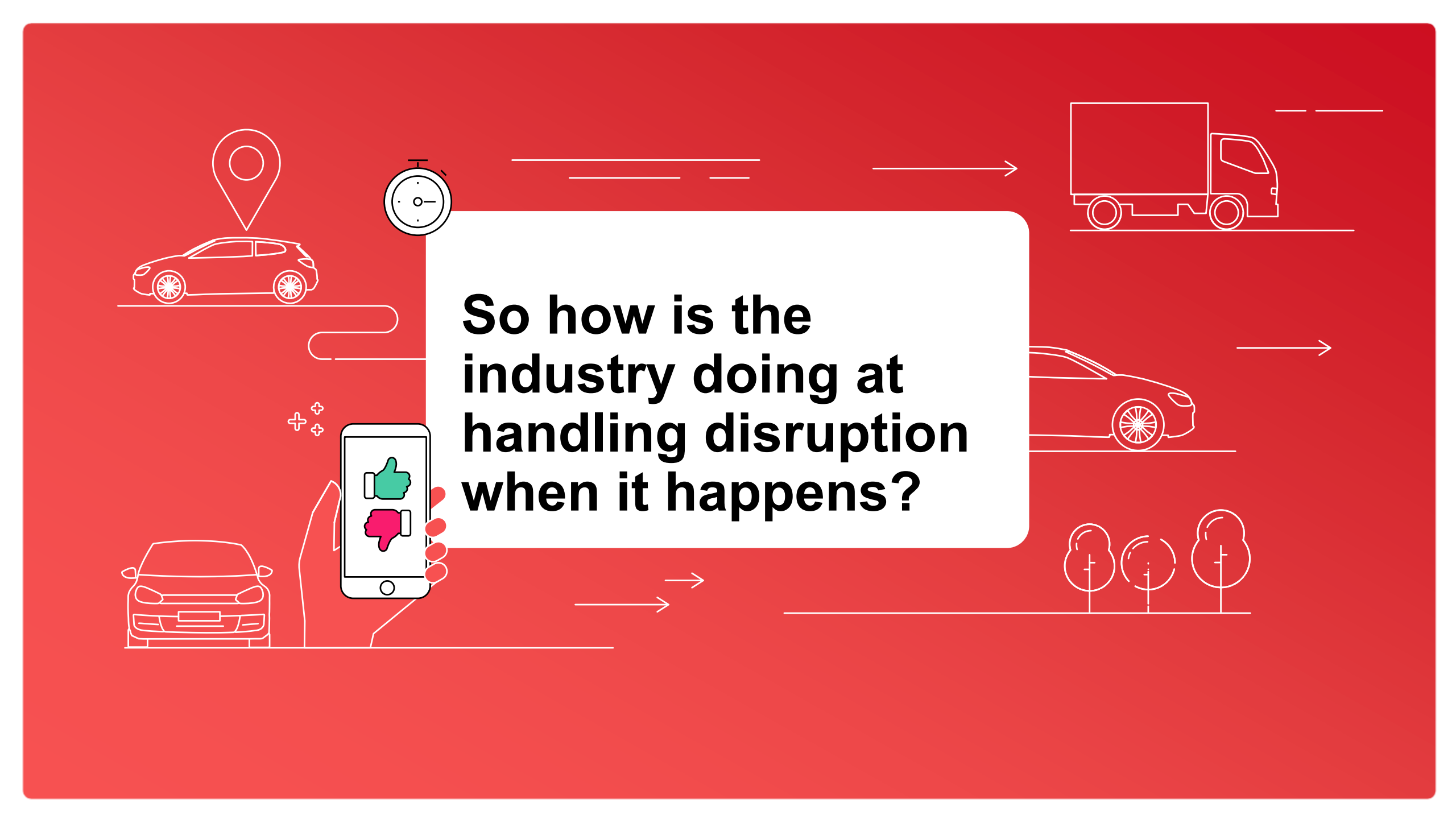
I use train for work but **it would never enter my consideration for other journey occasions**

I travel by train but **I'm no advocate**. I might contribute to negative discourse about train travel in wider society... or even actively advise people against it in some situations

I'll work at home more often to **reduce my dependency and spending** on an unreliable service

I actively avoid using the train for certain types of journey, or at all

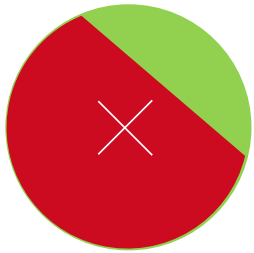
I'm young and slowly **developing a default perception of mistrust, which will be difficult to overcome as I grow older**, when I will potentially have more reasons to use trains, and have more spending power to do so (and/or I'm passing this on to my children)



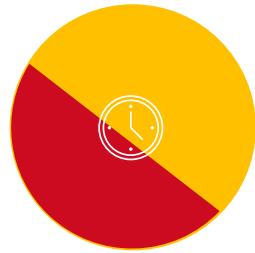
**So how is the
industry doing at
handling disruption
when it happens?**

There are pockets of excellence, but on the whole disruption is (remembered as being) managed quite poorly for customers

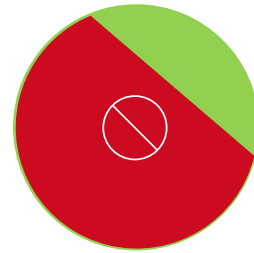
Traffic light colours used here to give a (qualitative) indication of how often our community talked about poor (red), good (green) or neither / nor (amber) ways in which problems they encountered were handled.



Cancellation



Delay



Termination en route



Other

It is natural that the poorer examples of disruption management are the most memorable and somewhat overshadow the times when the industry and its staff do really well – so the negative side might be over-represented in what we have heard from our community participants, in terms of the number of occasions when disruption is handled well and less well.

But regardless of this, just as it is important to drive down the frequency of things going wrong in the first place, it's also really worthwhile improving how it is dealt with, and reducing the number of occasions when management is poor. It's worth it for customers, because the bad experiences can make life difficult at the time; it's worth it for the industry, because again, the more memorable occasions are the ones which drive how "brand rail" is perceived, both by individuals and within the national psyche.

Our community gave us many different examples of poor disruption handling, which can be organised into some key themes



Information and
communication



Systemic or
structural issues /
processes



Handling the
operational
consequences of
disruption



Lack of customer
centricity in our
culture

Plus, through all of this, is much **inconsistency**
(within the experience of individual TOCs, and even within the experience of individual customers)

Some specific examples of actions and issues that need to be fixed are given on the next four pages

Some of the things that need to be fixed:

i Information and communication

Accuracy and timing of “push” communications

Customer receives short notice

(even where it may have been known about by TOCs in advance)

...two days before [the journey] it had snowed. We had booked tickets ...the journey [took over 2 hrs longer than expected]! ...[but] we were only told by the driver that due to frozen signs/snow we were going slow
(Tom, urban, leisure journey)

Lack of info / updates

Preventing customer from making alternative arrangements

[Unexpected termination meaning customers had to wait for a different train to continue to destination]:

We were told [it] would be coming “soon” but waited 20 minutes before being told there was some issue... [so] I rang my dad to collect me.... I feel like they may well have known [it would take a long time]... so if they had told us then I would have called my dad sooner
(Jay, suburban, leisure journey)

Misinformation

Preventing customer from taking action and/or leading them to incorrect action

I spoke to three different staff members at the time and got three different answers. I understood ...that things happen ...outside of anyone’s control, but to leave us there with no [useable] information was not good.
(Rob, suburban, leisure journey)

Inconsistency / changing information

(reinforcing any perception of chaos; even implying deception)

Because of snow... trains were cancelled all over the place... [but] the app said that certain trains were running, and then they get cancelled... I lost faith and ended up getting a bus...and being 45 minutes late... I needed the app to be accurate, and up to date
(Fiona, suburban, business journey)

...the board [says] ... “on time”...then a minute late... continues until eventually the train arrives... [This] company doesn’t want to admit [to being] 15 minutes late, and is dishonestly moving the time a minute at a time.
(Gavin, urban, mainly leisure)

Tone & relevance, especially via interactive channels where more tailored communication, in direct response to individuals, feels more expected

Insincerity

Stock responses, language that feels distancing / excuses

They were citing COVID for the reason and lack of staff, etcetera. Lack of rolling stock. The boring stuff that you usually hear when trains are in a mess.
(Colin, urban, leisure journey)

Non-engagement / no ownership taken by “remote” touchpoints

e.g. customer service helpline, Twitter

I asked for help ...[but] no luck. So instead I tweeted, but the answers were the standard, “go and use the self-help customer service sections [on the website]”, which didn’t help as I was already on the platform waiting for a train.
(Tom, suburban, commuter journey)

Some of the things that need to be fixed:



Systemic or structural issues / processes

TOCs / lines of route operating in silos

*I was basically met with a shrug of the shoulders. It was like, well, their job was to get me to Leeds and ...it basically wasn't their problem if I[then] missed the last train from Leeds to Hebden Bridge ...it's **this idea that if you get from A to B, they've done their job. But so many train journeys ...[are] A to B to C, ...There seems to be a lack of culpability when you move from one company to another...** I've paid for a ticket from A to B to C, You know, just getting from A to B isn't particularly helpful*
(John, rural, business journey)

*My train [to Bradford] was not running when I arrived [at Keighley]. I got the Leeds train instead, so I could get off at Shipley, to then connect to Bradford.... [But I missed the connection due to extra ticket checks holding me up at Shipley]. It is already awkward enough to get between the five spread out platforms at Shipley. **Why [do they] need to check tickets of connecting passengers that already showed them to get on the train, plus will have to show them yet again to get out station at Bradford?***
(Oliver, suburban, commuter journey)

Miscommunication between staff / stations (even within TOCs)

*And on the way back... around 1am ...[the train was terminated early]. I can't recall exactly why, but **we were told we would get taxis to Sheffield provided by the train company** ...There was no real communication when we were on the train, so ...I went up to **the conductor ... [who said] if you just go outside the entrance, there'll be a taxi waiting for you** ...And the taxis never came ...then **I called the train company and ...they weren't aware of taxis***
(Alice, urban, leisure journey)

Ticket invalidity / inflexibility

*They cancelled my train 10 minutes before it was supposed to take off ... **they didn't give me any notification... and they said to me that it was my fault because I didn't check...** And ...I had to basically buy another ticket, and I wasn't refunded for the old one, which was terrible.*
(Una, Urban, leisure journey)

[The train was] delayed... [and I] missed my connecting train ...I was told I could get on any subsequent train and my ticket would be valid... But the ticket inspector insisted on fining me for having an invalid ticket ...Only after a sustained (public) argument did he agree not to fine me ...I sympathise with staff as they are suffering as a result of problems elsewhere. But it is so frustrating, after already having dealt with one delay, to be further penalised through no fault of one's own.
(John, rural, business journey)

Processes leading to "computer says no" attitude

*I tried to collect [my tickets] and the [TVM] printer was broken ...So I went to the reception desk and ...he said that I'd have to re-buy the tickets and then submit a claim form for it, which was over £100 ... **[It was] an admin error, where they could just literally reprint the ticket and the guy was really rude** ...[In the end someone else sorted it out], but it was just such a silly little thing that turned into a massive, massive deal. And **I don't know whether it was the guy or the system that's been put in place [that was at fault]**, but it was just a stressful start to the day.*
(Andy, suburban, business journey)

Some of the things that need to be fixed:

(Consequential) operational issues

Flaws in provision of alternative travel

E.g. not following through with customer all the way to ensure they can access alternative transport

*When we got there, **we found there was a bus replacement service.** ...we had to walk to the end of the road, to get the replacement bus. I mean, **it was awful... if we'd have had mobility problems ...to walk there, or if it was a tight deadline ...the signing was really poor...** we'd never caught a replacement bus from there so we didn't know where it was. There was no one around to tell us where to go*

(Tracy, urban, leisure journey)

*But when we got to Machynlleth ..the train terminate[d] there and we were asked to get off, it wasn't quite clear why. And **we were then ...told that ...buses [would] take us to the relevant stations.** It was all a bit confusing and ...it was very cold. And we waited around the station ... a very long time ...and **I wasn't quite sure what I was meant to be doing.** And finally, I asked a member of staff, "Do you know when the bus is going to come for Pwllheli?" And they said, "Well, it's waiting outside". **And I just thought, well, you could have told us ...I could have actually have missed it.** So it was a very annoying experience.*

(Riz, suburban, leisure journey)

Delays meaning that subsequent trains feature lower quality service

E.g. overcrowding, lost seat reservations, discomfort, trolley cancellation

*I ...had a reserved seat on the train, where I expected to be able to work ...My train was on time but the two previous trains had been cancelled.... [so] there were three times the normal number of people ...and reservations no longer applied. **I spent the journey standing, crammed ...by the toilets. Obviously, this made it impossible to work ...I enquired whether, due to the exceptional circumstances, we might ...use First Class (which was barely half full). I was told that this would only be the case if I agreed to pay the upgrade, which I refused to do.***

(John, rural, business journey)

*...so there were not enough seats and people were standing. **Those who had reserved seats struggled to get to them because so many people were standing and the trolley service was cancelled as they couldn't get through. It was an awful experience.***

(Clive, rural, business journey)

(Perception that) expected issues are poorly planned for

*It was sitting on the floor room only [for]... the whole way ...**There was rugby on that day ...races... football...[and the TOC] thought it a good idea to only have two carriages....**We didn't even come back on the train because we knew it would be really bad... we shared an Uber.*

(Colin, urban, leisure journey)

Some of the things that need to be fixed:



(Perceived or real) lack of customer centricity in our culture

Perceived lack of accountability & insensitivity to individuals' circumstances (or at worst, rudeness)

*[Despite phoning in advance and being assured it would be fixed] I turned up ...[and] the lift was out of order. ...**The person behind the ticket office couldn't give a damn**, and instead of dealing with my enquiry directly, they went, "Oh, don't worry, someone will come and speak with you" ... which wasted another 10 minutes. [He just told me to go around to the other lift, but I wouldn't make it in time and I would be late] ...So I finally get annoyed because **the train personnel, in my eyes, don't see me as a professional because disabled people aren't meant to work, are they?** ...[It will make] me look unprofessional if I'm late, but no one from the rail company cares. ...[I don't want to feel special or extraordinary. I just want to get my train like anyone else.... [and to be] treated like a human being ...assistance can be so hit and miss.*

(Joshua, wheelchair user, rural, commuter journey)

They said, "Oh, just take the next train" [as if it's that easy]....

*[And later] **Being unapologetic was not acceptable.** I can understand their inability to fix things, but they could have at least apologised*

(Charles, urban, leisure journey)

Lack of support = customer effort

*The train got cancelled, so I had to take the country route rather than going through London. But [that included] a rail replacement service which added about three hours onto the journey. Luckily, I had a look at the Journey Planner ...[and] ultimately changed my destination and went via Birmingham [taking an extra 2 hours]. ...**And there was no support. I couldn't find anyone who I could ask for help. I just had to try and make all these arrangements myself.***

(Tom, suburban, leisure journey)

Lack of response to complaint / claim

*As result [of cancellations] I missed work, the people I look after didn't have their full care they desperately need. **I did contact someone about this and they told me to contact a different department, which I did but I had no response.** I would have at least liked a response since it impacted so many people ... **just to be informed [about what happened] if possible, but not to be ignored.***

(Katherine, suburban, commuting journey)

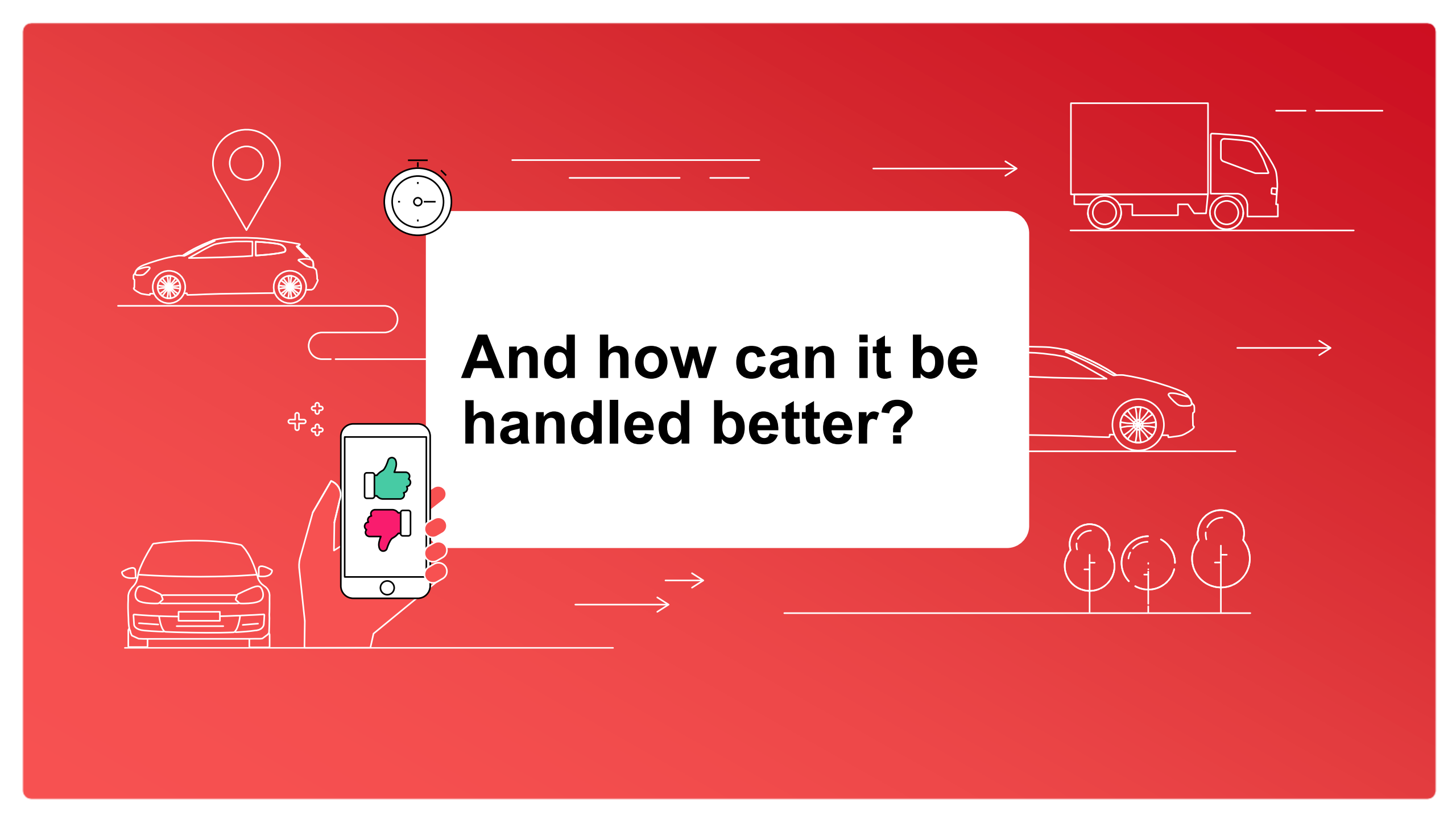
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Being delayed on a train is just part of life! Things happen which are out of the control of the train company...

The only thing that will upset me is the lack of communication from staff or the driver when trains are delayed

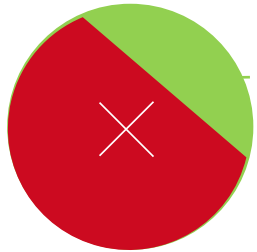
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Tom (50, urban, travels mainly for business)



**And how can it be
handled better?**

The industry is already handling disruption well in some circumstances: some key themes are common in these scenarios



Cancellation

Barbara

Staff engaged **face to face**; **alternative transport** took her **all the way**; robust **support** to find and use the alternative transport

Mark

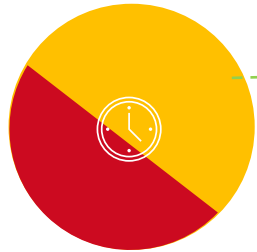
Not penalised for using a ticket that was technically invalid, as a result of a cancellation

Alessia

Clear information from station staff about when next train would come, and **reassurance** about her ticket

Anne

One-click compensation process



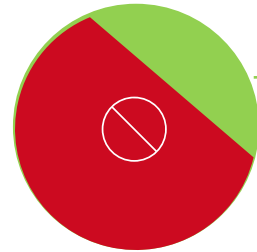
Delay

Clive

Pro-active (automatic) delay repay

Marie

Pro-active information on board about the reason for the delay, and for **compensation**



Termination en route

Simon

Face to face engagement and transparency from staff who seemed to take **genuine responsibility**: providing **information, goodwill gestures** on board

Lucy

Easy website form for DR, full **reimbursement**; **safe environment** at station even at night (bright, staff presence)



Other

Jay

Practical help from staff, who **personally** took passengers to find and access seats on a severely overcrowded train, including **special help and attention** in her situation with a baby

Michelle

Kind, understanding staff who helped work out how to get back on track when she mistakenly missed her stop

More broadly, the features of good handling are:

The following themes and features arise from our community's descriptions of rail disruption that was handled well and how they would like to see it done better, as well as their descriptions of when problems have been handled well in other service sectors (e.g. in other modes of transport, banking, insurance, retail, broadband, utilities, etc.)



What

Practical help

Support to find alternatives
Reduce friction for using those alternatives (practical support and wayfinding, "onward travel voucher")

Information and communication

Clear, easy to access, transparent

Financial / tangible recompense

Compensation, goodwill gestures



How

Tailored

Recognising and dealing with me as an individual

Pragmatism

Staff agency to make decisions

Empathy

Sensitivity to the situation, humanity
Attention to detail: think through whole customer journey from here

Accountability

Face to face, transparent engagement (not "hiding away")
Meaningful apology
Waivers / not penalising
No quibbles

Low customer effort

Fast, efficient, salient help is easy to access and use, via channels that work for me

Sense of urgency

Compensation and Delay Repay



“

I've been taking the train for years and have only just found out that you can get compensation if your train is delayed for more than 15 minutes (I think) so **they definitely need to advertise that more.**

It may cost them more short term but in the long run you will keep customers.

”

Claire (28, suburban, travels short distances for leisure)

Inconsistency also characterises the current experience of claiming and receiving compensation

Inconsistency of knowledge / awareness



✓ Claimed / received

Of 20 disruption examples given by our community, where the customer was likely to have been eligible for compensation, only 11 made a claim and/or received an automatic repayment



Awareness of potential compensation is partly linked to familiarity / frequency (though not all frequent users are aware)



Staff were vital in other cases:

This information [was] given out when we were told there was an incident. I wouldn't have thought to look this up myself.

(Marie)



Others either had no idea that compensation might be offered



Or assumed – based on existing negative perceptions – that the process wouldn't be worthwhile



A minority took a more conscious decision not to take things further, feeling that the disruption was relatively minor

Inconsistency of handling compensation scenarios

...in the customer effort required:



Rob spent two months calling and chasing



Anne found her TOC's website difficult to use so gave up



...but like others she also made a claim "in a click" through Trainline

...in the detail of how customers are treated:



For instance Riz was reimbursed for a £30 taxi she was forced to take in Wales



...but Alice was made to feel that she was asking a lot, that a similar reimbursement was exceptional

...and even within an individual TOC's procedures, for the same customer:

I've done it once .. it takes too long...It was £5, which is barely worth the effort

(Clive)

-----> [For a similar scenario occurring during this study]:

Surprisingly, I have a reply saying... compensation will be credited in the next few days. [TOC] are getting better with customer service!

Compensation and especially unexpected goodwill gestures are generally appreciated



...at the time I didn't know if I'd get money back, but luckily I got reimbursed quite a lot of my ticket ... which was ...**amazing** for me with the fact that I was still at university at this time
(Lucy, urban, leisure journey)

We were compensated for our train not running on time. I believe we got half of the amount of money of our ticket back, **which I think was very generous**. And so I was quite happy, and not sure what else could have been done differently... **[I'd be] happy to do this journey again**
(Marie, suburban, leisure journey)

And I have to say, the staff couldn't have been better at explaining the situation ... Further on in the journey, **they announced that because of all the disruption they would provide free refreshments from the buffet car, which was very nice and helped smooth things** ...it was a good experience in the face of a difficult situation that could involve them for that.

(Simon, suburban, business journey)

But some feel compensation should be extended to other scenarios

...to other costs incurred as a direct consequence of cancellation and delay

...The train was cancelled, which left me ...either [making] three changes and [taking] five hours ...or have to stay the night in London. So it ruined my plans ...[as well as having] **to spend my own money for a hotel**
(Martin, urban, leisure journey)

Due to the cancellation, I [missed] the Heathrow Express, ...my flight ...[and] an important client meeting. ...This resulted in substantial damage to ...my business reputation, [and]... financial implications to my company and the people I employ.... **The £30 [compensation] offered so far is totally inadequate.**
(Clive, rural, business journey)

...or to other types of disruption and inconvenience

...I spent the journey standing, crammed ...by the toilets... [so] could not work as intended. As my train wasn't delayed ...I am not entitled to any compensation. However...**I was profoundly uncomfortable and denied resources I am entitled to. It seems absurd ...that there is no compensation scheme for this.**
(John, rural, business journey)

Beyond tangible reimbursement, what do customers expect or hope for from compensation?



Genuine acknowledgement of the impact on me

Relevant compensation that feels fair in the circumstances

Compensation that is relevant to my disrupted journey as a whole – acknowledging other expenses and the inconvenience

Rail vouchers can be galling as recompense for extreme disruption to an individual's journey (e.g. lasting hours, requiring other transport)

Goodwill gestures, like a coffee, to ease comfort (note: providing water in extreme heat can be expected rather than seen as generosity)



Minimal effort

No quibbles, pro-active
Efficient, quick, automatic

Clear, easy to find information, policies and processes

Automatic / opt-out (rather than in) auto-DR scheme, when booking in advance or where details are known

Easy to contact, empathetic staff

Full, transparent and honest engagement with my situation

Summary



Disruption from the customer perspective: summary

Disruption to train journeys – regardless of how frequent or infrequent it is, or how often it makes a substantial difference in reality – **looms large in customer perception**, and influences overall impressions of the railway for both users and non users

Instances of disruption, large and small, need to be reduced, both for customers' sake, and for the sake of “brand rail” – which has great, but currently under-fulfilled, potential

When unavoidable disruption happens, it needs to be handled more effectively: there are pockets of great practice, but we do get it wrong, and this is typically more memorable

From customer perspective, disruption comes in the form of **delays** (both “minor” and major), **cancellation, premature halts**, and a range of **other problems and inconveniences**, including overcrowding and faults with amenities, facilities and ancillary services

The experiences of our community indicate that:

- **“Bigger” (the most memorable and impactful) types of disruption** – typically where trains are cancelled or terminated before the intended destination – **have the greatest degree of inconsistency in how they are handled**: the industry must learn from and implement best practice here
- **Delays are least likely to be perceived as being handled well**: more effort is needed here to ensure customers know their rights, and to apologise and compensate people quickly and without additional friction
- Other problems are handled well on isolated occasions, but **overall more attention is needed on these other issues which can let down otherwise good, core operational performance**

Disruption - where things go wrong and what must change: summary

Where the industry does less well in handling disruption, there are four key areas in which this happens:

- Flaws or failings in **communication** to customers
- **Inflexible or flawed systems, processes and rules**, which sometimes hamper front-line staff's ability to resolve issues
- **Unsatisfactory handling of the operational consequences of disruption** (e.g. provision/support with alternative modes, subsequent overcrowding) – not following all the way through for customers to their end-point, reverting to a logistical exercise rather than a service for *people*
- **Lack of customer centricity**

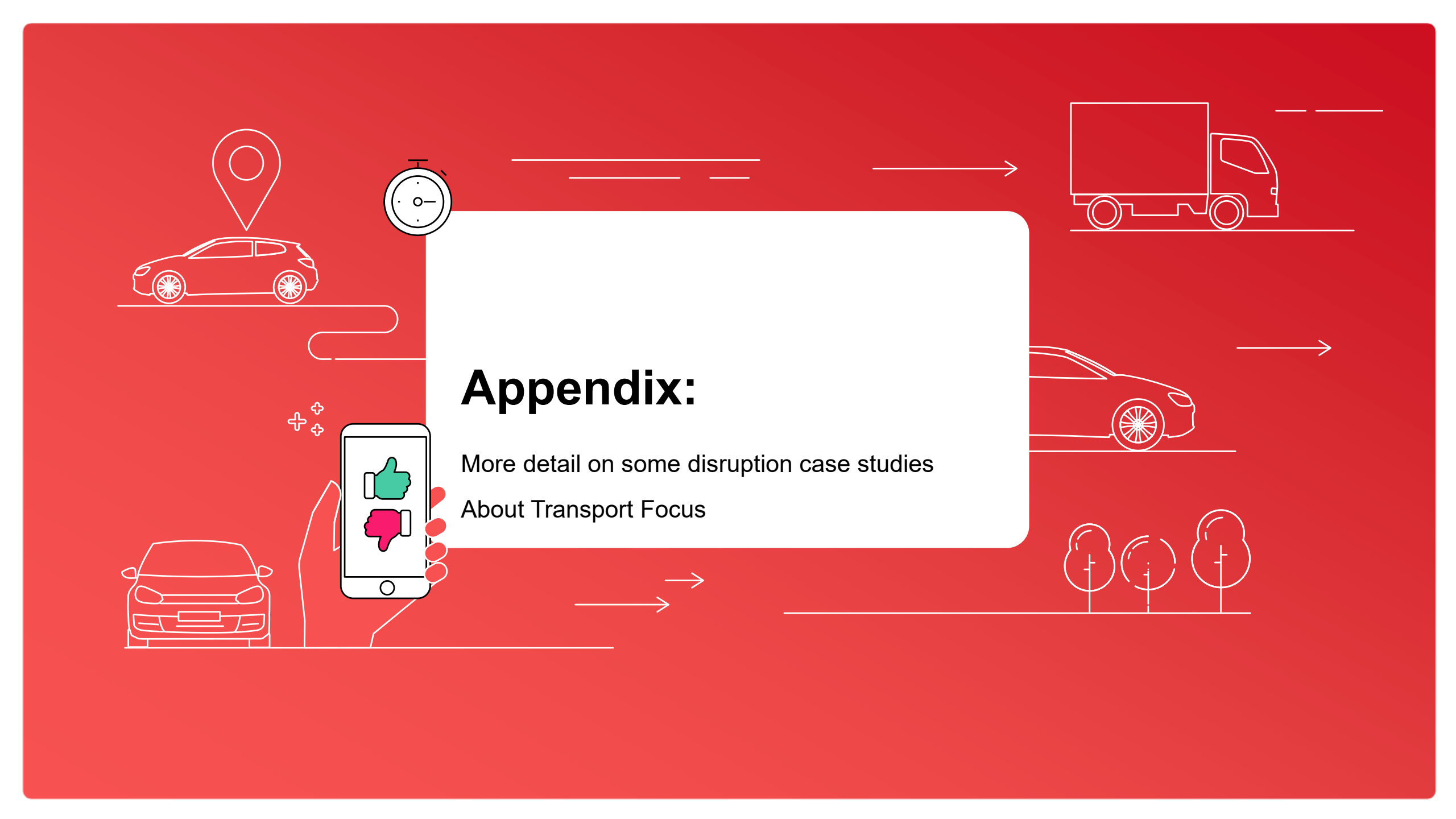
Instead, companies need to do all of the practical things to resolve disruption that they are already doing, but **from a (more consistently) different starting point, where customer needs drive what is done and how.**

This includes (demonstrably) acting with a **sense of urgency**, demonstrating an **acceptance of responsibility** for when things go wrong, being **empathetic**, having the **flexibility** to tailor resolutions to customer groups or individuals, and **reducing customers' effort** as far as possible.

Compensation (of which Delay Repay is a part) plays a key role.

But **customers' awareness** of their own rights is **widely varied**, and the **administration of compensation is inconsistent.**

Like the requirements for handling disruption in general, **customers need to be informed about compensation, and it must be fair and friction free**



Appendix:

More detail on some disruption case studies
About Transport Focus

Alice and Rob made long distance journeys in which the train stopped short of a destination, with stressful consequences

Alice

Works full time, lives in a busy family home in Yorkshire with her mum and siblings. Travels every couple of weeks to friends in London.



London to
Sheffield



Late
evening



One-off
leisure trip

Returning home to Sheffield after a day out at Wimbledon with her father, **Alice's train terminated unexpectedly at Derby**, some time after midnight.

Passengers were told that taxis would be provided to take them onward.

Information given on board was sparse. Anxious, she checked with the guard several times, who confirmed she should just go outside of the station to find taxis. At Derby, however, **there were no taxis.**

After waiting 30-40 minutes, feeling cold, unsafe, and worried about her phone battery, she called the train company. It took some time to get through, and **they were unaware of any taxi provision.** They agreed to arrange this, but **taxis still did not arrive after chasing several times** more.

After around 1.5 hours, Alice and her dad took an Uber home. She claimed and was refunded for the Uber, but felt that this in itself was handled poorly.

Our evening was ruined [after] a really good day ...we just didn't need it to end like that.... they should've been apologetic instead of saying it's an exceptional circumstances and that's why we are covering your Uber fare. There should have been an effort to do more than just cover the expenses.

Rob

Stay-at-home dad with two young children. Travels from Sheffield to see family in South Wales 2-3 times a year. Doesn't drive.



Sheffield to
Milford Haven



Afternoon,
December



Semi-regular
leisure trip

When travelling with his partner and 3-year old to see family for Christmas, **Rob's train terminated without notice at Crewe**, where the family were stuck for 2 hours.

After initially **struggling to get information on how to proceed from Crewe**, Rob found a ticket desk where he was advised about which train to catch next.

However, after boarding he realised that **this second train actually terminated at Carmarthen**, and due to another unconnected delay they needed to wait another hour at Carmarthen for a service to take them all the way to Milford Haven.

He contacted TfW the next day and was eventually refunded. However, **this process was drawn out, and he felt that the compensation should also have acknowledged the stress** both during and after the journey.

[At Crewe] we had no idea where we were meant to go, what train to get, whether they'd accept our ticket ... [Then] we got thrown off at Carmarthen ... at 7:00 at night. My son is tired, hungry, cold. My missus is not happy ... she was actually pregnant.

...I got the usual apology with promises to look into it ...which started 2 months of phone calls. [It] seems the original call handler did not put the complaint in properly.

John and Marie also made journeys which stopped short of their destination – with different perspectives and experiences again

John

Works from home in Yorkshire. Travels around North of England and sometimes to London about once a week, usually for leisure.



London to
Hebden Bridge



Late
evening



One-off
leisure trip

Returning home from London, **Stephen's train between London and Leeds was severely delayed, and then ultimately terminated unexpectedly at Doncaster.**

At Doncaster, he asked for help to complete his journey, and was advised that there was a late-evening train to Leeds. However, there would subsequently be no way to get to Hebden Bridge from Leeds at that time.

He happens to have family in Doncaster, so **stayed there overnight rather than be stranded in Leeds at night**, and then had to rearrange work for the next day while he made his way home to Hebden Bridge the following morning.

He knew that different companies operated the two legs of his journey, and was **really frustrated that staff appeared only to take responsibility for "their" leg, and not for his whole journey.** He also worried about other customers who may not have been fortunate as to have somewhere to stay in an emergency as he did.

And it's this idea that... if you get from A to B they've done their job. But so many train journeys ...go from A to B to C ...It would be nice if you were met with a greater level of understanding ...things like this are hugely frustrating. It was an expensive train anyway ...it makes you question whether you take the train in the future

Marie

Lives in Falkirk with husband and two children; currently a full time carer for her son. Travels infrequently by train, usually for leisure.



London to
Falkirk



Daytime



One-off
leisure trip

Travelling home from London with her family, **Marie's train was stopped on the track and was unable to proceed for over an hour.**

She learned a little later that **it was caused by a fatality on the track, though she was grateful that it was described only as an "incident"** when it was announced on board, as she was travelling with two children aged 6 and 9.

She was unwell at the time and was desperate to get home, but **had sympathy with the situation and felt it was handled as well as could be expected** overall.

She was advised to keep hold of and photograph her tickets in order to make a compensation claim – she wouldn't have thought to do so herself. The tickets were then partially refunded, which she appreciated.

I think it was half of our ticket price that was refunded which I thought was very generous. Not sure that they could have done anything better, just a very unfortunate event to happen.

Charles and Barbara had short notice cancellations. Both had difficult journeys, but were left with very different impressions of rail travel

Charles

Engineering manager from Reading. Occasionally commutes by train to work in Theale, has travelled for leisure in the past with his wife



Reading to
Edinburgh



Daytime



One-off
leisure trip

Charles and his wife were looking forward to a mini break in Edinburgh “our favourite city”. The train journey was to be part of the holiday, with great scenery to be viewed on the way, from a seat which was carefully pre-booked to their preferences.

However, when they arrived at the station to begin the London to Edinburgh leg, **the train was unexpectedly cancelled an hour and a half before departure**. Instead they had to board **the next available train, which was full, and they had to stand up all the way for around 7 hours**, with their own and others’ luggage filling up space around them.

He didn’t feel that staff were helpful, with **no apology and no attempt to smooth things over**. He didn’t claim for compensation or make a complaint – “it was one to forget” – but reflects now that **no information was given at the time about customers’ rights** or how to claim.

A journey to remember for the wrong reasons.... [it was] the big turning point ...to stop using trains for long journeys.... I remember being so stressed

Barbara

Management consultant from Salford, where she flat-shares with a friend. Travels around the country for business every couple of months



Edinburgh to
Manchester



Friday
evening



Occasional
business trip

Intending to return home after a work conference, **very strong winds resulted in Barbara’s 5pm train being cancelled**.

Knowing there would be no trains the next day due to scheduled strikes, **she boarded a London-bound train at 8pm instead, hoping to connect to Manchester from York**.

This train was inevitably very crowded and made slow progress, and she realised that **by the time she arrived in York there would be no trains to Manchester**.

She spoke to **staff on board, who advised her to get off at Doncaster**, where taxis would be provided to York. **At Doncaster, staff were on hand to help “hundreds of people” get taxis, which were paid for by the train company**

[I was] really stressed, I didn’t know what I would do... true to their word, there were ...people helping out [at Doncaster] because ...hundreds of people were stranded. ...I arrived home at 3 a.m. [but] I was relieved... they really ensured that everyone who was on that street safely arrived to wherever they were going

Jay and Anna gave examples of disruption experienced by those making shorter distance and commuter journeys

Jay

Lawyer living in Amersham. Commutes into London a few times a week, and travels to the Midlands to see other family fairly often



London towards West (short distance)



Afternoon peak



Regular commute

Travelling from Paddington, information boards showed that Jay's train would depart from one of the furthest platforms along the concourse. This **information was given at short notice before departure**, and so passengers felt they had to run.

However, **once on board, the driver announced that this train would no longer go to that destination**. All passengers had to get off, and repeat the **stressful rush to find out which would be the new platform** – which was now at the other end – and then run to catch the train in time.

By this point **she, like others, had also used her ticket in the gates when she boarded the first train, and so had to queue** to be let through manually by gate staff. **Eventually the gates were opened up fully** to help speed people through.

It was very stressful after a long day of work to be rushing about a large station ...on and off different trains ... and when you'd lost your ticket due to the mistake.... nothing was handled well [with] lack of updates ... and misinformation. The only good thing was the operative at the train gates finally just allowed people on without tickets.

Anna

Recently started a graduate position in finance and lives alone in London. She commutes across London a few times a week for work.



Kentish Town to East Croydon



Peak times



Regular commute

Anna can't name specific examples of disruption but feels that the trains she takes across London (using Thameslink or Southern) seem to be **at least a few minutes late – sometimes up to 20 – almost all of the time**.

This makes her late and means trains are often more overcrowded.

It gives her a **negative impression of trains overall** despite the fact that she sees train travel as having environmental and safety advantages over the tube or buses.

[I've never complained]...I honestly don't think it would have made an impact. I assume they would say it is the traffic, weather or something else.

And there are many other issues encountered by customers which damage their experience and impression of rail travel; for example:

Andy

PhD student, lives with his girlfriend in Nottingham. Travels for work connected to his PhD, to various places, about every 3 months



Nottingham to London



Morning peak



Occasional business trip

Andy had a ticket to travel to a conference in London, booked in advance by his work. When he went to collect them at the station, he discovered that **the printer was out of order and the tickets could not be printed.**

He asked for help at the information (“reception”) desk, and **was told that he would need to buy another ticket, and to claim a refund** for the one he was no longer able to use. This would have cost around £150.

He felt that this was ridiculous, and that **the member of staff was also rude.**

Eventually a roaming member of staff at the ticket gates was able to print a stand-in ticket, sign a form and stamp the ticket to confirm its validity. **It was resolved in the end, but Andy almost missed the train.**

It was just such a silly little thing that turned into a massive, massive deal...it was just a stressful start to the day, which could have been so easily resolved knowing that one of the colleagues who was manning the gates could easily resolve it ... It was silly.

Colin

Works in a school, lives in Harrow with his wife and teenage children. Travels to London or elsewhere once or twice a week for leisure.



Llandudno Junction to Wrexham



Weekend



One off leisure trip

Colin and his family were going out for the day, shopping and meeting friends.

The train was extremely crowded. He sat on the floor in the doorway, and the train also missed some timetabled stops because there was no more space.

There were several major sport events in the area on the day, and **the train was made of only two carriages, which he and others perceived as bad planning.**

When he complained, he heard nothing back, and received only “stock” responses when he tweeted.

Guidance was still being given about travel and behaviour due to Covid, so throughout Colin was also surprised that this scenario had been allowed to happen, given that he felt that the railway service in Wales had previously been among the best in handling Covid.

...these people who run the railway thought it a good idea to only have two carriages. ...I did complain ...they were citing Covid ...lack of staff, ...rolling stock. The boring stuff that you usually hear ... that was a nasty journey ...I tweeted at the time and got ...the same reply [as] everyone ...I didn't expect any conversation [but] it's always worth a try

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.