

Shaping Rail's Future: Customer Community 2025-26

Harmonising expectations for
customer care

April 2026

The Customer Community: 2025-26

Following the successful community insight programme which ran from February 2023 to April 2024, and again from July 2024 to June 2025, this is the third community of rail users brought together by Transport Focus and the Customer & Revenue Growth Team to help inform the future of rail travel in Britain



A unique vehicle for engagement

- ✓ Hear users' experiences and opinions of rail travel in Britain
- ✓ Identify strengths, weaknesses, and improvements
- ✓ Involve customers in potential solutions and new ideas to help shape the future of rail



40 rail users

representing
diverse needs &
experiences



Sep 2025 to
March 2026



Using flexible, engaging research methods

- ✓ Online research platform for continuous interaction
 - Feedback on a given topic each month
 - Via activities using video, text, images, polls
 - Participants work individually, interacting with a moderator, and each other
- ✓ Face to face workshops to discuss topics further, generate ideas, and explore proposed concepts

In March 2026 the community...



Described recent experiences of when things have gone wrong during a train journey



To **highlight good and poor practice** in how this is handled currently, and **what matters to passengers**



Prioritised a series of customer care activities: what tangible actions are more and less important when things go wrong

Highlighted which of these activities needs most improvement across the industry



Told us how well they understand what to expect around these customer care activities, and what they believe their rights are now

Taking these together we can **pinpoint priorities for harmonising and improving customers' understanding of their rights**, based on where this is least streamlined currently, and where customer impact is likely to be greatest



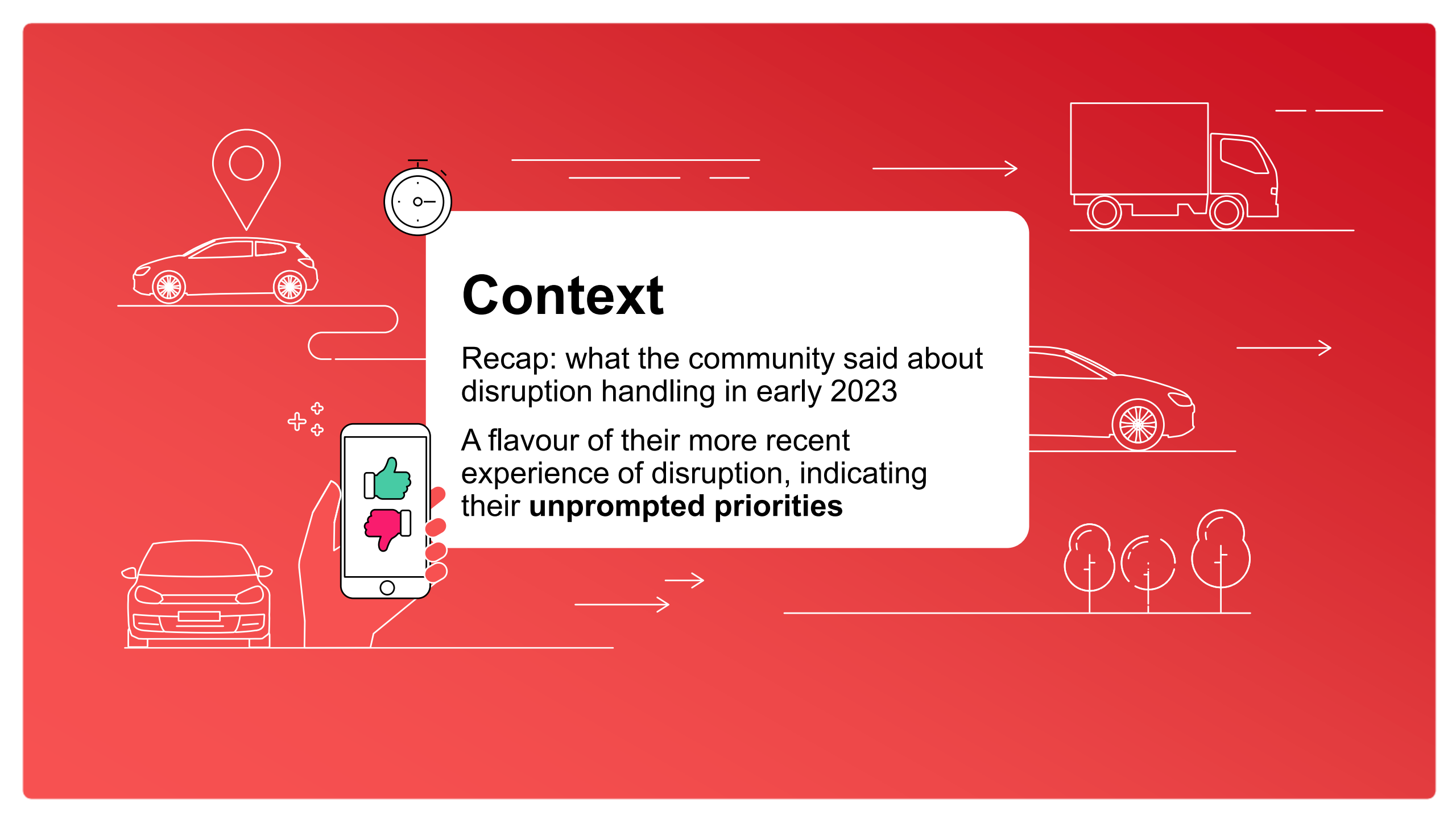
Critiqued examples of TOCs' existing literature and commitments around customer service activities, and gave equivalent examples from other industries



For some initial **guidance around what customers like and understand**, and how commitments can be presented

This report

- 5 **Context:** customer experiences of rail disruption
- 8 **Harmonising customer service commitments & expectations:** Customer priorities
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 - 37 1. A flavour of the community's recent experiences of things going wrong on the railway
 - 2. More detail on rail user expectations for customer service areas explored in this exercise



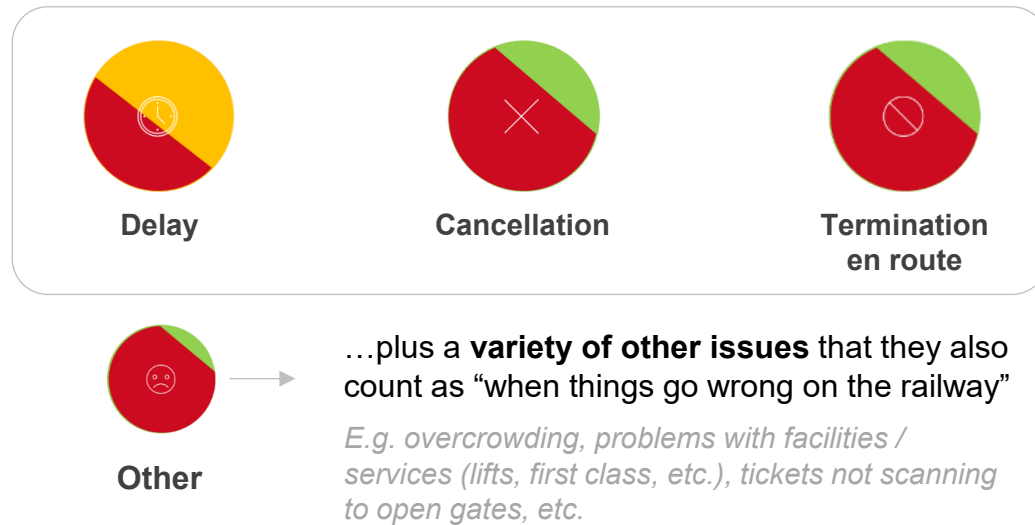
Context

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

A flavour of their more recent experience of disruption, indicating their **unprompted priorities**

Recap: customers' experience of disruption and how it's handled

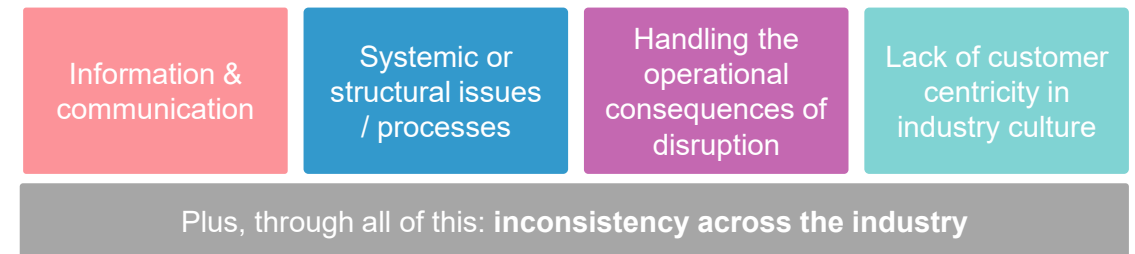
In previous iterations* of the customer community, participants described three main types of disruption that stand out as “when things go wrong” to customers



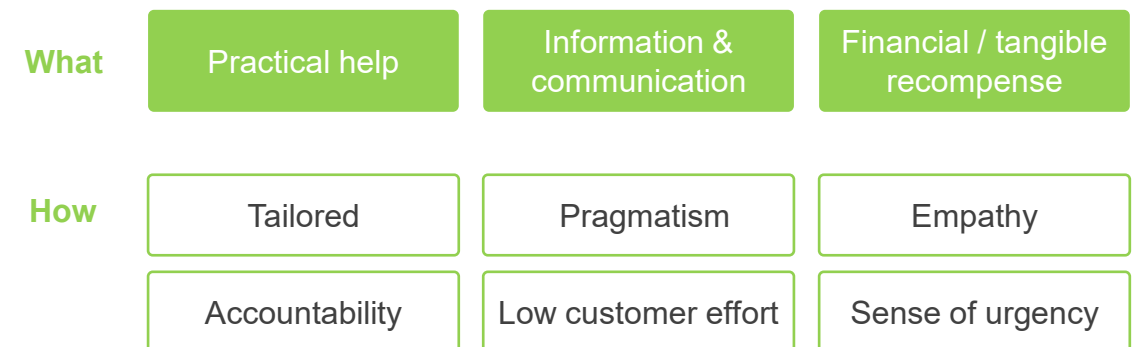
Feedback in early 2026 closely echoes these patterns

Feedback on than handling of disruption is consistently that there are **pockets of excellence**, but on the whole **disruption is (remembered as being) managed quite poorly**

Experiences of poor handling fall into key themes:



The features of good disruption handling:



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 the community talked about poor (red), good (green) or neither / nor (amber) ways in which problems were handled.

*Initial analysis here was made using detailed feedback on disruption experience given in Feb-Mar 2023; further feedback in follow-up activities since has further confirmed these broad findings

The community's more recent experiences also feature consistently dominant **factors that influence how well experiences were handled**

See Appendix for examples of these more recent experiences, in the community's own words



1 Pro-actively providing information (via staff)

To help with practical guidance, but also for reassurance, to manage crowding, and dispel overwhelm during more chaotic scenarios, crowding, etc.

Several stories here highlight a lack of clarity, cohesiveness, timeliness and accuracy during unplanned disruption



The most commonly praised and criticised element of customers' experiences



Indicating this is top priority, above and/or facilitating other activities here



2 Getting the passenger to their destination

(including via ticket acceptance on other trains and modes, and taxi provision / compensation)

Aria and Daniel's stories highlight that passengers find themselves finding and paying for their own transport, with little understanding of what they are entitled to

*Chloe's story highlights a need to work harder to ensure that the **way this is done** works well for the passenger at the centre of the disruption, that it is perceived to prioritise their wellbeing, rather than as a logistical problem to be solved*



Frictionless compensation

2



3 Providing Passenger Assistance for those needing additional help

Patricia's story highlights a need to work harder to ensure that not only can PA be booked, but that any disruption to essential services as part of this – such as lifts being out of order – is known about and communicated to those who need to know

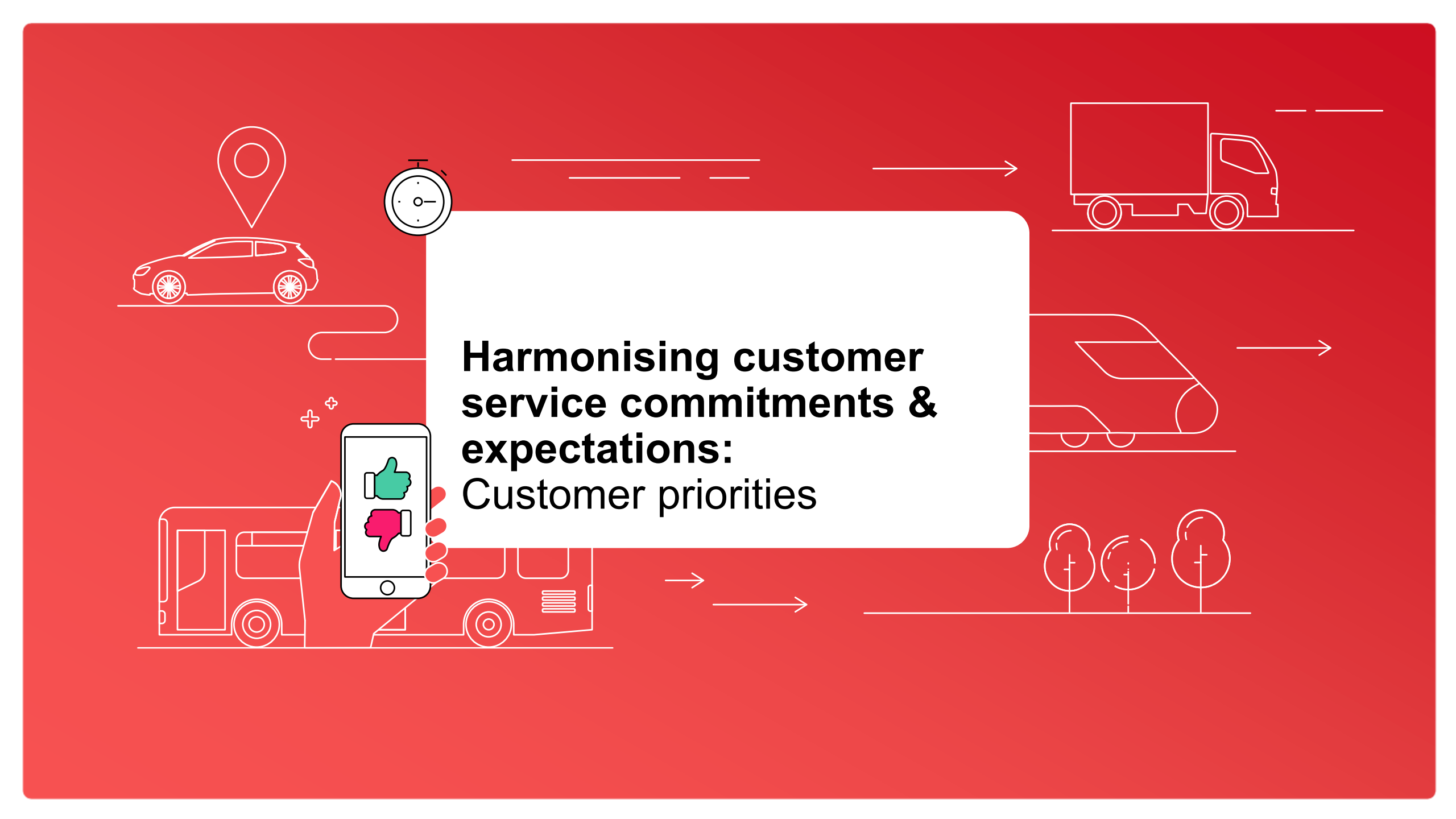


Helping passengers to find a seat on board

(especially for, but not necessarily limited to, those who visibly need to sit)

Participants' descriptions of these experiences also highlight that:

- These really key factors should be **objectives for both the customer facing staff and those who might have a role behind the scenes**
- Where the railway does appear to be doing everything it can, **passengers can (sometimes) recognise and tolerate practical limitations**



Harmonising customer service commitments & expectations: Customer priorities

“

It's very important to know what to expect from [TOCs] and what your rights are, especially during disruptions.

When things go wrong, it can be stressful, so having clear knowledge (or easy access to information) helps you make informed decisions about what to do next.

For example, knowing whether you are entitled to alternative transport, assistance, or compensation can make a big difference in how you handle the situation.

It helps passengers feel more confident and less powerless, as they understand what support they should receive rather than relying on guesswork or unclear information.

Savannah

”

Harmonising customer service commitments & expectations: Customer priorities



Operators currently make different commitments around some areas of customer service, meaning that **what passengers can expect as the minimum can vary.**

The rail industry therefore intends to work to harmonise passengers' rights and obligations around these areas.



Community members were asked about (prompted with) some of the customer service areas which are potentially in scope to be better streamlined in this respect.

They were asked about:

- The **relative significance** of each of these areas of customer service

The relative impact these things can have when things go wrong

- **Priorities for improvement**

In terms of the perceived quality with which they are delivered today

- Understanding and **confidence around what to expect**

How well they know their own rights and obligations

Make sure you can sit on the train if you reserved a seat, or compensate you if you can't

Make sure you get to your destination (and do not leave you stranded)

Compensate you for delays using Delay Repay

Allow you to use other scheduled public transport, on your train ticket

Provide refreshments to passengers

Enable you to contact the train company via phone, chatbot, live chats, etc.

Have staff available, or contactable, to help

Provide formal Passenger Assistance and "Turn up and Go" services for passengers with disabilities or other additional needs

Provide pro-active information, e.g. via email, text, at stations or on trains.

Of customer care areas looked at here, the most impactful is simply “**getting me there**”, followed and facilitated by **(pro)active, in-person assistance & information**

Passengers’ priorities for customer service activity

1 Most significant

Greatest impact on journey outcome

Make sure you get to your destination
(and do not leave you stranded)

Provide pro-active information, e.g. by email, text, at stations / on trains

Have staff available, or contactable, to help

Compensate you for delays using Delay Repay

Allow train ticket use on other scheduled public transport

4 Relatively less significant

*Least impact on journey outcome for the majority
These activities can be higher priorities for certain passenger groups or certain journey types: see more on page 16*

Make sure you can sit on the train if you reserved a seat, or compensate you if you can't

Provide formal Passenger Assistance and TUAG services for passengers with disabilities or other additional needs

Enable you to contact operator via phone, chatbot, live chats, etc.

Provide refreshments to passengers

Customers give a wide expression of this which encompasses:

- ✓ Get me to my destination
(by train or other mode)
- ✓ (and/or) don't leave me stranded
(using other modes or with overnight accommodation)
- ✓ (and/or) don't let me make a journey that could leave me stranded
(make sure I'm informed to make the right decisions about my journey or altering my plans)

Ultimately, getting people from A to B is the railway's function, and customers don't want to be left

TOCs' commitments, and passengers' rights which are articulated by TOCs in this area today may be made with more critical scenarios in mind, e.g. those involving the last train of the day, infrequent services, remote geographies, and where passengers are a long way from home. But customers themselves see this idea as the standout priority because, regardless of how critical their circumstances, they don't want to be inconvenienced, let alone “stranded”. They planned to make a journey and they want the railway to deliver on it.

Customers' priorities for care and service in disruption: in their own words

1 ✓ Don't "leave" me

...clear and timely information helps reduce confusion and stress during disruptions, so I know what is happening and what to do next. Making sure I can still reach my destination is essential, as the main purpose of the journey is to get there, even if there are delays or changes. ...[Staff] provide reassurance, answer questions, and guide passengers on alternative options when things go wrong. Together, these make the situation much easier to manage..

Maulika

...the important one is to get to the destination, as all the frustrations will come from not being able to get to the place you want to ...the best action is to communicate to people how they can best go to where they need to go.

Matthew

While things like compensation or refreshments are helpful, they do not address the immediate problem of uncertainty and disruption. Being informed, supported, and able to complete the journey has the greatest impact in situations like this.

Savannah

Having front line staff is my priority as they can see the issues rather than trying to explain over a phone. But they need to have the support to offer real solutions to the passengers, too.

Chloe

2 ✓ Pro-active information ✓ Visible / contactable staff

3 ✓ Compensation / Delay Repay ✓ Ticket acceptance

Ultimately getting to your destination has to be the most important thing, as I often travel quite late it would be a real problem if I was unable to get home at all and stuck in an unfamiliar location.

Having some flexibility to be able to fall back on another option, such as a bus, would be really helpful and I don't think ...the consumer should pick up the cost for this, it should be in the powers of the train company etc. to make this happen. ...delay repay makes a big difference to the trust that I have in travelling by rail and think this should continue.

Luke

Being able to use other transport helps make things practical. It removes friction — you don't have to argue about tickets or wait around for one specific solution. You can just move and adapt, which is what people want in that situation.

Arjun

For me it would be about regaining the money I've spent on a service that cannot be provided... [although] compensation is really important but it' can be the last thing on people's minds and usually they'll do it after they get to their destination

Isaac

4 ✓ Seat guarantees ✓ Passenger Assistance / TUAG ✓ Assistance vis contact centre ✓ Refreshments

I'd expect to sit down for my journey if I'd reserved a seat. This is especially important for older passengers or those with disabilities/medical issues.

Ava

A big one for me is a seat, I ...had to stand for 3+ hours due to overcrowding even though I had a seat reserved ...infuriating ...elderly ladies next to us having to sit on the floor... There was little empathy from the staff. When we said we'd sit in first class they said, you're not, or you're gonna pay. It was very poorly handled.

Wyatt

If one needs Passenger Assistance it's usual to book in advance, [but] in the event of delay or cancellation a Turn up and Go service would be very helpful.

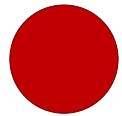
Penelope

These make sure that a passenger's wellbeing is taken care of...

Isabella

Customers believe some of these areas of customer service are more in need of **improvement** than others

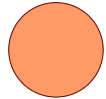
Passengers' priorities for improvements



Higher relative
priority to
improve

Provide pro-active information, e.g. by email, text,
at stations / on trains

Have staff available, or contactable, to help



Make sure you get to your destination
(and do not leave you stranded)

Allow train ticket use on other scheduled public transport



Compensate you for delays using Delay Repay

Make sure you can sit on the train if you reserved a seat, or
compensate you if you can't

Provide formal Passenger Assistance and TUAG services for
passengers with disabilities or other additional needs

Enable you to contact operator by phone, chatbot, live chats,
etc.



Lower relative
priority to improve

Provide refreshments to passengers

It is nearly always impossible to find train staff to help. The ability to use other public transport is a good idea but I've never seen it mentioned.

Penelope

In my experience, information was not clear or quick enough, which caused confusion and stress. More proactive updates, such as live announcements or text alerts, would make a big difference. Staff were available but not easy to approach or visible, so having more visible and helpful staff would improve the experience.

Maulika

Mak[ing] sure you get to your destination... needs to be handled more proactively. Instead of passengers scrambling to find alternatives, there should be a clear plan straight away whether that's directing people to other trains or organising replacement options quickly.

Arjun

Delay repay is complicated, slow and across multiple companies. I'm waiting for two responses from months ago; I've given up, which I think is their business model.

Dan

Losing a seat when you paid for or need one is difficult to deal with in reality when it's busy [but it's important to improve on]. Last year I was on crutches and had to stand on a 3 hour journey ...I couldn't access my seat and no one would give me a priority seat and there were no staff to help.

James

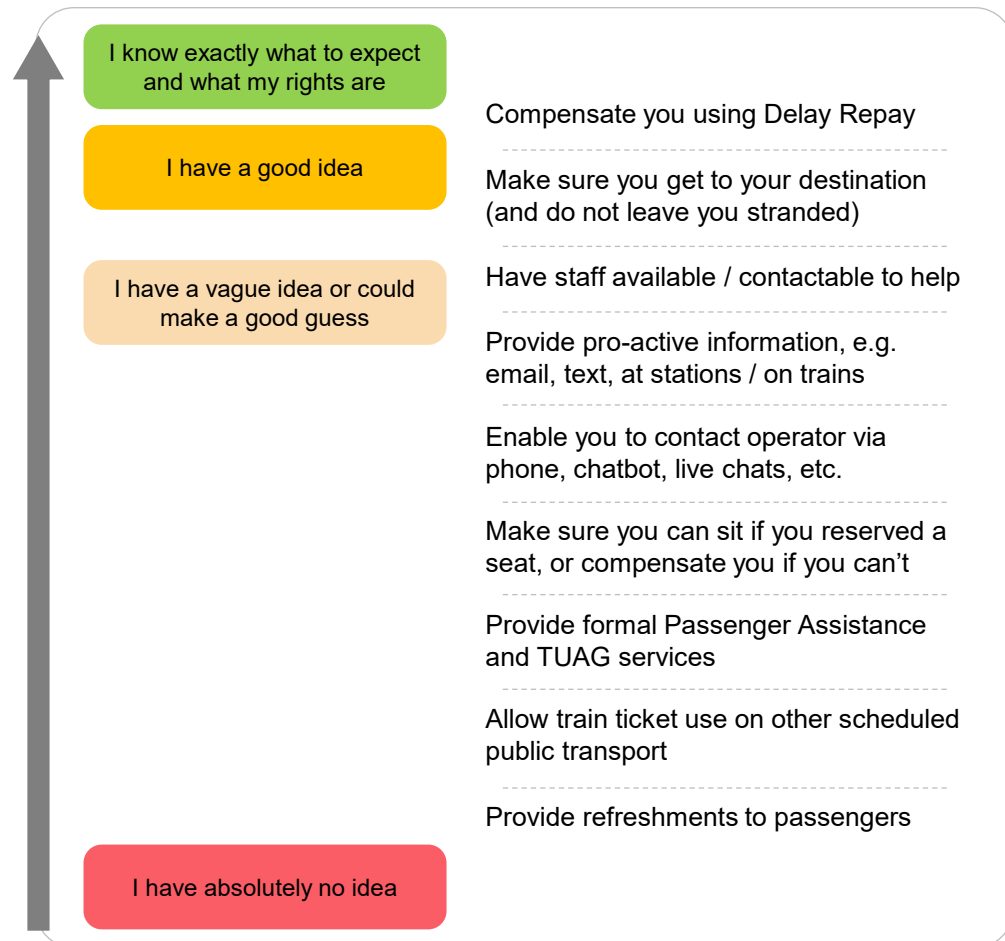
[There are] far too many horror stories about Passenger Assistance on supposedly straightforward journeys, and these are only exacerbated when things go wrong.

This should be a significant area of improvement across the entire network. Disabled people should not continue to be treated as second class citizens..

Benjamin

Confidence around passengers' rights and expectations is reasonable for already-standardised schemes like Delay Repay, much less so for other points

Passengers' confidence in knowing their rights & expectations*



...and confidence does matter → it is worthwhile to pursue consistency

- ✓ **Over half of the community felt that it is very important that passengers know or can find out their rights and obligations in these areas** (*Most others felt it was "quite" important*)

If I don't know my rights, then I can't demand them when things go wrong. Not all train companies or their staff offer the services I should expect.

Ellen

This information should be made more clear and available to search more quickly. It feels 'hidden information' to me - kinda like small print in documents.

Layla

- ✓ **Note there is an emphasis on being able to find out and understand your rights **at the point of need**, i.e. when disruption happens**

When things go wrong, you are already dealing with stress and time pressure, so not knowing your rights just makes it worse. If you know what you are entitled to, you can make quicker decisions and avoid being stuck or misled. It also helps you challenge things if needed. Without that knowledge, you are more likely to just accept whatever happens, even if it is not right.

Even if you do not know everything in advance, it is important that the information is easy to find in the moment. Otherwise it feels like the system is set up in a way that only works if you already know how it works.

Arjun

If you understand things like delay compensation, refund policies, or what assistance is available, you're far more confident in handling disruptions.... it's very important that you can easily find out your rights and obligations.

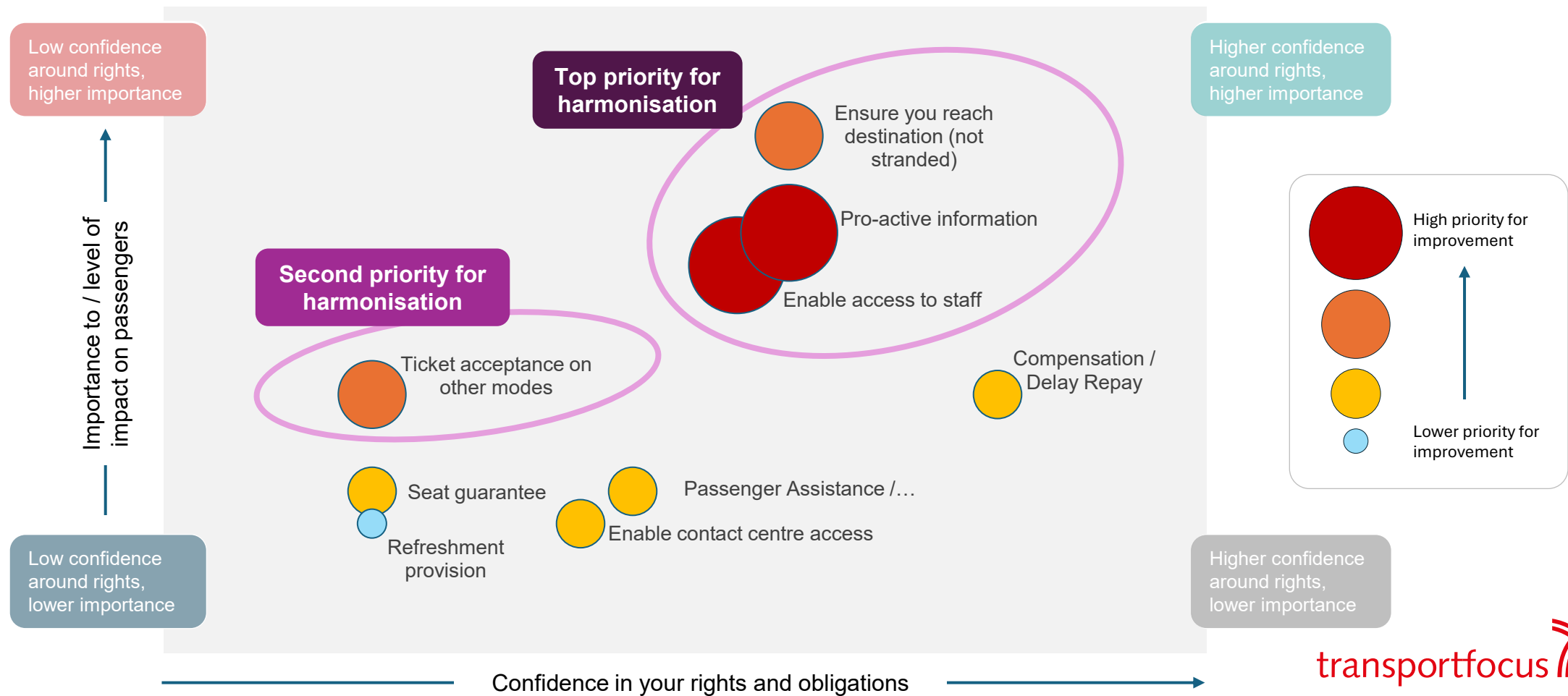
When journeys are delayed or cancelled, you often need clear, quick information—otherwise it can feel confusing and frustrating. Being able to access that information easily... makes a big difference to the overall experience.

John

*awareness of rights, and schemes like D/R may be higher among this group of rail users, who have been exposed to many initiatives and discussions about rail over the last six months. Confidence among the wider public may be lower overall, but the approximate order shown here is likely to be similar

Bringing together all of this feedback on what matters most to customers, what needs improving, and confidence around expectations, identifies priorities for harmonisation

The diagram below maps out the relative importance vs confidence around each of the customer service areas explored in this exercise. It is based on the totality of the qualitative feedback, and answers to prompted, multiple choice questions, rather than being an analysis of quantitative data



These priorities for harmonisation vary in different journey contexts and for different customer groups

Variations in harmonisation priority, by journey context

Priority for harmonisation & firming up customer understanding	All disruption scenarios	Longer distance journeys <i>(typically less frequent/familiar)</i>	Shorter & medium distance journeys <i>(typically more local & frequent/familiar)</i>	Trains are cancelled / terminated	Trains are delayed but still running	Customers learn of disruption when at departure / connection station	Customers learn of disruption when on board
1 (A)	Get me to my destination / don't leave me stranded <i>(prevent me from making a journey that could leave me stranded)</i>						
1 (B)	Pro-active information	Information	Staff Ticket acceptance	Staff	Information	Information	Information
1 (B)	Ensure I can reach staff	Staff	Information	Information	Staff	Staff	Staff Seat guarantees
Additional areas of importance	Enable ticket acceptance on other modes	Seat guarantees		Ticket acceptance		Ticket acceptance	

Ultimately, ensuring passengers can reach their destination and/or are not left stranded, is the highest priority in all types of disruption scenarios

- On shorter and more familiar journeys, **being able to use train tickets on other modes** has a higher relative impact than in other journey contexts, and is a top priority area for increasing customers' understanding of their rights
- On longer or less familiar journeys, and when disruption occurs when passengers are already on board, **providing information and ensuring passengers can reach staff** remain top priorities, but **seat guarantees** are also especially important
- When trains are cancelled or terminated (rather than delayed), **ticket acceptance on other modes** (or other trains) is important
- Where things go wrong in other ways, **access to staff** is a key priority. The reasons for and implications of other things going wrong can be highly individual and therefore requires very tailored responses. E.g. where lifts are out of order leading to access issues, the customer really wants to speak to staff directly to help in the best way for their unique circumstances

Proposed priorities for harmonisation, and improving customer understanding of their rights, expectations and obligations

....taking together the overall picture of customers' priorities, the way different customer service types are more and less important in different circumstances, and rail users' unprompted descriptions of disruption experience, a suggested priority rundown is:

1
**Ensuring you get to
your destination**
(you are not "left" at any point)

**Providing pro-
active information**

**Enabling access to staff
for info. & assistance**

2
**Ticket
acceptance**

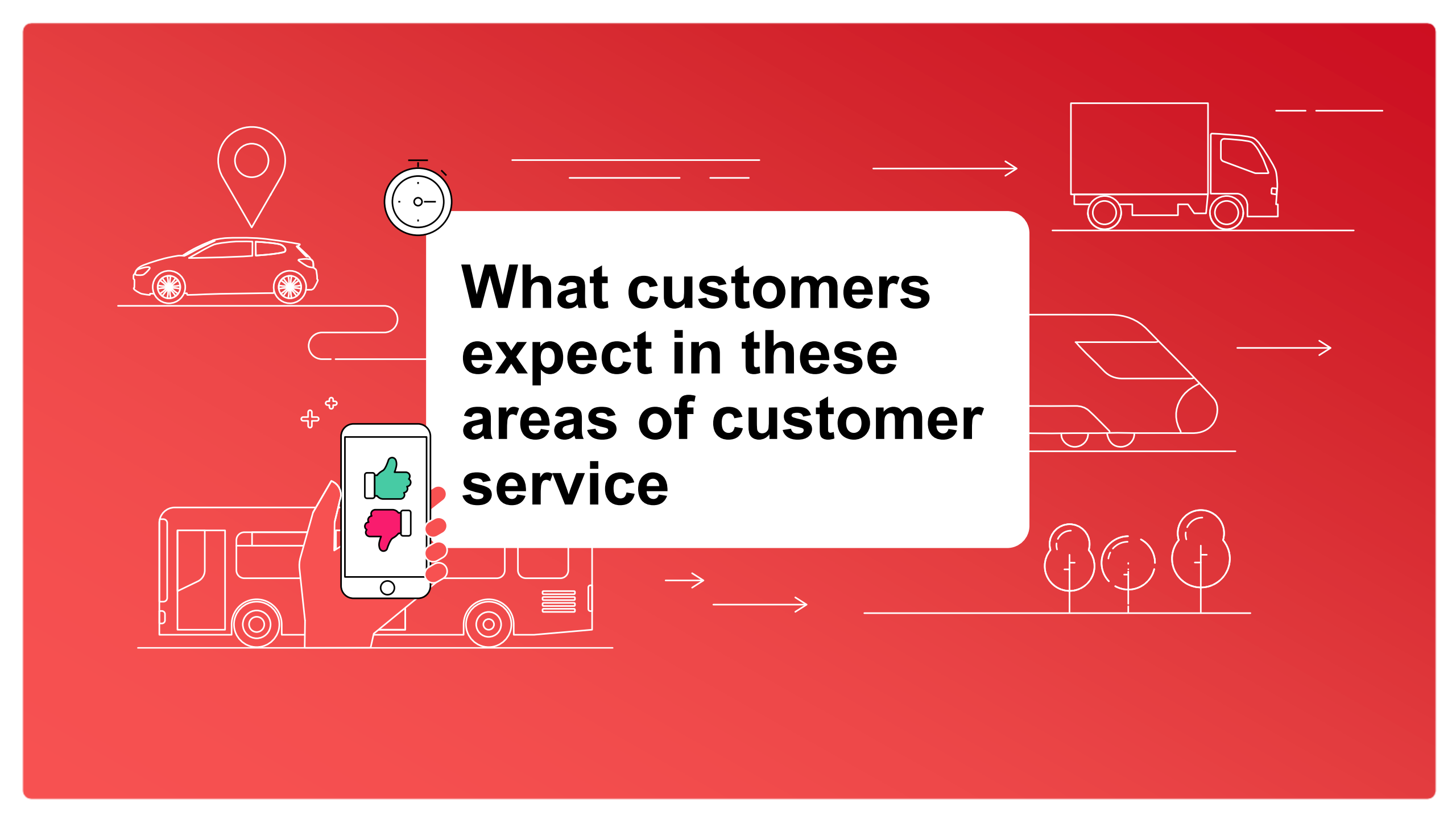
**Seat
guarantees**

3
**Compensation &
Delay Repay**

**Passenger
Assistance / TUAG**

4
**Enabling contact
centre access**

**Providing
refreshments**



**What customers
expect in these
areas of customer
service**

The customer community outlined what they would expect from train operators in relation to this area of customer service, before being prompted with any existing examples of what TOCs provide or commit to.

They also reviewed the commitments and information on this topic that is given by some train operators today, based on extracts of online content.

(Some examples were a representation of TOCs' content rather than exhaustive. The purpose was to illustrate existing information and stimulate response and ideas, highlighting key areas of good and poor practice to learn from, rather than to critique individual TOCs).



The following is a summary of their key expectations for each area of customer service. More detail is also given in the Appendix.

“

This is straightforward. It's a duty of care from the train lines if something goes wrong to help if you get stranded...

I know that the external circumstances might be outwith their control, but regardless of the situation, they should be helping to get you to where you need to be.

”

Savannah

Summary of rail users' expectations for areas of customer service: **top priorities for harmonisation and firming up customer understanding**

See Appendix pg 42-45 for more detail

Priority for
harmonisation

1A

Ensuring you get to destination
(you are not "left" at any point)

1B

**Providing pro-active
information**

1B

**Enabling access to staff for
info. & assistance**

Customers
need →

- Practical **action**
- **Information & assistance**
- **Customer-first** mindset

- **Timely** information
- **Multiple channels**
- **Accuracy & consistency**
- **Plain English** and clarity
- **Practical guidance** and **relevant, individual info.**, not simply facts
- **Staff** to play a recognised role

- Visible / known **presence**, reinforced further during disruption
- **At stations and on board** (very little tolerance for unstaffed trains)
- **Approachable**, easy to access
- **Empathetic**, taking customers seriously
- **Knowledgeable**, supported, informed, empowered

When it comes
to informing
customers of
their rights &
expectations →

- Explicit clarification of
 - What happens if **multiple operators** / routes are involved
 - Where I should go / **who I should ask** for help, in practice
 - **Quantified criteria and thresholds** at which alternative options are eligible
- Consider **illustrative examples** to outline how the commitments work in practice given individual nature of issues

"Smarter Information, Smarter Journeys" initiative, and its presentation, are popular with this community

- Stronger commitment to having **more on-the-ground staff presence**
- Explicit clarification of
 - **Where & when staff will not be available** (enabling an assumption that they will be, as the default)
 - **Reliable alternatives** when in-person staff are not present

Minimise caveats and exceptions

Layout / presentation of rights & expectations needs particular attention: reduce text, use plain English

Summary of rail users' expectations for areas of customer service: **additional priorities for harmonisation and firming up customer understanding** *Appendix pg 46-49 for more*

Priority for
harmonisation

2A Ticket acceptance

Customers
need →

- Clear, salient, speedy, pro-active **information**
- **Staff and signposting** to direct & advise
- Attendant, **broadier advice** on alternative routes, compensation implications, etc.
- **No quibble** attitude

When it comes
to informing
customers of
their rights &
expectations
→

- **Raise general awareness** that ticket acceptance is possible in principle, plus **provide relevant, ideally individually-specific information at point of need**
- Explicit clarification of
 - **Which transport modes** are in scope (and not, incl. taxis)
 - **Implications** for Passenger Assistance, seat reservations, etc.
 - **How to realise** ticket acceptance policy in practice

2B Seat guarantees

- **Pro-activity and practical assistance** from TOCs, clear expectation for staff
- Consider seat guarantees during service disruption, **and at all other times**
- **First Class** areas must be utilised – but First Class customers must be compensated appropriately
- **Prioritise** more vulnerable and less mobile customers if necessary
- **Compensation is required**
 - No definitive consensus from this research but 50-75% of ticket price can feel acceptable
 - Repaid in money, not vouchers
 - Minimise claims process effort (staff ticket endorsement can be problematic)

Explicit clarification of the details of these points in particular ←

Minimise caveats and exceptions

Layout / presentation of rights & expectations needs particular attention: reduce text, use plain English

Summary of rail users' expectations for areas of customer service: **Lower priorities for harmonisation and firming up understanding, but important (to individuals)**

See Appendix pg 50-52 for more detail

Priority for
harmonisation

3

Compensation & Delay Repay

While compensation is critical, practical help to reach the destination can be a more immediate need in some scenarios

Customers
need →

- **Variation** in compensation by delay length **feels largely reasonable**
- (no challenge in this research to **existing Delay Repay thresholds and refund values**)
- Offer and / or process compensation **pro-actively**
- **Minimise effort** in making claim & accessing compensation
- **Focus on improvement** of delivery rather than harmonisation

When it comes
to informing
customers of
their rights &
expectations
→

- Explicit clarification of
 - Delay length **thresholds** and compensation **values**
 - **How** to claim and how repayments are made

3

Passenger Assistance / Turn up & Go

- Bookable PA **for all journeys**
- **Co-ordination** between routes/operators
- Easy, accessible, up to date information on railway accessibility more broadly
- Strong awareness & understanding of disabilities and other needs
- **Focus on improvement** of delivery rather than harmonisation

- **Greater awareness** of PA and especially TUAG
- Explicit clarification of
 - Where TUAG is **not possible** (enabling an assumption that it is, as the default)
 - Any **differentiation** between disability or other needs (e.g. luggage, pregnancy)
 - **How** to book and access accessibility services

← Minimise caveats and exceptions →

Layout / presentation of rights & expectations needs particular attention: reduce text, use plain English

Summary of rail users' expectations for areas of customer service: **Lower priorities for harmonisation and firming up understanding**

See Appendix pg 53-56 for more detail

Priority for
harmonisation

4

Enabling contact centre access

4

Providing refreshments

Customers
need →

- **Easy to find and access** contact methods
- ...including **guidance on which method is most appropriate** (in stressful disruption scenario)
- **Fast, clear** responses
- **Comprehensive, relevant** information & advice
- **Consistent, accurate, up to date** information
- **Empathy**, and ability to respond to **individuals' needs**
- **Multiple channels**, including human interaction (and WhatsApp appreciated)
- 24/7 availability (or **when passengers are on the railway network**)

- Refreshment in **“extreme” scenarios**, and **linked to delay length /** disruption severity
- (No coherent expectation on definition of “extreme”, but not usually relevant to delays under an hour)
- **Water expected in unusually hot conditions** (often regardless of whether catering is provided normally)

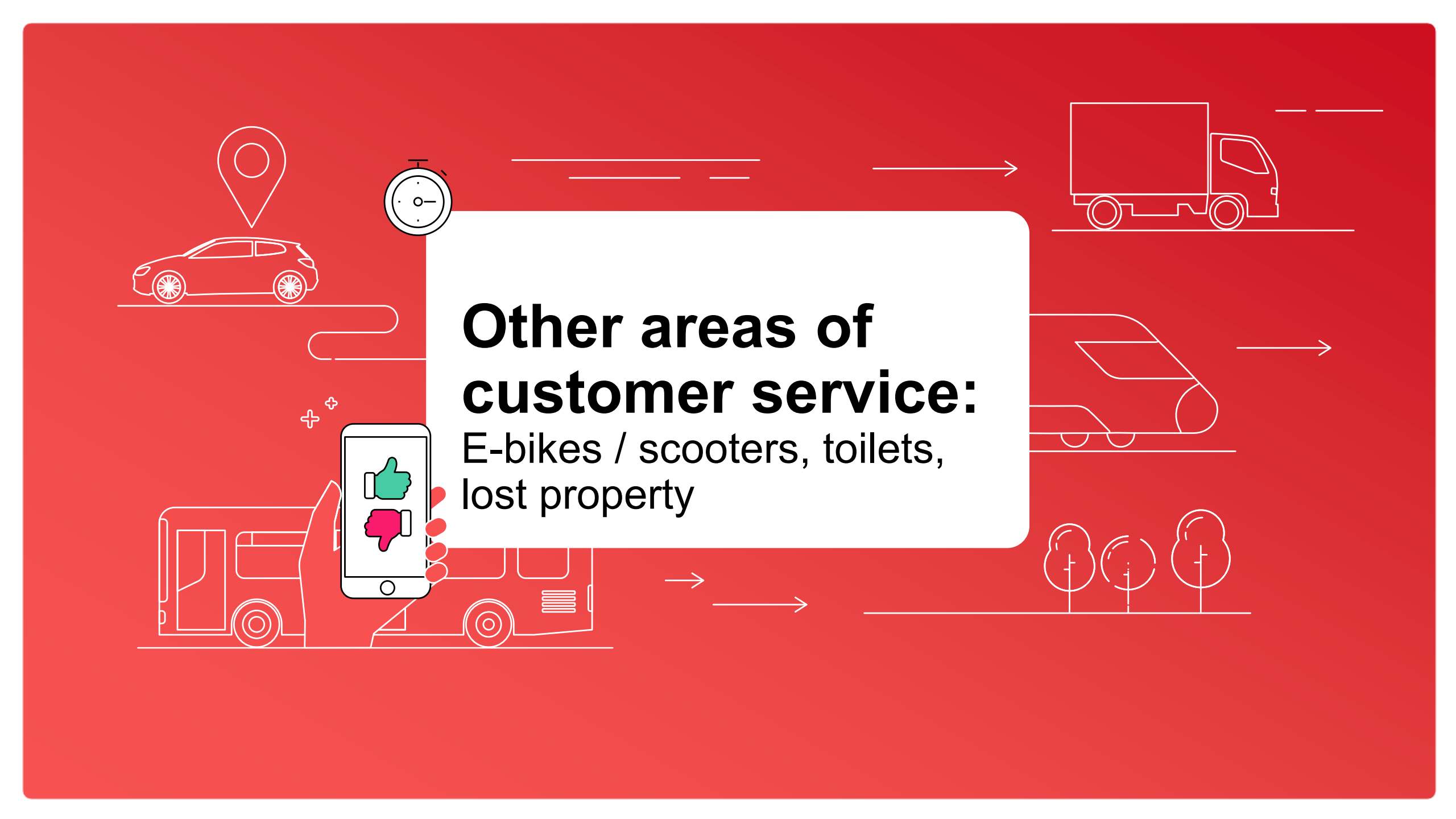
When it comes
to informing
customers of
their rights &
expectations
→

- Clear, consistent presentation of contact options

- Explicit clarification of
 - **What the thresholds are**
 - **Whether refreshments will be provided**, or that customers buy their own and claim back (and what values are acceptable if so)
 - **Definition** of “refreshments”

Minimise caveats and exceptions

Layout / presentation of rights & expectations needs particular attention: reduce text, use plain English

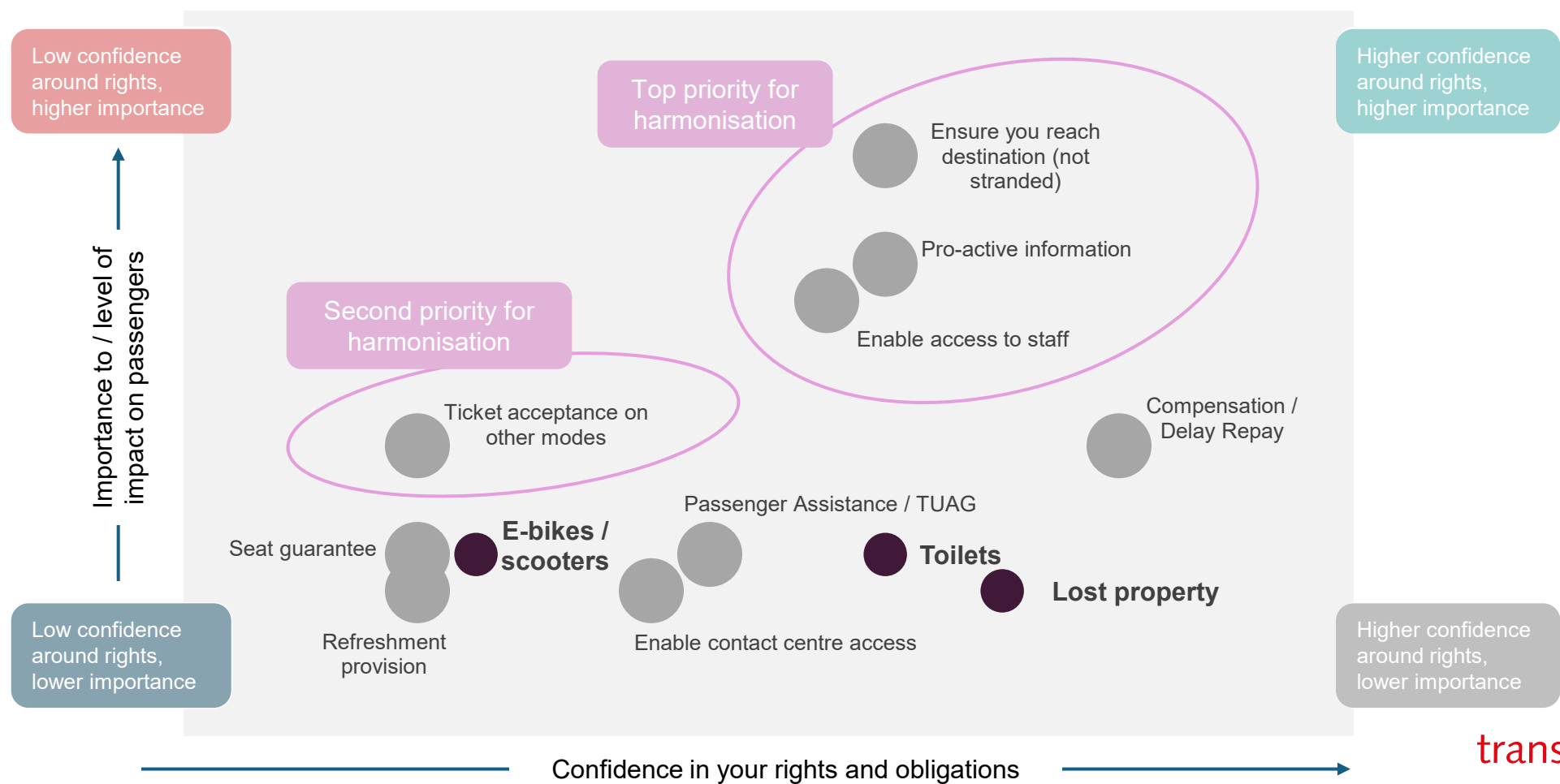


Other areas of customer service:

E-bikes / scooters, toilets,
lost property

These areas of customer service can be important, but are a little lower priority for harmonisation than key areas discussed thus far in this report

The diagram below maps out the relative importance vs confidence around each of the customer service areas explored in this exercise. It is based on the totality of the qualitative feedback, and answers to prompted, multiple choice questions, rather than being an analysis of quantitative data



Customer expectations in more detail:

Toilets

Of the three additional areas of customer experience covered here, this is the most important and impactful on journeys.

Providing toilets is seen as “a basic human right”.

This community’s perception of toilet provision is quite poor, in terms of availability, and particularly around working order and cleanliness. Other research has indicated that this perception might be somewhat (if not always) misplaced – but that where toilets are unavailable or are poor quality, this is especially memorable, so the perception endures.

As such this is **an important area for improvement, even if it is a relatively lower priority for harmonisation.**

Key expectations are:

- **Clear information** about what kind of toilets (or Changing Places facilities for example) are available, their opening hours, and whether or not they are in working order
- Provision of this information **in advance** of a journey (e.g. online)
- Some appetite for receiving phone **alerts to toilets being out of order**, where this is especially important (perhaps via opt-in messaging)
- Ensure that **staff are informed** about status of toilets

- **Good maintenance and cleaning** practices

- Variable **opening hours** can be acceptable, but this should be **aligned (as a minimum) with when staff are also available**

There is felt to be little reason for toilets to be closed when staff are present

Some indication that people expect toilets to be open for longer than normal if disruption means people are using the stations and trains at different times than normal

- **Low effort to access** (locked toilets can be understandable, but getting them unlocked should not feel difficult)
- **Free to use**

(charging to use toilets can feel acceptable to some, to fund cleaning and maintenance, but given the perception that toilets are not always in working order, this is often difficult to justify. And on balance, feedback suggests that charging a fee to use toilets contradicts the idea that this is a “right” not just an expectation).

- All of this is relevant to **both accessible and standard toilets**, and to toilets both **on board and at stations**

Customer experiences and expectations around toilets: in their own words

It is very important to know what to expect, especially for basic facilities like toilets. ...Knowing [what to expect] helps you plan ahead and avoid unnecessary stress... [including for] those with medical conditions, children, or pregnancy.

Savannah

As someone with medical problems, it is quite important to know what toilet facilities will be available at stations and on trains.

Elijah

They should be open during operating hours, not randomly closed. If a station is staffed, there should really be toilet access. I do not think passengers should have to pay... they have already paid for a ticket. At the very least, there should be free access during disruption or long waits .

Arjun

I've been told to drive [in my mobility scooter] from one end of a large London station to the other only to find those toilets are locked.

Staff should know, and station signage should make it clear if some toilets are only open part of the day.

Ellen

There should be working toilets at all stations, it's a basic human right. Same for on the train... But they're always out of order so there is clearly no real obligation [on TOCs today, to meet a standard level of expectation].

Dan



Customer expectations in more detail:

E bikes / scooters

While this affects fewer passengers directly...

- Not knowing your rights:
 - can cause problems for someone who may find they are prevented from travelling if they need to keep their e-vehicle with them and find they cannot
 - might mean some journeys do not take place by train, when they could do if the passenger was more confident
- Knowing passengers' rights in this area can be useful for those who do not use this equipment, as well as those who do. The same might be true for very large luggage for example, but there is some concern about the risk of electrical fires from e-bikes and scooters, so a clear understanding of rights and obligations (e.g. for how bikes are stored) can be reassuring for those who are worried about this.

I have an e-scooter and assumed they're not allowed on trains. I think perhaps a designated carriage would be a good idea.

Michael

...[Understanding this is] quite important as you're likely to find out once you get to the train and there's not much you can do about it at that point.

Matthew

Key expectations are:

Many feel that e-bikes and scooters should not be allowed on board trains, or on station premises, for safety reasons, and because they can take up space.

....there is an overall consensus that these vehicles need a **dedicated storage area**, which can be an acceptable compromise for those with concerns (but not all)



Restricting use to off-peak times and quieter services is worth exploring – suggested by some in this community

Regardless of what the rules are, all agree there must be **clear information in advance of the journey**, about whether and how bikes and scooters can be brought onto stations and on board, and that these **rules must be upheld** by the operators

Given strong opinions about whether e-bikes and scooters should be allowed at all, **it may be worthwhile making it clear to all passengers why they are allowed (if so), and how safety will be managed for everyone**

Especially if I get hit by one of those e-bikes, whose responsibly is it if it happens on Network Rail premises?

Levi

I would be concerned about electric bikes/scooters being in allowed in passenger carriages... I've travelled when a [non-electric] bike has ...not been safely placed, thus blocking doors/toilets. With electric bikes / scooters there could also be a real risk of fire if the batteries are not safe.

Penelope

Customer expectations in more detail:

Lost property

Losing something while traveling by train can have really important consequences, so this is important.

However, customers do also feel that there is some degree of responsibility on the passenger themselves, and overall that this area of customer service is a **lower priority than others covered in this exercise.**

It is not something you think about until it happens, but when it does it matters a lot. If you lose something valuable, you want to know quickly what to do and what your chances are.

Arjun

Key expectations are:

A recent, dedicated activity explored lost property management in detail with this rail customer community, and a separate report is available.

Summarised feedback here about customers' expectations echoes the key findings from this previous work, which showed that essentially, **customers want to know that quick, sincere, pragmatic, and practical action is being taken to find and return their belongings**

- Customer-facing and contact centre **staff** (in all functions, not only dedicated lost property or customer service roles) should be prepared to be a first port of call
- Most expect to **collect a found item from a mutually convenient station**, or in some circumstances from a secure locker
- They expect **common sense proof of ownership checks**, including showing ID on collection
- Charging a fee for returning items feels unfair**, except to cover delivery costs where relevant.
- Centralising a lost property service would be tentatively welcomed**, with some clear benefits for consistency and efficiency
But community members had concerns about the potential loss of the benefits that come from local knowledge and relationships between colleagues at stations and on trains along certain lines of route, for example, that can help get lost items back to their owners relatively fuss-free.

Learning from other industries



Participants gave examples of other industries where they know their rights relating to when things go wrong. Common themes are illustrated by...

Penelope who understood her rights as a broadband customer because there is an **official contract** in place. This empowered her to fight for compensation when she experienced an outage that had a material affect on her (albeit that having to fight in the first place was a poor experience).

The idea of a “contract” isn’t as clear in rail, but this type of experience might indicate that being more salient (not only more transparent) about passenger rights and expectations, could increase confidence.

(Other broader feedback cautions that having clear expectations and confidence in consumer rights only works if it goes alongside improved service reliability and punctuality in practice. Customers want the statement of their rights to be what they fall back on in unusual situations, rather than disruption being a “normal” expectation)

Dan who likes the fact that his broadband provider makes a **clear statement of thresholds at which compensation will be given**, and exactly how much it will be: “In the terms ...it’s [something] like £9 a day for every day you don’t have service, x amount if an engineer doesn’t show up, etc. Also minimum speeds that if they don’t reach then you don’t pay...”. These quantified **commitments were easy to find** when he went to look on the provider’s website.

Chloe who sent food back when it arrived cold to her restaurant table. She felt entitled and confident to do so given the **warm customer service** from staff, and in the knowledge that the restaurant was both obliged to uphold **minimum food safety standards**, and that it **advertised (by law) its record** on these standards.

Isabella who understands what she can do about shoes if they are faulty after she has paid for them (or if she changes her mind), because **all retailers** are known to abide by **consumer rights laws**, and the **basics are stated on receipts** when she buys them.

Simon who knows that if he buys an item for his home from a retailer like John Luke or similar, he can return it for a refund if he decides it’s not right, with **no questions asked**. “[They are] always polite, never a problem. And done with good grace and a smile.”

Matthew who has experienced delays and breakdown on buses. He isn’t sure of official rights in this situation, but has always found that the **“human connection with the driver”** is helpful in understanding the problem and being let on to a different bus with the same ticket.

Maulika who (like many others) feels fairly confident that she will be looked after if something goes wrong in relation to a flight. She may not know all of the detail, but she has a broad and confident expectation that she will be entitled to assistance such as food, drinks, and accommodation if needed, and that she may also have the right to compensation depending on the delay length and reason.

She knows all of this due to **“up front” communication** from airlines at **several points through the booking and purchase journey**, and again at the point of any disruption, via a **range of touchpoints** including “emails, apps, airport announcements, and staff guidance.... [as well as] written policies on their websites and they send updates during disruptions”. She also finds it easy to know where to look for information.

Luke who was reassured by his airline when, during flight delay, they **pro-actively** provided “updates on the app that gave a link to their website outlining my rights, and how to apply for compensation... rather than me having to go and find out about it”.

“ The airline compensation scheme is a bit more clear cut. Granted the delay time is much larger but it's synchronised across all airlines and more of like a government /EU directive than train companies just making up their own obligations with loopholes in. ”

Dan

“ [Even if] they don't publicly display them well, [your rights with airlines are] so well known it's so easy to look on the internet or elsewhere for them. ”

Isaac

“ Compared to rail, it feels like there is a clearer structure around what you are entitled to [from airlines], even if you sometimes still have to push for it. [And] it's visible and consistent. You see the same messages across websites, booking confirmations, and at the airport, so it sticks over time. ”

Arjun

“ When making a purchase, I normally assume that my rights and obligations will be covered by the Consumer Rights Act. ”

Elijah

“ The rail industry could improve passenger confidence with a centralised “Passenger Rights” [web]page outlining refunds, compensation, and assistance. ”

Savannah

“ There's often a compromise to how passengers and bus drivers deal with delays/broken down buses. As much as rules can streamline say a refunds process, occasionally things go wrong which rules don't necessarily have premise [for], that could require say the guard on the train ...to make arrangements clear. ”

Matthew

Good practice principles that the rail industry might learn from and adopt

Feedback throughout this exercise, including customers' comparisons to other industries, supports the two overarching objectives for the railway that drive this work



It is worthwhile from customers' perspective to:

Be open and more salient about the expectations passengers should have

There is less relevance and practicality for a "contract" than in some other industries, and Charters or equivalent are not an everyday document for customers, so consider frequent micro-reminders that passenger rights exist and how to contact help, via everyday touchpoints like on tickets and receipts, posters, announcements, etc.

Create more **consistency** in passenger rights and expectations across the industry

Other common themes in the community's comparisons are:

Customer knowledge and understanding

Be **pro-active** in informing customers of their next steps when things go wrong

In relation to how they reach their destination, what alternatives they are entitled to, compensation, etc.

Wherever possible, use and publish **quantifiable / measurable thresholds** at which compensation or other rights take effect

Consider using tangible examples of what people can expect, where criteria are not quantifiable

Ensure **customers know the complaint procedure** including what "proofs" they might need to make a complaint / claim a refund

Staff and culture

Ensure **staff (both "front and back") are knowledgeable and have the tools** to help resolve both everyday queries and more serious problems

Foster a **customer-centric and empathetic culture** among both front-line staff and rail organisations more widely

Accept and learn from criticism and complaint, and demonstrate both the willingness and the outcome of this learning

External credibility

Use (only truly **meaningful**) **quality accreditations / awards**

Consider **raising public awareness** of mandated standards and obligations that train operators must meet under **statutory regulations**

Consider raising profile of regulatory / passenger bodies alongside this

Summary



Summary: (1/2)

All train operators make commitments and have policies around how they will help passengers, particularly during (but not limited to) times of disruption on the railway. However, it is recognised that these commitments vary across the different operators, and so it can be hard for passengers to know what to expect and what their rights are.

As part of broader work to bring together a consistent set of customer commitments across the industry, this research exercise has sought to identify priorities for streamlining some specific, practical areas of customer service, so that delivery is more consistent and that customers are clearer and more confident about their rights. There has been a focus here on when things go wrong, but the findings can also be applied more widely.

Based on direct questions about these specific areas of customer service, and on the customer community's unprompted feedback about their own experiences, **the highest priorities for harmonisation are:**

- **The measures in place to ensure passengers reach their destination** (that they are not “left” at any point in their journey)
- **The ways in which operators provide information pro-actively to customers**
- **The ways in which operators ensure that passengers can reach staff for in-person advice and assistance**

Secondary priorities are the **delivery of ticket acceptance and seat guarantee schemes**

The importance of these can depend on the journey context

Delay Repay and assistance for disabled and other vulnerable or less mobile passengers are not high priorities for harmonisation, as customers are (somewhat) clearer on their rights here at present.

However, these are still areas that customers feel need improving, to deliver more effectively on expectations they already have.

Summary: (2/2)

Other areas of customer service explored in this activity are found to be relatively **less immediate priorities for harmonisation**, albeit that more consistency and a better understanding of their rights will be beneficial for passengers in due course:

- The ways in which operators enable customers to interact with contact centres
- Provision of refreshments when train services are seriously disrupted or in very hot conditions
- Provision of toilets
- The rules, rights and policies around e-bikes and e-scooters
- Provision of lost property services.

The community also fed back experiences and thoughts on how other industries ensure that customers are confident about their rights when things go wrong.

Key learnings for the rail industry from this are that emphasis should be on:

- Ensuring **the concept of passenger rights is kept salient**
- **Pro-active** information and action when things do go wrong
- **Defining and communicating clear, quantifiable thresholds** for when compensation or certain actions are triggered (and finding mitigations to this where fully consistent, quantifiable measures are not possible, e.g. using real examples to illustrate commitments)
- Never compromising on the presence and role of **front line staff**
- Fostering a **customer-centric, empathetic culture**, where mistakes are recognised and learned from
- Using **meaningful quality accreditations** to reinforce credibility where relevant.



Appendix 1:

A flavour of the community's recent experiences of things going wrong on the railway

A flavour of the community's recent experiences of things going wrong on the railway: **Delays**

Aria travels frequently from Andover to London, via Woking or Basingstoke

“ I got stuck at Woking and had to get an Uber all the way to Andover as there were no trains and no talk of when the next one might have been available. I got home after midnight and was due back at work the following morning at 5am. As a police officer you don't want to feel that tired...

I did claim my Uber through the delay repay system and they approved this, which was extremely helpful. However, there were not enough updates on when the next train would have been available [at the time], and there was no talk of being able to claim for an Uber, I just tried my luck. ”

Luke travelled from London Gatwick to Swindon, changing at Reading

“ ...these were two places that I'd never been to before. As I waited for my connection at Reading, I noted the train was delayed by 10 minutes. As I stood and waited on the platform 10 minutes became 12, 14, going as far as 20 minutes at one point. Either way, as the planned time got closer the actual time was more and more delayed.

This was fairly late at night and in winter, so it was pretty cold on the platform! This meant that I was almost an hour late in getting into Swindon

There was clearly a breakdown in communication as the apps were only conveying the message on the screen, and the staff on the platform had no idea what was causing the problem, and what the likely outcome would be. ”

Omar travelled from Birmingham to Leicester

“ The train journey which should've been 48 minutes was delayed whilst we were on the train with no updates. It took a longer, different route and eventually made the train journey two hours. I was late to a meeting.

When I spoke to them, they immediately [arranged] a refund, but there was a lack of updates whilst I was on the train. I didn't know what was going to happen. The staff were not very helpful. ”

Matthew travelled from Manchester to Cambridge, changing at Nuneaton

“ The train had a slight delay which led to us being stuck behind a slower commuter train. This led to us getting stuck in Cambridge with the wrong platform where quite strangely the driver was struggling to fit onto the platform leaving us locked into the train whilst we felt stationary but he was actually inching very slowly towards the train in front.

I think the main issue was that it wasn't communicated and people were speculating if the driver had just walked off and forgotten to open the doors for us all.

... (I believe waiting always feels longer than it is if there's no reference to how long you'll have to wait for). When the doors eventually opened, ...there were no workers to be seen at the station]. ”

A flavour of the community's recent experiences of things going wrong on the railway: **Cancellations & early stopping points**

Arjun travelled from Manchester to London

“ *The train was delayed quite a bit, and eventually it was cancelled altogether...*

The main issue was how last-minute it all felt. At first it was just showing as delayed... so I stayed at the station thinking it would still run. Then suddenly it was cancelled, which left a lot of people scrambling.

It was quite stressful ...the uncertainty — not knowing whether I'd still make it on time or if I needed to completely rethink the plan. I was late for the meeting, and I couldn't properly prepare on the train like I'd planned, because I was busy trying to work out alternative routes and timings.

Staff were physically present on the platform, which helped a bit when things got confusing.... [and] ticket acceptance on other services was allowed...

[But] the communication wasn't clear or timely enough. There wasn't clear guidance — people had to figure things out for themselves. Information was inconsistent — boards, apps, and staff weren't always aligned. It felt quite reactive rather than managed.

No one really took control of the situation to direct passengers properly. There was no proactive support for people who might need extra help, like those with accessibility needs or tight connections. ”

Michael travelled from London to Birmingham

“ *My train was terminated at an earlier stop, Birmingham Airport. We were told to stay on the platform that we disembarked at but there was no other information given, so I got a taxi for the remainder of my journey.*

It was an added expense I didn't expect, and I didn't get to my destination as early as I should have. Quite stressful and tiring. ”

Liam travelled from Wigan to London

“ *My train was cancelled which meant everyone from that train jumped on to the next one, joining the load already on it. Seat reservations were gone and there was no availability at all. I was left standing the entire journey and ended up with blistered feet...*

I was reimbursed with very little fuss and received several apologies from staff along the way... An additional train would have been beneficial but they can't just throw on another train ”

James travelled from Oxford to Manchester

“ *A tree came down the night before and caused delays all day / the line was closed so I had to make two changes [instead of the direct route I had expected]. The journey took longer, was more complex and I had a lot of luggage. I almost missed a show I was going to with family.*

At Oxford I was given a printed alternate route to get - very helpful and useful. All staff were very understanding about why my ticket seemingly didn't make sense for where I was going.

[The first TOC] was useless though, they should've advertised delay repay. ”

Aurora travelled from Birmingham to Beaulieu Park on a Sunday

“ *...every weekend in March ...there were no trains running from Liverpool Street to Beaulieu Park so I had to alter my planned trip. It made the journey longer but there was sufficient warning.* ”

And some examples of other issues, where passengers' journeys were very negatively affected even though train services themselves were not disrupted

Chloe travelled from Cardiff Central to Cadoxton
Chloe uses a wheelchair, and was travelling with her son who has autism

“ *The lift was broken at Cardiff Central, meaning I had no access to the platform I required.*

I had to catch a train on different platform, to get to Queen Street, in order to catch another train [back] to the platform required at Central.

Whilst time consuming for myself... it was harrowing for my autistic son, who ...became overwhelmed by ...bouncing around different stations and platforms.

Front line staff were excellent, and tried to assist and understand the issues. In the end they diverted the next train so it picked us up on a different platform, and we were able to stay on that train to home, rather than getting off and moving platforms/trains again.

[But I felt there was a] lack of support from the controllers behind the scenes. My son suffered and was left in a shut down for a full day afterwards. Why couldn't we have just been put in a taxi and sent home, instead of being forced to double our travel time, using different additional trains. The personal impact was hard on him,

”

Ellen travelled from Manchester to Rotherham with one interchange, in the early evening
Ellen uses a mobility scooter

“ *The lifts were off at Rotherham Central so no way for me to exit the station. [This has happened before], so I asked staff at the transfer station to check [before I made the connection and set on my way to Rotherham.]*

The station and train staff tried to reach staff at Rotherham, then the regional office. They held up the train for a few minutes until they confirmed I could not travel [on to Rotherham]. Station staff arranged a taxi [from my connection station] and escorted me to the pickup point. When the taxi didn't arrive within 15 minutes, they came back, checked I was OK, and chased the taxi firm.

[But it still] took me an extra 45 mins to get home. I had to wait ages for a taxi in the cold.

[They did get me home, but the TOC] should have let staff ...on that route know that Rotherham wasn't accessible that evening, especially since I had prebooked assistance at Rotherham.

”

Layla travelled from Manchester to Birmingham on, the day after a major event in Manchester (which she was not part of).

Layla has ME and experiences severe tiredness.

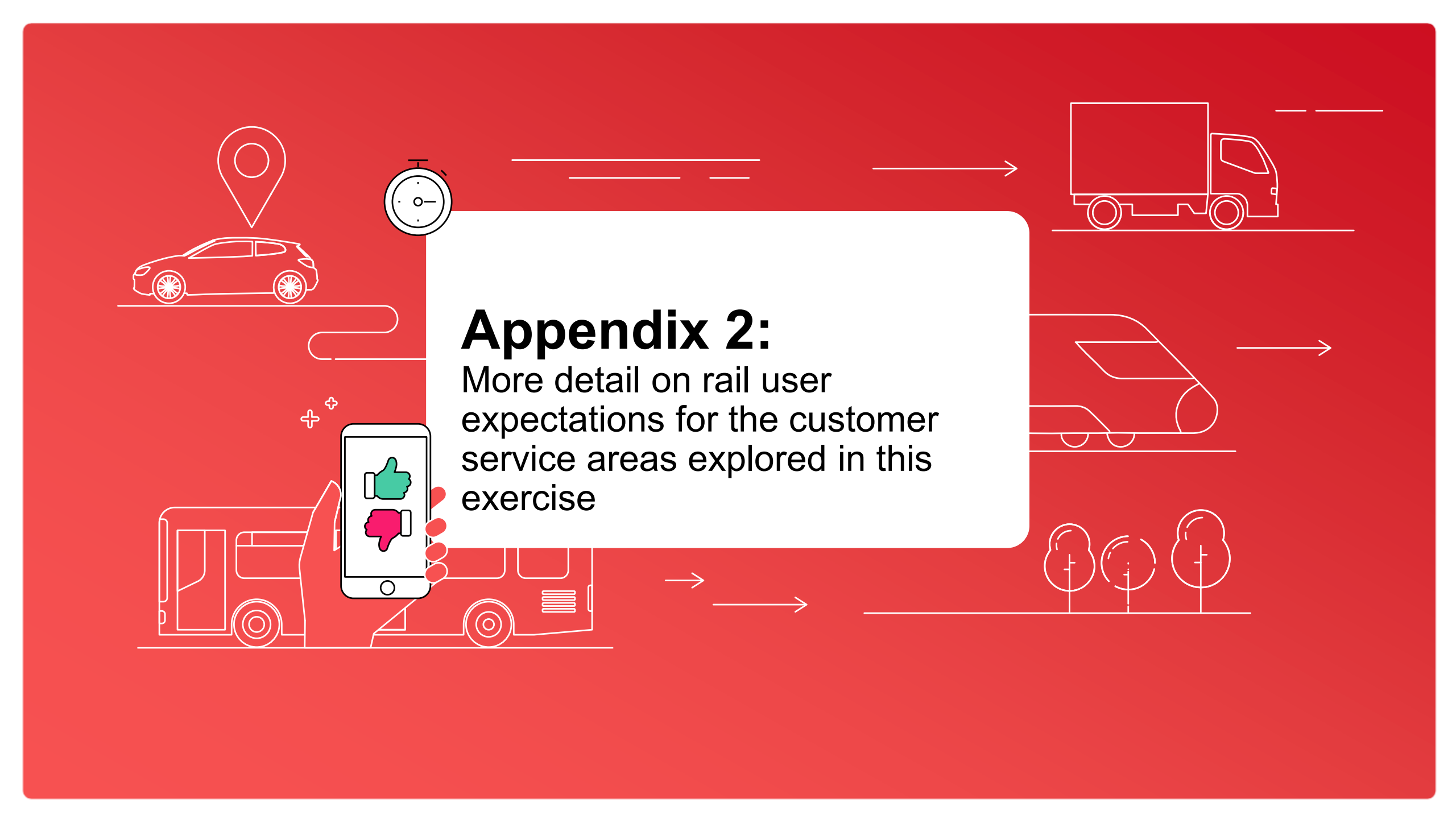
“ *[It was very crowded but] there was only one train that afternoon. It caused me great stress as I had no [choice but to make the journey to get home]. I got shoved around as people all wanted a seat on that train!*

It was very confusing on the platform and I got on the train but felt confused - I felt I wasn't on the right one. It was over crowded, there was no staff to ask, I felt rushed and had to make a quick decision. I had to ask the other passengers and take their word for it.

It was horrible. I can't move quickly, and I had luggage.

...There was no way I could stand that whole journey! I [couldn't get to my reserved seat but luckily I came across a seat that was free... The people crammed on and I had people stood all around me, falling into me for the whole journey. It was so tight, restrictive. I felt very overwhelmed.

”



Appendix 2:

More detail on rail user expectations for the customer service areas explored in this exercise

Customer expectations in more detail: Ensuring you get to your destination (you are not “left” at any point, including the journey start)

The community outlined what they would expect from train operators in relation to this area of customer service, before being prompted with any existing examples of what TOCs provide or commit to.

Getting from A to B is rail users’ ultimate objective, overarching all other ideas explored in this activity.

Customers feel **the railway should act in all and any ways possible to facilitate this**, with specific emphases in their expectations falling into three, equally important areas:

Practical actions

- Enable travel on **other train services**
- Provide and/or enable use of **other transport modes**
- Provide **overnight accommodation and next-day travel** where no suitable same-day travel is possible
- Either it must be very **clear and salient whether and which of these options are available**, or for some there is an assumption that customers should be able to make their own alternative arrangements in secure knowledge that they will be able to claim for reimbursement (e.g. for accommodation, other travel costs).

Information and assistance

- Provide **information to enable decisions** and alternate plans
- Have **staff** to interact with one to one, in person
- **Help passengers in practice** with the tangible arrangements above, at the point of need

Customer-first principles

- The objective is to get to the **passenger’s end destination, not the disrupted train’s destination**
- Provide **suitable waiting facilities** for alternative trains / transport, **don’t leave people alone** while waiting
- ...**Ensure alternative transport methods genuinely suit the person** concerned (e.g. taxis may be a last resort as a rule, but they may be essential for certain people and other modes may be out of the question)

Providing clear, timely information...

Arranging alternative routes or transport...

Ensuring the last connection is protected or offering safe alternatives if it’s missed.

Not leaving passengers stranded at night or far from home.

Offering accommodation or taxis where same-day travel isn’t possible.

Clear guidance on compensation and refunds.

Aria

What one can reasonably expect depends to some extent on the reason for the disruption to the journey but [as a general point] I think that the train company should ensure that no passenger is simply abandoned and left to sort things out for themselves.

Elijah

The train companies should keep you informed about delayed travel and what plans they have to get you to where you need to be ...[but] also if you’re traveling only a short distance whether it’s going to be worth you going or if you should cancel and go home, rather than traveling on a service that’s going to ...be less worth it.

David

TOCs should provide a range of alternative transport methods which respond adequately to individual passenger needs in a timely manner ...Where a passenger has had to pay for alternative transport themselves, refunds should be processed quickly (subject to reasonableness of journey type and receipts provided).

Benjamin

Streamlining specifics around how this is delivered : Ensuring you get to your destination (you are not “left” at any point)

The community reviewed the commitments and information on this topic that is given by a selection of train operators today, based on extracts of the content they publish online. (Some of the examples were a representation of the TOCs’ content rather than being exhaustive. The purpose was to illustrate existing information and stimulate response and ideas, highlighting key areas of good and poor practice to learn from, rather than to critique individual TOCs).

This is a difficult concept on which to set customer expectations, so it might be inevitable that webpages and other literature can feel wordy. But this is an area in which people need to understand their rights and options when **they might be especially stressed and anxious – making lots of information feel even more overwhelming. Excessive wording is a common criticism** of the examples shown (particularly CrossCountry’s webpages), and several suggest different **visual layout** improvements, like breaking up text, Q&A format, diagrams, etc.

There is also a lot of criticism for what is perceived as **excessive clauses and exceptions in TOCs’ existing commitments** here. While likely necessary, these **must be kept to a minimum and expressed as concisely** as possible.

...but there is praise for the **tone of voice** used by some of the TOCs in the examples shown (with CrossCountry a notable exception)



In general, participants were left feeling fairly unclear about their rights based on TOCs’ existing statements in this area. They understand that TOCs intend to get them home, but are not clear how this will be delivered in practice, and so doubt that it is possible.

There is lots to clarify here, but some key questions are:

- ? How does it work when there is **more than one operator** involved; who is responsible?
- ? **Who do you ask / where do you go in practice** to get the help needed? Will there be staff, and what if there aren’t?
- ? What are the **thresholds / criteria** for different transport or accommodation options (this is inconsistent across operators, and often vague for any individual operator)
- ? How are **subjective ideas** defined (e.g. what does “a reasonable alternative station” mean, and who decides?), and how do the criteria **flex for individual circumstances**, e.g. accommodation might be an option but what if it’s critical that I do get home?

*The hypothetical nature of existing statements in this area, combined with high potential for variability in individual scenarios, and high stakes (being stranded), breeds a lot of this uncertainty and cynicism. **Tangible illustrations** of how TOCs would or have acted in some example situations would likely be really helpful for those who wish to see further information.*

I understand the general promise: they should help me finish my journey or provide accommodation/alternatives. However, the exact thresholds, how to request help, and what I’m definitely entitled to vs “may be offered” still feel a bit vague.

Aria

I like they have made an effort ...however there are too many caveats ...they will have lots of internal systems to dispute any wrongdoing I’d imagine, letting them sound good on paper and useless in real life .

Wyatt

I get the general idea that they will try to help you complete your journey, but it depends on the situation and is not consistent. It is hard to know exactly what you are entitled to, especially around things like taxis or accommodation.

Arjun

I sort of understand. It’s a lot of information to take in and feel like it could be presented in a simpler way.

Jenni

[It needs] more spaced out information and questions with answers ...I wouldn’t read all of that and take in the information properly which would probably lead to me missing things.

Mia

Customer expectations in more detail: Pro-active information

The community outlined what they would expect from train operators in relation to this area of customer service, before being prompted with any existing examples of what TOCs provide or commit to.

As highlighted in rail users' unprompted descriptions of their disruption experiences, **information provided pro-actively by train companies was the stand out feature of whether or not their outcome was acceptable or not.**

Also see reports on more detailed feedback on expectations around information provision, in earlier work with the customer community, but in summary their feedback here highlights that key points are:

- Timely** – ahead of the journey where possible, fast, with regular updates (even if there is no change to previous information)
- Given across **multiple channels** (and with options to find out more / speak to someone, etc.)
- Accuracy and consistency** across channels
- Plain English and clarity**
- Practical guidance** and **relevant information to individuals** as far as is possible, not simply facts
- Staff** play a vital role in ensuring the right information is put across, and in the right, relevant way

Receiving [only] digital information would be a problem for me. I don't tend to use my mobile phone in public places because poor eyesight makes the small screen difficult to read, and poor hand sensitivity means... there's a risk of dropping the phone. [And] I'm always aware that my phone could be snatched.

Penelope

The information should be timely, regularly updated, delivered in a consistent manner, and accurate. It should use simple language and there should be an option to contact someone if anything remains unclear. It should not depend on a passenger having to install a specific app (e.g. Twitter/X, Facebook etc) to receive information.

Benjamin

Streamlining the specifics around how this is delivered

The community reviewed the commitments and information on this topic that is given by some train operators today, based on extracts of online content.

(Some examples were a representation of TOCs' content rather than exhaustive. The purpose was to illustrate existing information and stimulate response and ideas, highlighting key areas of good and poor practice to learn from, rather than to critique individual TOCs).

Participants in this community felt that the **“Smarter Information, Smarter Journeys”** initiative, including the way this is laid out for the public to read and explore, is right.

They found it **clear, comprehensive**, and **shows an understanding** of what customers need, including when things go wrong

(Bigger concerns exist about ensuring this is delivered in practice)

Customer expectations in more detail: Access to staff for info. & assistance

The community outlined what they would expect from train operators in relation to this area of customer service, before being prompted with any existing examples of what TOCs provide or commit to.

Seeing and being able to interact with staff is an enduring priority for members of this community (and previous cohorts), both when things go wrong on the railway, and when things are going to plan. It is also one of their top priority areas for improvement.

Also see reports on more detailed feedback on expectations for staff, in earlier work with the customer community, but in summary **their feedback here highlights that staff must be:**

- ✓ Visible / presence is known, available to passengers, and easy to access
- ✓ Present at stations and on board trains

There is a tolerance for the fact that some stations are not staffed, or staffed only during certain times. There is always a preference for staff to be present and customers want to see more of this, but other contact methods are acceptable where this is not practical, providing they work, that they cover all times of the day when passengers are on the railway) and that they are easy to find, access and use.

Customers feel the above are more important during any kind of disruption – recognising that staff can be more stretched or that crowding can make it difficult for them to be visible, but feeling strongly that operators should work to overcome and mitigate this in these situations.

- ✓ Approachable, empathetic, and taking customers seriously
- ✓ Knowledgeable, and supported with the right information
- ✓ Empowered to give advice and help passengers in the best way, tailored to their situation

Passengers should reasonably expect that staff are available, or at least easily contactable, ...to provide support and guidance. This includes having visible staff at stations, or access to [them] if staff are not physically present. Staff should be approachable, well-informed, and able to give clear advice... This is especially important during stressful situations, as passengers rely on staff for reassurance, accurate information, and help with making decisions about their journey.

Savannah

Streamlining the specifics around how this is delivered

The community reviewed the commitments and information on this topic that is given by some train operators today, based on extracts of online content.

(Some examples were a representation of TOCs' content rather than exhaustive. The purpose was to illustrate existing information and stimulate response and ideas, highlighting key areas of good and poor practice to learn from, rather than to critique individual TOCs).

The **lack of consistency** in TOCs' existing commitments to staff presence is a real issue for customers.

Their feedback on what TOCs say about this currently strongly confirms that this is a high priority for harmonisation, and also for improvement generally.

While there is **some tolerance around unstaffed stations, this feels less accepted on board trains** (and many would also like to see more done to up-staff stations wherever possible, as well).

In general, of examples shown here, SWT's statements around staff provision are tentatively praised, and are felt to be the minimum standard to aim for.

I dislike [that on some TOCs]... a member of staff is not on board the train. What about a conductor to not only check tickets but provide necessary information? Southwestern have got it right [in specifying that conductors assist at unstaffed stations, rather than] relying on help points.

Simon

Why can't the same be on all train companies, [it's] very confusing.

Evelyn

Customer expectations in more detail:

Ticket acceptance on other trains and other public transport

The community outlined what they would expect from train operators in relation to this area of customer service, before being prompted with any existing examples of what TOCs provide or commit to.

Allowing and enabling travel on other services and other transport feels logical and necessary to customers – an intuitive element of “getting me to my destination”

Expectations for how this is delivered focus on:

Clear, salient, speedy **information**

Staff to help direct and advise

Information about where tickets are accepted **goes hand in hand with broader advice** on which alternative routes will get people to their destination, and implications that using other transport will have for compensation (since using other modes is likely to take longer and be viewed as a delay)

No fuss / no quibble attitude

- Some feel strongly that passengers should be able to make their own decisions about what alternative services / transport are most suitable and should be free to use their train tickets in this way
- Clear boundaries will need to be drawn to enable a balance between quick, no fuss decision-making, and what is practical for TOCs and other providers

Most see ticket acceptance as being **relevant to other rail, or bus, tram, underground services**. Some do also see **taxi/Uber** as within the scope, depending on their own circumstances.

You should not have to check loads of conditions or worry about getting fined ...it should feel flexible and practical. The focus should be on helping people keep moving, not sticking rigidly to ticket rules when things have already gone wrong..

Arjun

Clear guidelines and a brief outline on the best routes.

Samuel



Streamlining specifics around how this is delivered : Ticket acceptance on other trains / public transport

The community reviewed the commitments and information on this topic that is given by a selection of train operators today, based on extracts of the content they publish online. (Some of the examples were a representation of the TOCs' content rather than being exhaustive. The purpose was to illustrate existing information and stimulate response and ideas, highlighting key areas of good and poor practice to learn from, rather than to critique individual TOCs).

Information about ticket acceptance is paramount to its successful implementation :

- **Pro-active** (including via news and social media) and/or **easy to find** information
- **Maps, signposting and staff assistance** to locate and reach the eligible alternatives
- ✓ Clear information on **where tickets are not accepted** is as important as where they are (*see previous page: some people feel they should be able to assume that they can make their own alternative arrangements at the disrupted TOCs' expense*)

Simply knowing that ticket acceptance can be implemented in principle, and an overview of where and when this can apply, is appreciated and reassuring in its own right.

Rail users also largely appreciate the **specific detail around which train services or other public transport services may be used** in given circumstances,

...but (somewhat inevitably) this level of detail can also be difficult to navigate in practice when there is a lot of information, and multiple exceptions



- ✓ Providing an **overall commitment in principle**, and then **finding ways to make information as relevant as possible to individuals when it becomes relevant**, and specific to that situation, may help
- ✓ Many also confirm again that they would need help from **staff** at the point of making the journey to understand in detail.



Key remaining questions in addition to this, not currently made clear by TOCs in the examples shown to participants here, are around:

- If using other services / other transport, what are the **implications for Passenger Assistance, seat reservations and other details** that might be linked to a specific train service booking (e.g. luggage, bikes etc.)
- If information is given stating that ticket acceptance is in place, **do I then also need specific permission when I try to board** or can I just go ahead?

It feels like you can sometimes use other transport, but only in specific situations, and you have to rely on real time updates to know.

What could be better is having a more standard, simple rule. For example, something like your ticket is valid on reasonable alternative routes during disruption, unless stated otherwise.

Arjun

The Ticket Acceptance offer is a good idea and a rational response to cancellations... However if my carefully planned travel had to change at the last moment ...I couldn't manage to find the alternative travel modes without Assistance staff ...Even though the alternative travel modes listed above were available, I feel I might be more tempted to just go back home!

Penelope

Unless people go seeking information [it]... will be missed by most passengers. It would be nice if the information for your ticket could be updated onto your ticket/provided to you if you have a live train tracker so you know exactly what applies. You should be told what you can do and also what is not allowed.

James

Customer expectations in more detail:

Seat guarantees

The community outlined what they would expect from train operators in relation to this area of customer service, before being prompted with any existing examples of what TOCs provide or commit to.

The feedback highlights a strong customer expectation that **TOCs should be more pro-active and provide more practical assistance in this area**, with clear expectations that:

- Staff must be present and active in helping people find a suitable seat
- First class areas must be opened up

Several participants do concede that when trains are overcrowded, finding a seat can be impossible. In this situation they agree **pragmatism might mean compromise**:

- They do feel that **some people should take priority over others**: older and less mobile people, young families
- There is a general expectation that everyone deserves to sit, but in extreme situations, some would also **prioritise those who have reserved** (but as a lower priority than those with a greater need)
- **Compensation** for having to stand or sit on the floor is required

Note that many people feel **these principles should be in place regardless of whether or not there is “disruption”**. Many people feel awkward when their reserved seat is taken, and again, **(pro-active) staff assistance** in this scenario is especially important and welcome.

Unless there is a major issue out of their control, onboard staff should ensure you get your booked seat or an upgrade. Otherwise you should be entitled to a refund... Passengers needing priority seats should always be prioritised.

Ellen



Streamlining specifics around how this is delivered :

Seat guarantees

The community reviewed the commitments and information on this topic that is given by a selection of train operators today, based on extracts of the content they publish online. (Some of the examples were a representation of the TOCs' content rather than being exhaustive. The purpose was to illustrate existing information and stimulate response and ideas, highlighting key areas of good and poor practice to learn from, rather than to critique individual TOCs).

Some **criticism of wordiness and “get out” clauses** around existing offers, from all TOCs. While likely necessary, these **must be kept to a minimum and expressed as concisely as possible**.

...but praise for the **tone of voice** used by the TOCs in the examples shown

Customers appreciate **clarity around how First Class reservations are managed**, and **how First Class seating can be utilised within seat guarantees** (though this isn't mentioned in all of the examples given)

While this research cannot uncover a definitive consensus on appropriate levels of compensation as part of a seat guarantee...

- Full refunds (like LNER) are appreciated and felt to be very generous; **50% or 75% can feel acceptable, given the passenger still reached their destination** (this may depend on circumstances, since less physically able passengers might find standing up entirely impossible, even leading them to abandon the journey)
- **5% (like CrossCountry) is felt to unacceptable**
- Vouchers for future rail journeys are generally less acceptable; **customers prefer refunded money**
- **Standardisation** across the network, around compensation relating to seats, is desirable

Making the claim process easy is important:

- **Needing to have tickets endorsed by staff can be understandable to customers, but can feel like “jumping through hoops”**, for example where staff are difficult to find which can exacerbate an already negative experience. LNER's apparent **no-quibble policy** on this is appreciated.
- Feedback here praised **simple online links and step by step online Q&A forms**, and the provision of a **phone number** to make a claim, as an alternative.

Key remaining questions, which are not currently made clear by TOCs in the examples shown to participants here, are around:

- ? **Whether and how some people might be prioritised for seating** (e.g. if someone is less physically able to stand than someone else)
- ? **What happens if staff are not available** to help find seats, and / or to endorse tickets

*...they show
empathy - makes
you feel ...they get
how you feel if you
can't get your seat.
Working with me
not against me!*

Layla

Customer expectations in more detail: Compensation and Delay Repay

The community outlined what they would expect from train operators in relation to this area of customer service, before being prompted with any existing examples of what TOCs provide or commit to.

This was a key factor which influenced how customers felt about disruption they had experienced, in their unprompted feedback

(Some suggest that while compensation is critical, knowing about it isn't always urgent at the point of disruption, in situations where there is a lot of confusion. **Practical help and information to reach the destination can be a more immediate need in some scenarios.**)

Many customers draw a distinction between getting to the destination late, and not being able to get to the destination at all (or very late). **It does feel reasonable to many that compensation varies in these different scenarios.**

Less consensus about specific levels of compensation, though this feedback **does not make any challenge to existing Delay Repay thresholds and refund values.** (Some even explicitly say that the current rules are reasonable, albeit that the process and clarity around this might need improvement)

Participants' key concerns are that:

- ✓ Compensation is available
- ✓ It's offered and/or provided pro-actively
- ✓ The process is as effortless and fast as possible for customers

Specific, detailed feedback on the mechanics of, and other issues around, Delay Repay has been given in separate activities with the rail customer communality and is available in relevant reports.

100% you should be compensated for delays ...and purely on the basis that if you are recorded having a ticket with them... the train company should be reaching out and saying [that you are entitled to compensation] or it should just be an automatic refund...

Wyatt

I would be more concerned about completing my journey rather than any form of compensation.

Penelope

Streamlining the specifics around how this is delivered

The community reviewed the commitments and information on this topic that is given by a selection of train operators today, based on extracts of the content they publish online.

(Some examples were a representation of TOCs' content rather than exhaustive. The purpose was to illustrate existing information and stimulate response and ideas, highlighting key areas of good and poor practice to learn from, rather than to critique individual TOCs).

This is largely **standardised** already across the rail industry, with **measurable thresholds** at which a passenger becomes eligible. Partly because of this, rail users in this community found the information provided largely clear and fair.

(Nevertheless, while they really liked the more generous and fully automatic repayment offering from C2C, this confirmed that harmonising initiatives like this fully is worthwhile: some were concerned that this was only available with a specific smartcard, or that there was a lack of fairness that they hadn't come across this)

Varied (but known) levels of compensation for different delay lengths confirmed as **largely acceptable**



Key questions and priorities for harmonisation are around **how to claim and how repayments are made.**

Customer expectations in more detail: Passenger Assistance / TUAG

The community outlined what they would expect from train operators in relation to this area of customer service, before being prompted with any existing examples of what TOCs provide or commit to.

While accessibility as an overall principle is not directly relevant to everyone and therefore is not identified as a *universally* top priority, clearly it is a priority for those who are directly affected, and all feel strongly that this is a critical requirement on the railway

Expectations relating to Passenger Assistance and TUAG offerings extend to accessibility more broadly. This includes:

Passenger Assistance

- Must be bookable in advance for **all journeys**
- Must be **followed through on** when there is any kind of disruption, and this must be something that can be expected and relied upon (which participants say it isn't today)
- Must be **co-ordinated between train services and routes/operators**, much more effectively than it is today

Turn up and Go would be very helpful in disruption and if Assistance hadn't been previously booked.

Penelope

TUAG

- A welcome addition to Passenger Assistance, but **awareness appears to be low** even among those who may need it
- Some recognition that it is difficult to guarantee TUAG in all locations at all times. In order that passengers know their rights and expectations here, **it must therefore be made explicitly and very saliently clear where TUAG is not possible** *There is an implication here that it can be assumed that TUAG is available everywhere else, i.e. the default is that this is possible (at staffed stations) unless specified; this specific point of expectation may need further verification.*
- References to TUAG in TOC literature and websites etc. may raise an expectation that TUAG is available during disrupted journeys where Passenger Assistance has not been booked (because the person felt they didn't need it or because their journey plans have changed due to the disruption). Any assistance may be more needed in these situations, and so it will be crucial to be especially clear about what operators can provide and commit to, as well as to deliver in practice.

Accessibility

- **Access limitations for stations and trains must be published, and this information must itself be easy to access** – and kept up to date (e.g. with information about whether lifts and toilets are in working order)
- **Staff must be attuned** to visible and non-visible disabilities or other circumstances, which may mean they need to alter how they give information as well as what help they provide

Streamlining specifics around how this is delivered : Passenger Assistance / TUAG

The community reviewed the commitments and information on this topic that is given by some train operators today, based on extracts of online content.

(Some examples were a representation of TOCs' content rather than exhaustive. The purpose was to illustrate existing information and stimulate response and ideas, highlighting key areas of good and poor practice to learn from, rather than to critique individual TOCs).

Passengers' rights and expectations around accessible travel are largely understood and known by those in this community who are directly affected.



This doesn't feel like a high priority for harmonisation, rather the focus needs to be on improving quality and reliability.

TOCs should be able to provide sufficient staff and resources to respond to unscheduled requests at any staffed station. It should be clear from the outset which locations these services are unavailable. Where availability is published the TOCs should deliver on promises and should be penalised where they fail in their duties.

Benjamin

Staff need to talk to each other, systems should be checked and messages passed on. I ...ended up stranded on train because the passenger assist person left, guard forgot me, and no other staff could be found.

Chloe

Prebooked assistance should be delivered as arranged, and staff at all points of the journey should be aware of our presence and needs.

Ellen



Additional points raised after reviewing what TOCs say about Passenger Assistance and TUAG (in context of disruption or not), are:

- ? What commitments to TOCs have around **non-visible disabilities and neurodiversity**?
- ? Do TOCs **differentiate between people who have disabilities, and those who might need help for other reasons** (e.g. having heavy luggage, travelling with a pram or small children, etc.), and what should expectations be here? (This is an area which is inconsistent between TOCs currently)
- ? All operators need to ensure that there is **accessible information** about Passenger Assistance, and **accessible methods to contact and interact with the service**



Customer expectations in more detail: Contact centre access

The community outlined what they would expect from train operators in relation to this area of customer service, before being prompted with any existing examples of what TOCs provide or commit to.

(Rail users' expectations for contact centres were explored in detail by the customer community in summer 2023; a full report on this is available.)

The feedback as part of this 2026 activity closely echoes the earlier findings, with key expectations for contact centres summarised as:

Easy to find and access

Fast, clear responses enabling quick decisions in a potentially stressful scenario

Information and advice that is **comprehensive and relevant** to individual journeys

Multiple channels

24/7 availability (or as a minimum, at times **when passengers are on the railway network** – this includes for example, remaining available when services are delayed, and when passengers are likely to still be at stations after the last train has reached its destination)

Consistent, accurate and up to date information

Empathy and understanding, and the ability to respond to individuals' needs

(In this context, there are very mixed opinions about chatbots and AI. Some see them as an essential way to help lots of people simultaneously, which a human could not do, but others feel strongly that using non-human customer service really misses the point; it feels sensible to have a **human “second layer” option in addition to automated services**, wherever possible. Note that it's the out of hours times when interacting with a human can feel most important.)

There should be live information about the delay etc. available online/through QR codes on screens on trains, ...[as well as] a live chat/call centre available to get more information. However I would stray away from using an AI chatbot as they're always useless and never help. A non-AI chatbot would be useful to direct people to further information.

James

...Chatbots that are useful for simple queries but allow quick escalation to a human....

Aria

There should be an easily contactable customer service line that doesn't take 10 mins to speak to someone.

Yasmin

Streamlining specifics around how this is delivered :

Contact centre access

The community reviewed the commitments and information on this topic that is given by a selection of train operators today, based on extracts of the content they publish online. (Some of the examples were a representation of the TOCs' content rather than being exhaustive. The purpose was to illustrate existing information and stimulate response and ideas, highlighting key areas of good and poor practice to learn from, rather than to critique individual TOCs).

Rail users like that many of the existing examples from TOCs about their support channels include **multiple different contact methods**.

Inclusion of **WhatsApp** is particularly noted – people feel this suggests TOCs are aiming to work in a way that is relevant and familiar, and there is an expectation that this will be live, and that messages will be responded to quickly, and will be individually relevant.

However, there is also criticism that **the way TOCs' present their choices of existing contact methods is hard to navigate** – presentation is key to help people use this information quickly and effectively

(Participants did not comment on specific information given by TOCs about the opening hours of their different channels. This may be linked to the fact that there is a lot of information about contact methods, and these specific details are currently overlooked.)



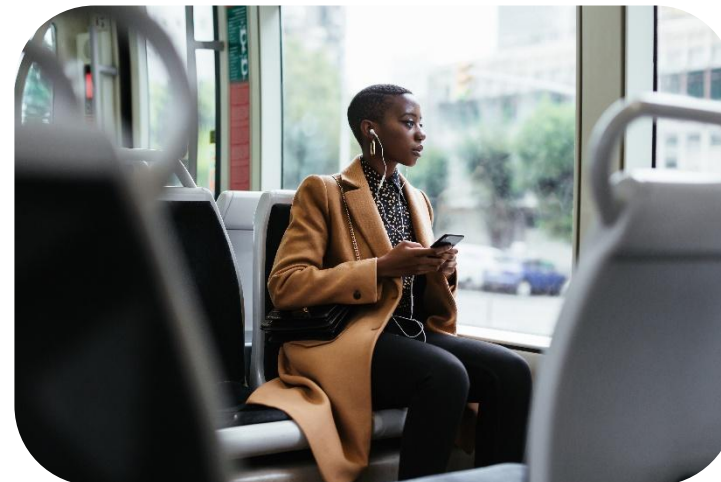
Key requirements in addition to what TOCs provide today is to **provide an expectation of likely response times, and a clear sense of which channel might be best** in different situations – especially in an urgent disruption scenario. This might be **more relevant and useful to passengers, than (or in addition to) opening hours information**.

It's not very clear what to expect in terms of response times or level of support. It would be better if companies clearly stated how quickly they reply and which channels are best for urgent help. I'm left wondering who to contact first in a disruption and whether all methods give the same level of support.

Maulika

It's unclear how quickly responses are given or which method is most effective. Clearer guidance on response times and best contact options would help. I'm unsure what to do if I can't get through or don't receive a response.

Savannah



I understand there are many ways to contact the company, but it's less clear which channel is fastest or most appropriate during disruption or emergencies. A clearer "best option in urgent situations" would help.

Aria

Customer expectations in more detail: Refreshment provision

The community outlined what they would expect from train operators in relation to this area of customer service, before being prompted with any existing examples of what TOCs provide or commit to.

A clear sense from customers that this is important but a lower priority than other points, and restricted to more extreme scenarios

As such, **refreshment offering should be linked to the length of a delay** (or the length and level of inconvenience to passengers if services are cancelled)

- ✓ Water as a basic, first offer
- ✓ (Some would like other drinks, especially hot drinks, offered for longer delays)
- ✓ Simple food / snacks for more significant delays

No coherent expectation on how long each of these thresholds should be, but there is a general feeling that this is **appropriate in “extreme” / “significant” circumstances**, with food in particular being relevant where delays are over an hour or even two hours long. Refreshments are not usually expected for delays that are less than this.

Customers expect clear information on **whether refreshments will be provided, or that customers should / may buy their own**.

Vouchers and/or clear policies on the values that can be claimed back are expected where customers may buy their own.

In addition to refreshments during delays, many have a strong belief that **train companies must provide water during hot weather**, where passengers are left on board for longer or in hotter conditions than expected.

Water if the delay is more than an hour. Snacks from the train station / on the train if more than 2/3 hours maybe and only if they cannot get an alternative route and are stuck for example.

Grace

On hot days, I think its an absolute must that any delay should come with giving out water as it can be dangerous on some trains which get so hot.

Matthew

Passengers should expect refreshments to be provided ...if they are left waiting for a long period of time. This could include free water, hot drinks, or basic snacks... [This] shows care for passenger wellbeing and helps make a difficult situation more manageable.

Maulika

I'm not sure this is necessary apart from extreme conditions, for example water should be supplied in hot weather. Food maybe supplied if the delay is over a certain time, maybe 2 hours. I'd be more concerned about ticket prices skyrocketing to absorb the cost of this to train companies.

Michael

Streamlining specifics around how this is delivered : Refreshment provision

The community reviewed the commitments and information on this topic that is given by a selection of train operators today, based on extracts of the content they publish online. (Some of the examples were a representation of the TOCs' content rather than being exhaustive. The purpose was to illustrate existing information and stimulate response and ideas, highlighting key areas of good and poor practice to learn from, rather than to critique individual TOCs).

After reviewing examples of TOCs' existing commitments in this area, participants' feedback highlights that while not the highest priority for harmonisation, the refreshments offering is currently one of the most variable.

This **level of variation is of concern to customers** (when they become aware of it), and **standardisation would be welcome**.

Lots of **criticism for the lack of real commitment** from any of the TOCs in the examples shown. "When stock is available" seems to defeat the object, meaning passengers cannot rely on their rights at all.

While many recognise that many trains do not have on-board catering, several people feel that having **"emergency" water might be made standard**, so that all operators can offer what feels like a minimum necessary requirement if unexpected situations happen.

This may help to overcome the lack of conviction, by having one area on which all can make the same, concrete commitment.



People want to see specifics, as this feels clearer to the passenger and indicates that a specific plan is in place behind the scenes. For example:

- Referring to **"refreshments" is too vague** and people prefer to know an outline of what this means
- They appreciate the **time thresholds** given by EMR and GWR at which something will be offered.

*Is water available no matter what,
or is this also subject to availability?*

Alexander

*I dislike the term "while stocks last" as
I believe it would be used as a cop out
in some instances... One
question....Will they be stocked up with
enough water, should this happen?*

Michael



*It is unclear whether the provision of refreshments ...is simply
a goodwill gesture or an obligation that has to be honoured ...
Also no mention is made of what (if anything) will be done for
those with medical requirements for water, food, etc.*

Elijah

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.