



The passenger experience

April 2014



Passenger Focus and the Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) wanted to understand the experience of passengers using the railway. We wanted to know how passengers plan their rail journeys and purchase tickets, and how they use information whilst travelling.

Why take the train?

Journey purpose is an important factor when deciding which mode of transport to use. More leisure and business¹ passengers in the quantitative survey considered using other modes of transport (26 per cent), than commuters (18 per cent) who are most likely making a frequent trip with a mode of transport in mind. Leisure and business passengers making a long distance

or an infrequent trip are even more likely to consider other modes (34 per cent and 29 per cent respectively). Similarly, just under a third of leisure and business passengers with a disability considered other modes of transport (31 per cent). Taking the car is the main alternative mode of transport for all passengers while commuters also consider the bus.

¹Quantitative results for planning journeys and purchasing tickets have been combined for leisure and business passengers, as they have similar needs and behaviours

Methodology

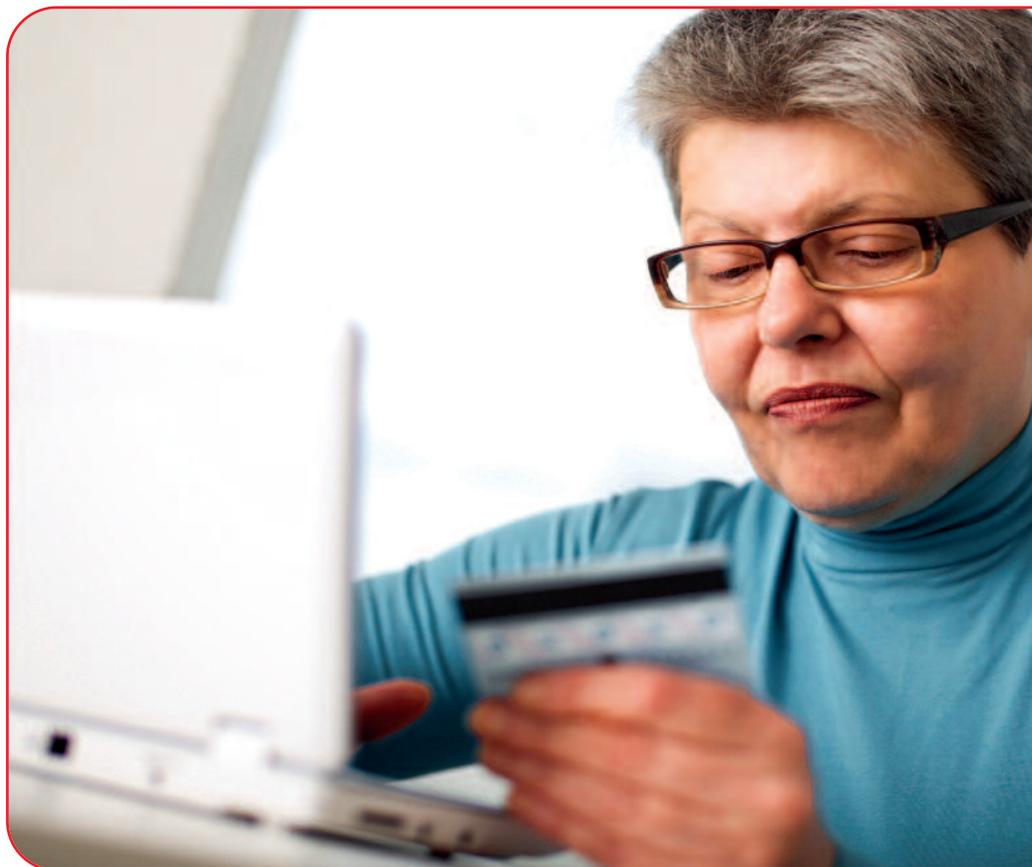
We carried out eight focus groups with rail passengers in London, Manchester and Birmingham. Six in-depth interviews were undertaken with passengers with a disability, followed by an online quantitative survey of 2,028 rail passengers in Great Britain.

Commuters choose the train because of the reliability of the journey time (27 per cent) and the door to door journey time (22 per cent). But for leisure and business passengers the cost of travel is the main reason (21 per cent).

Passengers in the focus groups said they usually consider the door to door aspect of a journey and this influences the mode of transport they use.

“I always think about the door to door journey. When I go to Birmingham city centre I get a train but **if I stay with my friend I drive because he lives a bus ride away.** That’s definitely a major factor”

Frequent passenger,
London focus group



Planning the journey

We wanted to know how passengers planned their journey once they had decided to take the train, so how they compare journey options such as routes and times of travel. We asked passengers to think about the last journey they had made.

Just under half of leisure and business passengers in the quantitative survey planned their journey (45 per cent), with a similar proportion of disabled leisure and business passengers doing likewise (48 per cent). This increases for passengers making a long distance leisure or business journey (59 per cent), which suggests that a journey of this type can be more complicated and requires in-depth planning.

Just over a third of commuters in the quantitative survey planned their journey (35 per cent). This is mainly done via apps which suggests that the extent of their planning may be for checking for delays and changes to train times, rather than in-depth planning as undertaken by leisure and business passengers.

Passengers have a preference to use online channels to plan their journey. Half of all leisure and business passengers in the quantitative survey (50 per cent) used websites to plan their journey (56 per cent for those making an infrequent leisure or business trip) and 27 per cent used an app.

This was also evident from the focus groups when many passengers said they used websites to plan their journeys.

“**I always pre-plan everything in advance** now because the internet makes it all so easy that there is no excuse not to”

Frequent passenger,
Birmingham focus group

“**I’m really confident about planning journeys because there are loads of apps you can use now.** I have the TfL one and the NR [National Rail] one on my phone and City Planner tells you what bus to take and where to change trains and how long it takes to walk and how many calories you will burn”

Infrequent passenger,
London focus group

Passengers in the focus groups said that they trusted the information online when planning their journey. However, they recognized the importance of knowing what to look for in order to get the correct information to successfully plan a journey.

Using apps was also mentioned by passengers in the focus groups, with many passengers saying they used them as an additional tool to plan journeys.



“If I’m coming into London socially I never bother to plan anything
I just turn up and buy a ticket at the station before I travel”
 Infrequent, London

Most passengers in the focus groups were aware that buying tickets on the day were usually more expensive than buying Advance Purchase tickets, so they avoided paying a walk up fare where possible. However, in certain circumstances they bought on the day such as when going on a spontaneous day out; travelling for business at short notice; or making short local leisure journeys.

Ticket types and restrictions

Around a fifth of passengers in the quantitative survey (21 per cent) were not made aware of restrictions when they bought their ticket. Passengers who bought their ticket before the day of travel, particularly via a website, were more likely to have been made aware of ticket restrictions, compared to those who bought on the day. 68 per cent of passengers who bought their ticket via a website before the day of travel, were informed of the ticket restrictions. However, only 33 per cent of passengers buying on the day from a ticket office were told. Of those

passengers who were made aware of restrictions to their ticket, most (83 per cent) fully understood them.

We explored this further in the focus groups. Many passengers had a low awareness and understanding of different ticket types, and this can be a barrier to successful ticket purchasing. This is also evident from previous research Passenger Focus has undertaken on ticket vending machines² and websites³. Passengers believe that a simplified fare structure will make their decision process easier and they will be less likely to buy the incorrect ticket.

continued on page 5...

Buying a ticket

In the quantitative survey, 66 per cent of leisure and business passengers who bought their ticket before the day of travel used a website. This was higher for those making an infrequent (70 per cent) or long distance (84 per cent) journey. 71 per cent of passengers with a disability also bought tickets via a website before the day of travel.

However commuters were more likely to buy their ticket from a ticket office before the day of travel (61 per cent).

Just under two thirds of leisure and business passengers who buy tickets before the day of travel do so because of cost savings (59 per cent).

When buying on the day of travel, ticket offices were used more by leisure and business passengers, and ticket vending machines more by commuters – 47 per cent of leisure and business passengers who bought their ticket on the day used a ticket office (36 per cent of commuters) and 34 per cent used a ticket vending machine (40 per cent of commuters).



“There may well be three core names [Anytime, Off Peak, Advanced] but I’m sure we could come up with half a dozen others that we are aware of.

The structure is complicated and not transparent”

Frequent passenger,
 London focus group

²Ticket vending machine usability, Passenger Focus, July 2010

³Ticket vending machine usability, Passenger Focus, June 2011

The passenger experience

...continued from page 4

“If there are conditions that I’m not that confident about **I will speak to somebody rather than risk getting the wrong ticket online**”

Infrequent passenger,
London focus group

Ticket restrictions were also explored in the focus groups. Frequent or confident passengers are more likely to trust their abilities in working out the restrictions and buying the correct ticket. Others were more likely to seek help from station staff who are expected to be able to answer questions about ticket validity.

Confidence in getting the best price

Passengers in the quantitative survey were very confident (36%) or fairly confident (42%) that they had secured the best priced ticket for their journey. Just over one in ten (11%) were not confident.

However when this issue was explored in the focus groups, passengers felt it was sometimes difficult to know whether they had bought the best priced ticket, especially for unfamiliar journeys.

They acknowledged that you would need a good knowledge of the fare structure and the restrictions that apply to be sure of getting the best priced ticket.

Being made aware of ticket restrictions has a positive effect on passengers’ confidence in getting the best price. However, understanding those

“I am confident that I will always be able to plan a journey I want to make **but not that I will always get the cheapest price available**”

[Infrequent passenger,
London focus group]

“I haven’t heard of a lot of the things that have been mentioned tonight so that’s why **someone can get a ticket for £15 that I pay £45 for because I don’t have the same knowledge of the system**”

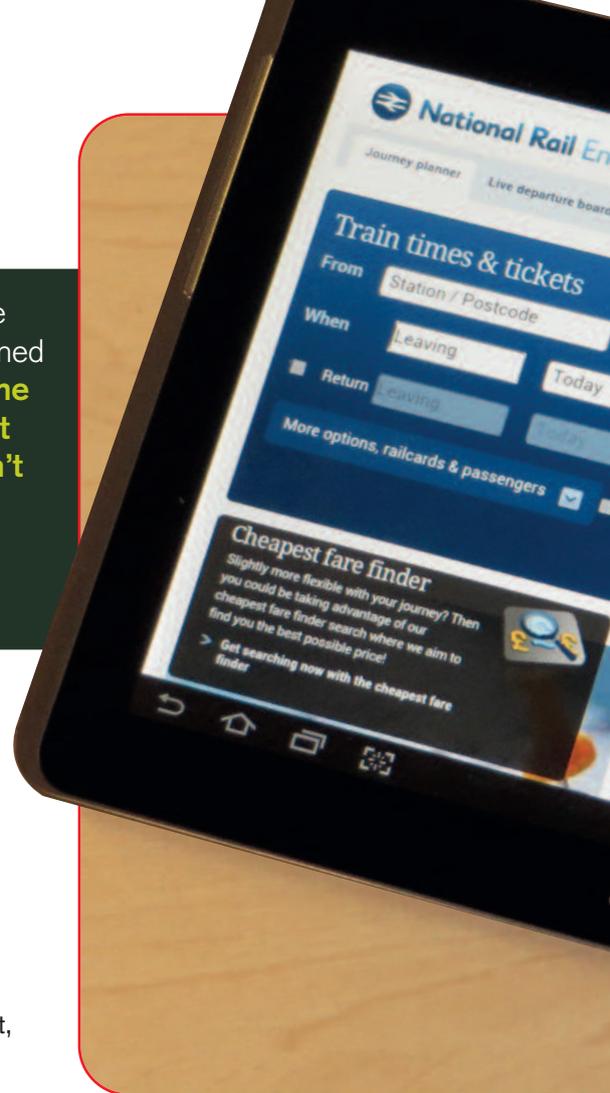
Infrequent passenger,
London focus group

restrictions also plays a significant part. Of passengers who said they were not confident in getting the best priced ticket in the quantitative survey, 34 per cent were not made aware of restrictions and 29 per cent could not recall being told. Conversely, nearly all (94 per cent) passengers who were very confident they had got the best price for their ticket, and 84 per cent of those who were fairly confident, were made aware of ticket restrictions and understood them.

Some passengers in the focus groups mentioned that there was no comparison website, like those that exist in other sectors such as insurance or utilities, which let you compare options. They thought that having such a facility would help their confidence in getting the correct ticket they wanted for the best price. As retailing itself gets more complicated – for instance some website retailers offer discounts, some tickets or offers are only available through certain channels – the desire for reassurance gets stronger.

“It’s comparable with other industries except that **there is no comparison website for train travel** but you know you will get the best deal on insurance from comparison sites”

Frequent passenger,
London focus group



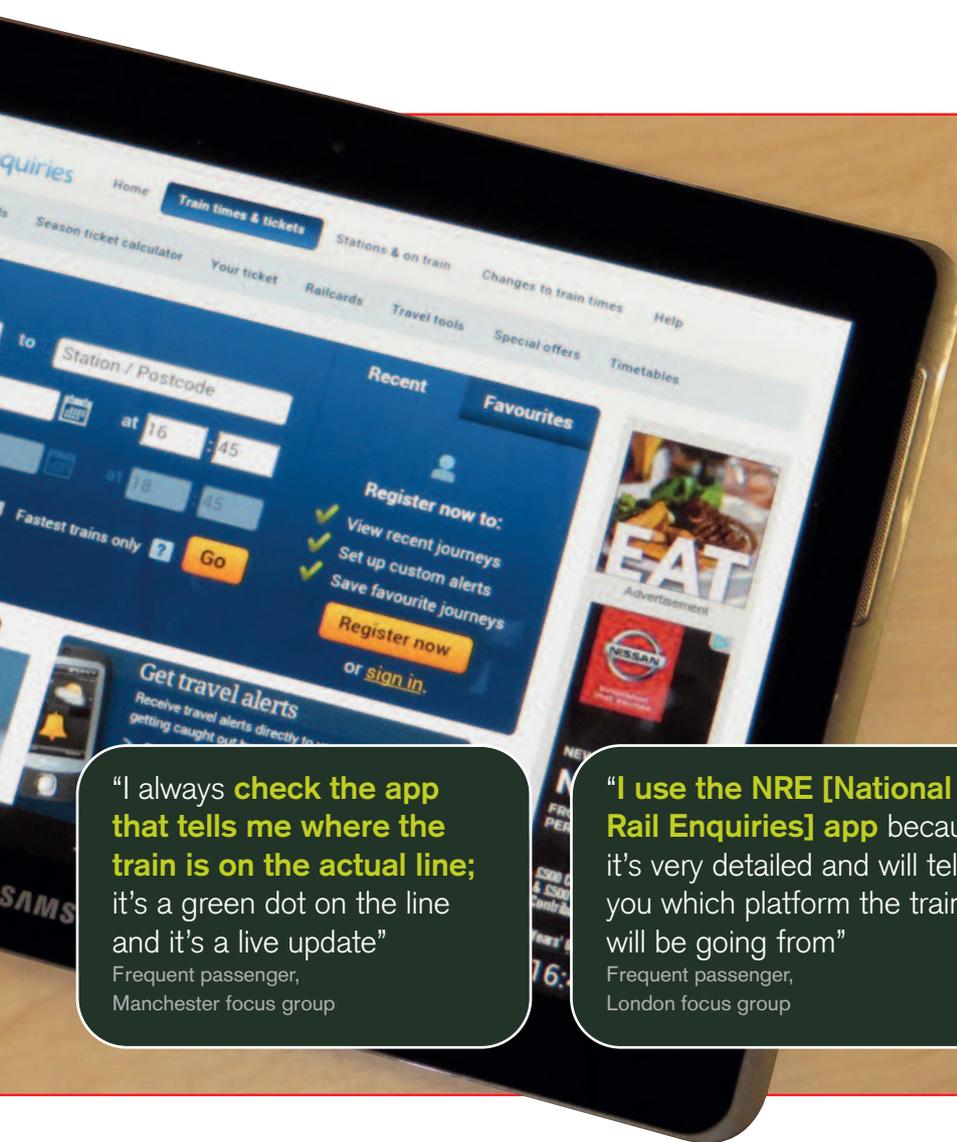
Information sources

Before travel

Passengers are increasingly checking the status of their journey before they travel. Around a third of leisure and business passengers in the quantitative survey (32%) checked for delays prior to setting off for the station and a quarter of commuters (24%). These checks are nearly always done online, using websites or apps. This was also mentioned in the focus groups.

Checking before leaving home in this way lets passengers know if there are any delays to their journey or whether to avoid going to the station if there are cancellations. It allows them to make alternative travel plans.

continued on back page...



"I always check the app that tells me where the train is on the actual line; it's a green dot on the line and it's a live update"

Frequent passenger,
Manchester focus group

"I use the NRE [National Rail Enquiries] app because it's very detailed and will tell you which platform the train will be going from"

Frequent passenger,
London focus group

During travel

Passengers find a range of information sources helpful for delays whilst travelling – information screens at stations (62 per cent), websites (48 per cent), as well as public announcements

at the station (44 per cent). Apps are considered more useful by commuters with a third using them (33%). Apps are especially helpful when access to other online information is not available.

Some passengers in the focus groups said they used apps during their

journey, but they used them alongside other sources such as information screens and public announcements. In certain situations apps are used to provide faster access to information such as delays and when making connections.

⁴Passenger Rail Usage, 2013, ORR

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Recommendations

As the number of passengers using trains continues to grow⁴, it is important that the concerns raised by passengers here are addressed.

- The ticketing structure can be confusing for passengers and, with the added complexity of ticket restrictions, some passengers find it difficult to know if they have bought the best value ticket for their journey. A full explanation of the ticket type and the accompanying restrictions should be available during the sales process and through all channels. The explanations must also be easy to understand.
- Passengers want a greater ability to compare ticketing options, so that they can be sure of buying the best priced ticket. For example, fares that are only available via specific channels or which retailers are offering discounts. In other sectors price comparison websites give consumers confidence that they have bought the right product at the right price.
- Apps are increasingly being used by passengers for planning and during travel. However apps are not used by all passengers, so the same information should be available from all sources so that passengers without access to apps are not disadvantaged.