

Passenger information when rail replacement services are in use

30 November 2023



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Executive summary

The railway is sometimes closed for planned engineering works, with train services replaced by road transport. Our expectation is that planning and making a journey when rail replacement services are in use should be as easy for passengers as when travelling by train. This report focusses on the quality of passenger information for rail replacement services, both in advance and on the day of travel. The starting point is the commitments set out in the Customer Information Pledges (Annex C), which are the approved code of practice adopted by train operators under the passenger information licence condition.

We planned and made seven journeys with planned rail replacement services across England and Wales during Summer 2023. We found some areas of good practice, most notably that rail replacement services were always shown in journey planners at the point when the engineering works were confirmed (eight weeks before travel for the works we reviewed). But we also found some common issues and make recommendations to train operators, Network Rail, National Rail Enquiries (NRE) and the industry's Smarter Information, Smarter Journeys (SISJ) programme. These include:

- Improving the quality of advance information provided online, including by ensuring better consistency of information, and by making it clearer which part of the route will have a train service and which will be operated by a rail replacement service.
- Ensuring that rail replacement services are shown in live departure information at stations and online so that it is clear that it is possible to travel to a destination even though trains are not running.
- Improving information about stations on the NRE, including providing information about engineering works on station pages and links to onward travel posters.
- Ensuring that rail replacement services display their destination, and that passengers are informed when a rail replacement service is approaching a stop.

We also note that there is currently no punctuality or reliability information for rail replacement services. This impacts passengers' ability to plan their journey on the day and to make delay repay claims. We invite SISJ to work with industry to explore how to make real-time information for planned rail replacement services available to passengers.

We have provided bilateral feedback to operators on the findings from our seven journeys, and are discussing the broader findings with the Rail Delivery Group Customer Information Group. In spring 2024, we will ask train operators and Network Rail to demonstrate to us

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how they are addressing the issues raised in the report. We will carry out further fieldwork in summer 2024 and expect to find an improved experience for passengers.

1. Introduction

Background

- 1.1 From time to time scheduled train services cannot be operated because the railway is closed for planned engineering works. These works can vary in duration from overnight, affecting very few services, to full line closures (blockades) which may last for many months. Most works take place over weekends. While an effort is made to keep passengers travelling by train wherever possible, it is generally necessary to operate rail replacement services using buses and coaches.
- 1.2 It is our expectation that planning and making a journey when planned rail replacement services are in use should be just as easy for passengers as making it by train. For this to be the case, passengers need to be provided with good information both in advance and on the day of travel, and for the rail replacement service to be accessible to them. This report scrutinises the quality of passenger information for planned rail replacement services.
- 1.3 Engineering works are planned by Network Rail well in advance, as is necessary to comply with the timetable planning process set out in its Network Code. This should enable both Network Rail and train operators to provide passengers with good information. The information should be available to passengers as they plan and book their journeys and on the day of travel itself.
- 1.4 However, there is evidence to suggest that passengers are not always receiving the information they need. The Rail Delivery Group commissions an ongoing survey ([infotracker](#)) that explores passenger satisfaction with information provision. Between May 2022 and September 2023, 41% of those who had to take a rail replacement service as part of the journey only found out at the station, rather than at the planning/booking stage. Just over half found it very easy to locate the replacement service.
- 1.5 In February 2023, Transport Focus [reported](#) on its experience of using rail replacement services during the Transpennine Route Upgrade blockade at Morley. It challenged the project to make some improvements that included:
 - (i) Clear, obvious destination signage needed on all rail replacement buses
 - (ii) Punctuality of rail replacement buses as important as ever for connecting services

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- (iii) Online train information needs to be consistent and helpful across different websites and apps
- (iv) Good levels of staff at most stations to help passengers, however smaller stations like Morley need more helpful information where staff are not present.

1.6 As part of the Transpennine Route Upgrade, a task force led by Northern Trains and TransPennine Express was established to explore the existing provision of information and develop a new set of principles and wayfinding signage. We welcome this initiative. The taskforce concluded their work in July 2023 and key findings included:

- (i) Inconsistencies between operators can cause confusion for passengers
- (ii) Signs at bus stops during planned works confirm that the passenger has reached the right place but these signs should be temporary
- (iii) Linking bus stop locations to those on Google Maps allows passengers who are visually impaired to take audible directions from their phone
- (iv) There needs to be live tracking of buses

Earlier findings

1.7 Earlier reviews have made similar findings. For example, in 2012 Transport Focus published a [report](#) on the passenger experience of engineering work that identified a need for:

- (i) Clearer information on when the journey will include a rail replacement service;
- (ii) Better information on the train to the interchange station;
- (iii) Clearer labelling of rail replacement services with destination and calling points; and,
- (iv) Better descriptions of the benefits of the engineering work so that passengers can see how they will benefit.

1.8 In 2004, the London Transport Users Committee studied rail replacement bus services, and its [report](#) included the following conclusion: *“At the poor end were the many occasions on Sundays when passengers were decanted at a strange station with neither staff nor directional signing to a bus stop, and waited in the*

cold and the rain for an antique bus. When it arrived, not always at the time advertised, passengers had to squeeze themselves and their luggage between parked cars to board it. Once on the vehicle, they found that the windows were too dirty to see through as they toured unfamiliar back streets of London. The driver would too often drive past their destination station without making any announcement.”

This report

1.9 Our review sought to identify what progress Network Rail and operators have made in improving the quality of passenger information for planned rail replacement services, and to identify issues and opportunities for further improvement.

- Chapter 2 sets out the regulatory framework for the provision of passenger information for planned rail replacement services
- Chapter 3 describes our approach to the field work that informed our findings
- Chapter 4 describes in some detail what good looks like at each stage of the passenger journey set against our findings
- Chapter 5 makes recommendations to Network Rail, National Rail Enquiries, train operators and SISJ that would deliver improvements to passenger information for planned rail replacement services

2. Regulatory framework

2.1 Operators are subject to a number of requirements relating to the provision of rail replacement services. We hold operators to account against their obligations under the passenger information licence condition. Complementary requirements are set out in the National Rail Conditions of Travel (NRCoT), the National Rail contracts issued by the Department for Transport (DfT) and the Passenger's Charter issued by train operators.

Passenger information licence condition

2.2 We expect train and station operators to ensure that passengers have accurate and timely information about their travel options, so that they can plan and make journeys with confidence, including during disruption. These expectations are formalised in a passenger information licence condition for train operators and a complementary licence condition for station operators (including Network Rail) and are more generally supported by wider consumer law requirements.

2.3 The [Customer Information Pledges](#) were launched in December 2021 and are a key output from the industry Smarter Information, Smarter Journeys ([SISJ](#)) programme. They set out good practice in the information that passengers can expect to receive before, during and after their journey by train, including when there is disruption.

2.4 In April 2022 we updated our [regulatory guidance](#) to support operators in adopting the pledges as their Code of Practice for passenger information, as is required under their licences.

2.5 Annex C lists those pledges that are most relevant to this work, with the codes that we use to refer to individual pledges throughout this report e.g. [D4].

Other obligations

2.6 The [National Rail Conditions of Travel](#) (NRCoT) form part of the ticket contract between the train operator and the passenger. Section 27 sets out the arrangements that apply when rail replacement services are in use. This includes commitments to make passengers aware that such services are operating, and that journey planners will include the extended or altered times when a rail replacement service is in use. These complement commitments set out in the Customer Information Pledges.

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- 2.7 The DfT contracts with train operators include requirements to provide rail replacement services in the event of planning or unplanned disruption. For example, section 6 of the [2022 TSGN Rail Contract](#) expects the operator to “use all reasonable endeavours to provide or secure the provision of alternative transport arrangements” in the event “any planned or unplanned disruption to railway passenger services”. These services should be “of reasonable quality, of a reasonably similar frequency to the Passenger Services included in the Timetable which such arrangements replace”
- 2.8 Train operators publish a Passenger’s Charter that sets out their commitments to passengers and the standards that they are expected to comply with. The Charters include obligations when rail replacement services are in use. For example, section 12.2 of the [GTR charter](#) makes provision for advertising rail replacement services using station posters, train operator websites and National Rail Enquiries. It adds that information about bus stop locations will be provided at the affected stations. These commitments again complement those set out in the Customer Information Pledges.

3. Fieldwork

- 3.1 We assessed the passenger information relating to rail replacement services for seven planned line closures across England and Wales during August and September 2023. This included two long term closures where the rail replacement services were planned to operate for more than two months. All our assessments were made on weekdays.
- 3.2 The rail replacement services we travelled on were provided by:
- London Overground (Willesden Junction to Watford)
 - Chiltern Railways (Princes Risborough to Aylesbury)
 - London Northwestern Railway (Northampton to Milton Keynes)
 - South Western Railway (Virginia Water to Twickenham)
 - Cross Country Trains (Severn Tunnel Junction to Gloucester)
 - Transport for Wales (Pontypridd to Treorchy)
 - Great Western Railway (Twyford to Henley-on-Thames)
- 3.3 Our assessments were based on requirements set out in the Customer Information Pledges and informed by the conclusions from previous reviews. We developed a set of questions (see Annex A) that assessed the passenger information provision for the end-to-end journey experience:
- (a) Before the journey (before the line closure has started)
 - (b) Before the journey (after the line closure has started)
 - (c) On the way to the interchange station on the day of travel
 - (d) At the interchange when catching the rail replacement service
 - (e) Boarding the rail replacement service
 - (f) On board the rail replacement service
 - (g) At the destination bus stop when leaving the rail replacement service

3.4 We gathered evidence from the National Rail Enquires (NRE) website and app, Network Rail website, train operator websites and apps, and from our observations as we travelled.

4. Our findings and analysis

- 4.1 In this chapter, for each stage of the passenger journey we have described what good looks like and our findings from the fieldwork. Our assessment of each individual trip is provided in Annex B.
- 4.2 Where we refer to customer information pledges, we have indicated this by including the reference to the relevant pledge in square brackets, for example [K1]. The pledges themselves are set out in Annex C.

Before the journey (before the start of the line closure)

- 4.3 We want passengers to be able to find out if there will be planned rail replacement services when they are planning their journey. Generally, advance communications are managed by Network Rail (for Valley Lines work it is Transport for Wales), working with the train operators to ensure that there is a consistent message for passengers.
- 4.4 For the journeys reviewed, we were pleased to find that online journey planners consistently provided information about rail replacement services at the earliest opportunity i.e. when the engineering works were confirmed 8 weeks before travel. However, there were inconsistencies in the branding used for some schemes. We found that maps were not widely used to show which part of the line was open and which was rail replacement services. More generally, there were opportunities to improve the information provided online.

Communicating blockades in advance

What does good look like	What did we find
For blockades on its infrastructure there should be a Network Rail website page that explains what work is taking place and whether this is part of a larger scheme	Most closures did not have a Network Rail page to explain what works were being carried out
The infrastructure page should introduce a consistent branding and description of the work that can be used on other publicity	While we saw some branding this was not always consistently applied and in some cases the description of the work varied. Some schemes did not use a consistent brand
The Network Rail page will link to an appropriate up to date page on the train operator website and NRE	Where links to the train operator were provided, they were generally to the homepage rather than to the specific page for these works

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What does good look like	What did we find
The NRE entry for the works should link to the Network Rail page rather than just to a generic “engineering work” entry [J3]	Generally the Network Rail page was not linked to. Where a link was provided it was not always to the right page. This resulted in passengers having to look at multiple sources to get the full story
Advance publicity should include a map showing which part of the route is trains and which is rail replacement services	Some schemes used online maps but this was not widely seen
Replacement bus stop locations are listed in the advance publicity, so that passengers do not have to look up onward travel posters or individual station pages/knowledgebase	Almost half of the schemes that we reviewed contained this information. Bus stops used by scheduled bus services have names; while these names appear on mapping platforms such as Google maps, they are rarely used by train companies in their publicity
Knowledgebase/station page replacement bus stops should match those on onward travel posters or advance information [F5]	About half of the schemes that we reviewed had consistent information. In other cases there were differences in the bus stop location. In addition there are issues with the new NRE website which mean that links to the onward travel posters (which include bus stop maps and local information) frequently do not work
It should be clear in journey planners that rail replacement services are in use [D5, NRCOT]	All the schemes that we reviewed made it clear that buses were in use
Journey planners should show all stops that the rail replacement service will call at	Since the upgrade to the NRE website this information is now widely available

Before the journey (after the line closure has started)

- 4.5 We want passengers to be able to find information about planned rail replacement services when they are planning their journey once the works have started. Passengers should not be taken by surprise when they arrive at the station.
- 4.6 We found that although rail replacement services are consistently shown in journey planners, not all train operator websites showed rail replacement services in their live departure information. This can lead to a misleading impression that there are no services available. Similarly, some operators using rainbow boards or similar service indicators are showing “good service” rather than highlighting that part of its network is closed.

4.7 While all the schemes were shown in the NRE engineering work calendar, the lack of any impact scoring meant that lengthy closures are lost amongst changes to a single late night train service. Journey planners, live departure boards and station pages did not always provide a reason for the closure.

Figure 1 Screenshot from National Rail Enquiries showing planned engineering work with one major scheme buried amongst other minor works

Planned engineering works	
⚠	Amended 22:49 London Paddington to Swansea service from Monday 16 to Thursday 19 October
⚠	Amended 21:38 Merthyr Tydfil to Bridgend service from Monday 16 to Thursday 19 October
⚠	Amended late night / early morning service to / from Worksop from Monday 16 to Friday 20 October
⚠	Amendments to some late night Southeastern trains
⚠	Amended service at Thirsk on Wednesday 18 and Thursday 19 October
⚠	Amended late night / early morning services to / from Plymouth from Monday 16 to Friday 20 October
⚠	Amended late night / early morning Southeastern services from Monday 16 to Friday 20 October
⚠	Major Improvement Works between Aylesbury and Princes Risborough from Monday 7 August until Sunday 29 October
⚠	Buses replace early morning trains between Purley and Caterham / Tattenham Corner from Tuesday 17 to Friday 20 October

Service status on the day

What does good look like	What did we find
Live departure web pages should include bus information	While NRE consistently showed the buses and displayed them in order of departure, train operator websites were less consistent. In some cases the buses were displayed in a separate list from the trains and in several cases they were not shown at all. This meant that some live departures showed that there were no services when buses were running.
It should be clear on the website that something different is happening and not show	In most cases the service indicator showed “good service” when buses were running. Operators using Journeycheck commonly

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What does good look like	What did we find
“good service” when rail replacement services are in use	showed no departures where buses were running. Similarly, operator live maps did not always indicate the closure
Train operator, NRE and Network Rail social media should show a consistent message with the same branding for the works	Social media was not always used to advertise the blockade. Where it was, in some cases the messages contained useful information such as maps that were not shown on websites
Work should be shown in the NRE engineering work calendar with a clear entry making it clear that it is major work affecting all day services for multiple days	All the work that we looked at was shown in the engineering work calendar. However, there are many entries each day and major works that last multiple days do not always stand out amongst more minor works (see figure 1)
Bus service information should be provided where rail tickets can be used on local buses	We did not find any examples of tickets being valid on local buses

On the way to the interchange station

- 4.8 For many journeys, the rail replacement service will affect only part of the route. The information that passengers receive as they travel on the train from a station that is operating normally to the interchange where the rail replacement services run from is therefore an important part of their experience.
- 4.9 In general, the information provision at this stage of the journey was poor. In some cases, there was no mention of destinations that would usually be served by the train but now depended on the rail replacement service, giving the impression that significant destinations were no longer being served. In others, passengers were not informed as they arrived at interchange stations that they would need to join a rail replacement service.

Figure 2 Customer information screens at Waterloo did not mention that buses ran from Twickenham or how to get to Reading and Windsor which normally have direct trains



On the way to the interchange station

What does good look like	What did we find
<p>Where there are normally through trains to a destination it should be clear at the station that passengers can still reach the destination but will require a rail replacement service for part of the journey</p>	<p>In most cases it was as if the final destination normally reached by train had never been served. There was poor awareness of the engineering work especially at the main station. Lack of branded material e.g. posters or information screens reduced awareness of the works that were taking place</p>
<p>Stations still served by trains on the route that has rail replacement services should have clear information (e.g. posters) with recognisable branding to highlight that the normal through train journeys are not available</p>	<p>Clear information was not generally available but in some cases this was owing to the lack of clear branded messaging</p>
<p>It should be clear onboard the train that it is not making its full, normal journey but this should not compromise the information about the part of the route that is operating</p>	<p>Generally the information on board the train was not updated for the engineering works. Passengers could not rely on the information on board the train to tell them the full story about their journey</p>
<p>When arriving at the interchange station there should be clear messaging on the train to tell passengers where they need to go to continue their journey</p>	<p>In most cases there was no recognition on the train of the fact that rail replacement services would be required to continue the journey. Most of our trips had rail replacement services replacing branch line services off the main line</p>

What does good look like	What did we find
	and so the original service was not directly affected

At the interchange station

- 4.10 When passengers arrive on a train at the interchange station they should be aware of the need to change and that rail replacement services will be required to continue their journey. It should be clear from their arrival platform where the rail replacement services depart from and how to get there. Posters and direction signs should be supported by regular announcements as passengers arrive. Passengers are more likely to use apps when making a journey. Apps providing live departure information should provide information on rail replacement services.
- 4.11 We found that the branding including posters, leaflets, maps and banners was generally good at the stations where the rail replacement services started from. However, passengers changing to the rail replacement services were not always met with announcements or information on where to go when they arrived at the station.

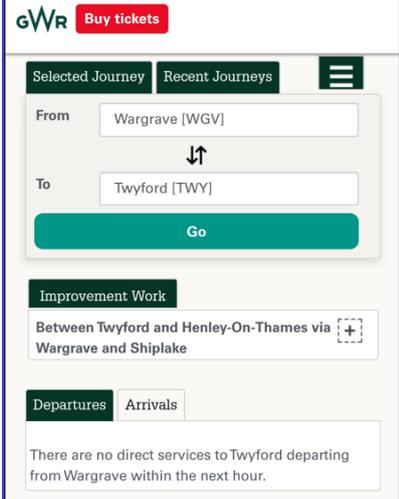
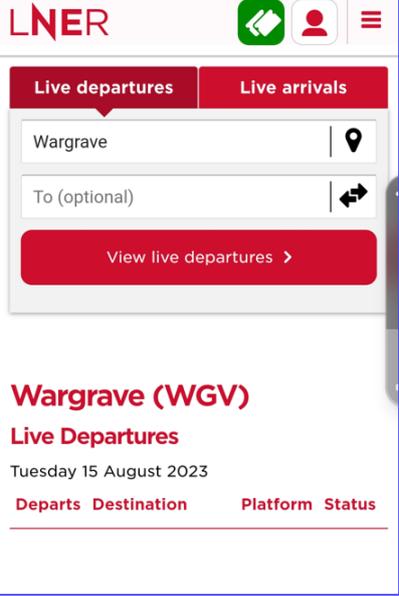
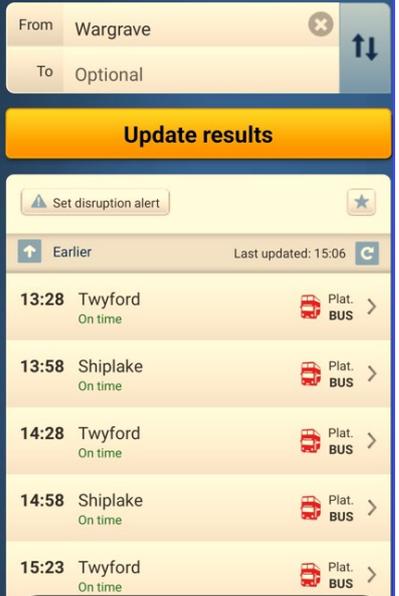
Figure 3 Buses banner at Twyford



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4.12 Rail replacement services were not always shown in train operator app live departures and even where they were they only showed the schedule, not whether they were on time or indeed running at all. Some apps showed the improvement work bulletin to explain why rail replacement services were operating but this was not consistent.

Figure 4 App live departure pages for Wargrave station where rail replacement services were running instead of trains

GWR app showed improvement work message but no departures	LNER app showed neither departures or a reason	National Rail Enquiries showed all bus departures but no reason
 <p>The screenshot shows the GWR app interface. At the top, there is a 'Buy tickets' button. Below it, there are tabs for 'Selected Journey' and 'Recent Journeys'. The 'From' field is set to 'Wargrave [WGV]' and the 'To' field is 'Twyford [TWY]'. A 'Go' button is visible. Below the search fields, there is a section titled 'Improvement Work' with a message: 'Between Twyford and Henley-On-Thames via Wargrave and Shiplake'. At the bottom, there are tabs for 'Departures' and 'Arrivals'. The 'Departures' tab is active, and it displays the message: 'There are no direct services to Twyford departing from Wargrave within the next hour.'</p>	 <p>The screenshot shows the LNER app interface. At the top, there is a 'Live departures' button and a 'Live arrivals' button. The 'From' field is set to 'Wargrave' and the 'To' field is '(optional)'. A 'View live departures' button is visible. Below the search fields, there is a section titled 'Wargrave (WGV) Live Departures' with the date 'Tuesday 15 August 2023'. A table header is visible with columns: 'Departs', 'Destination', and 'Platform Status'.</p>	 <p>The screenshot shows the National Rail Enquiries app interface. At the top, there is a search bar with 'From' set to 'Wargrave' and 'To' set to 'Optional'. Below the search bar, there is a 'Update results' button. Below that, there is a section titled 'Set disruption alert'. Below that, there is a section titled 'Earlier' with the date 'Tuesday 15 August 2023' and 'Last updated: 15:06'. A list of bus departures is shown with columns: 'Time', 'Destination', 'Status', and 'Platform'. The list includes: 13:28 Twyford On time, 13:58 Shiplake On time, 14:28 Twyford On time, 14:58 Shiplake On time, and 15:23 Twyford On time.</p>

At the interchange station

What does good look like	What did we find
<p>Regular announcements should be made to direct passengers to the rail replacement services. These should supplement waymarking so that it is clear as passengers step off the train where they need to go</p>	<p>Most operators did this well with posters and arrows to guide passengers although sometimes it was not clear when stepping off the train. While rail replacement services were in Darwin and therefore triggered a departure announcement, this was only a few minutes before departure and should have been supported by more regular messaging or announcements on arrival of connecting trains</p>
<p>Information about the engineering work should use the consistent branding and description of the work</p>	<p>While it may not have been consistent across the route, all the stations we caught buses from had appropriate messaging about the works</p>

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What does good look like	What did we find
Rail replacement service departures should be shown in live departures apps. Ideally this should be in realtime with any cancellations also shown [M5] and make reference to the reason why the work is taking place	While information was consistently available in the NRE app, some operators did not show planned bus departures. At stations solely served by rail replacement services this meant that live departures showed no services. Where buses were shown these were the timetabled services with no information about late running or cancellations. Some apps included the reason for the use of rail replacement services but this was not consistent
The rail replacement services should depart from a marked stop [D7] which should be the location on the engineering work publicity/station pages	The buses all departed from the expected location although this was not always marked as a rail replacement service stop
Staff should be available to assist passengers and ensure that they board the correct rail replacement services	Generally staff were available at the stops at the interchange stations. These were not always train operator staff. When asked they were able to explain where the bus was going to and confirm that it was the correct vehicle for the destination

Boarding the rail replacement service

- 4.13 When boarding the rail replacement service it should be clear that the vehicle is a rail replacement service and where it is going. Staff should be available to ensure that passengers board the correct vehicle for their journey.
- 4.14 Information was generally poor across our trips. In many cases the rail replacement services displayed either no destination at all or it was often on a small piece of paper which was not always correct. One operator was running three different routes and had rail replacement services in both directions serving the same stop with no vehicles showing the destination.

Figure 5 Different methods of showing the destination



Figure 6 Rail replacement bus arriving at Feltham station with no destination shown



Boarding the rail replacement service

What does good look like	What did we find
Vehicles should display “Rail replacement”, their destination and if there are express or	It was disappointing to find that in most cases the destination was not clear. Where electronic

What does good look like	What did we find
stopping services then this should also be clear [D7, G3]	displays were in use these were often blank when passengers boarded with the engine switched off. Also, sometimes the vehicle was approached from the rear or side where any windscreen display could not be seen. Where a destination was provided, this was often in the form of small writing on a piece of A4 paper that the driver may or may not have turned over to show the right route
Staff should engage with passengers to check destination or that they are on the right vehicle	While there were staff at the bus stop that could give this information, generally the bus drivers did not engage or check tickets. If specifically asked they were able to confirm the destination

Onboard the rail replacement service

- 4.15 Rail replacement services timings should be in the timetable of the day and we expect that they will operate in accordance with the published timetable. As there are unlikely to be working “next stop” systems onboard, an alternative means should be used to make sure that passengers are aware when they are approaching the next station. This is particularly important where the stop is not at the station itself. Such bus stops should be marked as being for rail replacement services so that it is clear when passengers arrive.
- 4.16 Generally the buses departed on time although some encountered traffic during their journey. We did not find any examples where drivers announced the stops or indeed stopped at intermediate stations if nobody was waiting. Not all stops that were not at stations were marked, which would have made it difficult for passengers to identify their stop if they did not know the area.

Onboard the rail replacement service

What does good look like	What did we find
Replacement services should be in the timetable and leave on time	All the buses were in the timetable and generally departed at the advertised time. However, one deliberately started late to avoid waiting time near an intermediate station where there was not room to stop and another was operating a shuttle type service where the bus departed when it was full

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What does good look like	What did we find
Passengers should be aware when they are approaching a station [G2]	With no next stop automated announcements it was left to the driver to stop at intermediate stations and announce the stops. We did not experience any announcements from the driver on any of our fieldwork and the bus did not generally pause at intermediate stations if nobody was waiting. Where the stop was not at the station it was not always obvious that the destination had been reached
Rail replacement service stops should be marked, especially when they are not at the railway station	Half of our trips noted that the intermediate station stops were marked. In one case there was a replacement bus timetable at the stop in addition to highly visible replacement bus branding

Arriving at the destination

- 4.17 The rail replacement services may bring passengers to stations that they are not familiar with. It is therefore important that the station stops are announced. Buses should arrive on time to the location that is advertised and ideally clearly marked.
- 4.18 On our trips, drivers did not announce stops and so it was not obvious that the bus was arriving at a station. Bus timetables were generously timed and ran to time. However, one bus did not run and information about that was not communicated to passengers. On that trip the punctuality worsened during the day meaning that the timetable became irrelevant when trying to predict what bus was about to arrive at the stop.

Leaving the replacement service

What does good look like	What did we find
Passengers should be aware when they are approaching a station, especially if the rail replacement service terminates there	We did not experience any announcements from the driver on any of our fieldwork. Where the stop was not at the station it was not always obvious that the destination had been reached
Rail replacement services should arrive on time	More than half of our trips arrived at the scheduled time. Although buses are in the timetables they are not updated in real time. Where one bus was cancelled there was no way to inform passengers waiting at a bus stop away from a station on the route. Similarly, as the buses became delayed in traffic and

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What does good look like	What did we find
	started to move away from the timetable it was not possible to know whether a bus had been missed or simply not turned up yet as live departures simply showed the scheduled times
Rail replacement service stops should be marked, especially when they are not at the railway station	Less than half of our trips ended at a marked rail replacement stop

5. Recommendations and next steps

- 5.1 We have collated the issues that we found into those that can be addressed by Network Rail, train operators, National Rail Enquiries, and the industry Smarter Information, Smarter Journeys programme.
- 5.2 We have provided bilateral feedback to operators on the findings from our seven journeys, and are discussing the broader findings with the Rail Delivery Group Customer Information Group. In spring 2024, we will ask train operators and Network Rail to demonstrate to us how they are addressing the issues raised in the report. We will carry out further fieldwork in summer 2024 and expect to find an improved experience for passengers.

For Network Rail

- 5.3 Network Rail is responsible for planning engineering work. It needs to take more ownership of publicising blockades where the railway is closed for a week or more.

Recommendations to Network Rail

Recommendation	How it can be delivered
<p>Improve the quality of advance information provided online when major works are planned, including by ensuring better consistency with information provided by train operators</p>	<p>For major line closures lasting at least a week there should be a Network Rail webpage that explains what work is taking place and whether this is part of a larger scheme. The page should introduce a consistent branding and description of the work that can be used on other publicity. The Network Rail page should link to an appropriate, up to date page on the train operator website and NRE (not just the homepage) and should be available 12 weeks in advance of the works [D1].</p> <p>At least one of the train operator or Network Rail pages should include a map showing which part of the route is trains and which are rail replacement services, especially if the rail replacement services are not following the normal route of the train service.</p>
<p>Improve coordination with train operators and NRE, to ensure consistent information is available across all channels when public communications are issued.</p>	<p>Public communications about the closure should be supported by information on web pages (train operator and NRE), posters and journey planners. Messaging on social media should link to the appropriate page with scheme branding. Network Rail needs to work with train operator and NRE communications channels to ensure that consistent information is available across all channels when communications are issued.</p>

For train operators

5.4 Train operators are responsible for providing detailed information to passengers to support journey planning. We would like to see better coordination with Network Rail and improvements to information at stations, on trains that are on their way to where the rail replacement services will be operating, and on buses. In particular we expect to see rail replacement buses displaying their destination.

Recommendations to train operators

Recommendation	How it can be delivered
<p>Improve the quality of advance information provided online when major works are planned, including by ensuring better consistency with information provided by Network Rail</p>	<p>For major line closures lasting a week or more, there should be an operator webpage that provides information on the changes that are being made. It should be available when the closure period appears in journey planners. It should provide a direct link to, and messaging consistent with, the equivalent Network Rail (or other infrastructure owner) webpage; be updated as more information becomes available; and provide maps showing how the route is affected and bus stop locations.</p>
<p>Ensure that it is clear to passengers that although part of the network is closed it is still possible to reach the normal destinations for that route</p>	<p>Service indicators should not show good service when part of the network is closed. Where part of the route is closed, or connections cannot be made, information should be available on station information screens to make it clear that passengers can change at X for a rail replacement service to Y and Z on the truncated train service. Where there are normally through trains to a destination it should be clear that passengers can still reach it but will require a rail replacement service for part of the journey.</p>
<p>Ensure that passengers arriving at an interchange station are clear where they need to go</p>	<p>Make better use of event driven announcements so that arriving trains are met with engineering announcements and replacement bus stop location.</p>
<p>Ensure that websites and apps show rail replacement services in journey planners and live departures including a reason for their operation</p>	<p>Live departure information on train operator websites and apps should show all departures from the station, whether train or rail replacement services. Station specific messaging such as live departures and station pages should explain why the works are taking place and the location of the replacement bus stop. When available the live departures information should include realtime rail replacement service data including cancellations.</p>

Recommendation	How it can be delivered
Ensure that rail replacement buses display their destination [D7] [G2]	Rail replacement services should display clear information showing their destination and that they are a rail replacement service. In addition, passengers onboard need to be informed when they are approaching an intermediate stop, especially if it is not located at a station.

For National Rail Enquiries

5.5 National Rail Enquiries provides an important central resource for publicising engineering work and the website has recently been updated. We welcome these developments, and we would like to see some further improvements.

Recommendations to National Rail Enquiries

Recommendation	How it can be delivered
Fix the broken links for onward travel posters so that these resources are available for all stations in England	Onward travel posters should be available on station pages under maps
Improve awareness of major schemes in the engineering work calendar and when work is underway	<p>Major works should appear in the service indicator as disruption so that pages such as live departures and the journey planners carry appropriate messaging when the lines are closed.</p> <p>Major works should be shown more clearly in the engineering work calendar so that they stand out from work that has a smaller impact</p>
Improve station specific information, working in collaboration with train operators	Station pages and live departures should carry messaging about the engineering works and location of rail replacement services

For the Smarter Information, Smarter Journeys programme

5.6 In November 2019 we [challenged the industry](#) to work together to develop and implement a strategy that would deliver tangible and enduring network-wide improvements to the provision of passenger information. In response, the industry established the Smarter Information, Smarter Journeys (SISJ) programme. We published the industry progress report in November 2022 and, in April 2023, the industry refreshed the programme with a new set of priorities.

5.7 There are some improvements that cannot be made at an individual operator level and require cross-industry participation or development of industry systems:

- Although the industry knows about blockades up to a year in advance, train times may be incorrectly showing in journey planners until Network Rail confirms the engineering work timetable. To ensure that passengers cannot buy tickets for train services that the industry knows will not run, SISJ should continue to focus on delivering the system changes necessary to resolve this issue. This will enable passengers to plan their journeys with greater confidence further in advance, and retailers to ensure that tickets are not sold for journeys that cannot be made.
- There is currently no industry data or passenger information about the performance (punctuality or reliability) of rail replacement services. We look to SISJ, working with train operators and Network Rail, to explore how real-time running information for planned rail replacement services could be made available to passengers. This would support passengers in planning and making their journeys. It would also enable data on the reliability of services to be compiled which should in turn make it easier for passengers to claim compensation if their service is delayed. The [bus open data](#) scheme requires all operators who run public bus services in England to publish timetable, location and fares data. While this is not a requirement for rail replacement services, it shows how data can be made available

Annex A: List of questions

A.1 In chapter 3 we set out the methodology for the checks that we made during our fieldwork. This set out the seven sections of our review, which are listed below with the detailed questions for that section. Where these link to specific Customer Information Pledges these are shown in square brackets, e.g. [F5]. Individual pledges are listed in full in Annex C.

(a) Before the journey (before the line closure has started)

- (i) Does the NRE engineering work information link to a specific Network Rail or TOC page about the works rather than just use generic wording such as “engineering work”?
- (ii) Is there a specific brand/logo/description for the work that is used consistently on the TOC/Network Rail/NRE publicity?
- (iii) If there is a Network Rail page, does it link to an appropriate, up to date page at the TOC and NRE?
- (iv) Is the information in the NRE entry consistent with that provided on the other sites so that you do not have to look at more than one place to get the full story? [J3]
- (v) Is a map available showing which part of the route is buses and which is trains?
- (vi) Can you find the location of the bus stop from the advance information? (A link direct from the engineering information rather than having to know to look on the TOC station pages/knowledgebase)
- (vii) Does the replacement bus information (on the TOC station pages/knowledgebase) match that on the onward travel poster? [F5]
- (viii) Is there any information about whether the bus will be accessible? Does this just link to the general NRE page on replacement buses or is there specific information given for this work? [D6]
- (ix) Is it clear in journey planners that buses will be in use? [D5, NRCoT]
- (x) If you plan a journey on the TOC website and NRE is there any extra messaging such as a pop-up box to alert you to the buses?

- (xi) Do the buses show all the stops that they call at? (Some journey planners do not show detailed bus information so just show the destination with no idea of how many stops the bus makes on the way)

(b) Before the journey (after the line closure has started)

- (i) Does TOC live departures web page show bus departures?
- (ii) Does NRE live departures web page show bus departures?
- (iii) Is it clear on the website/app that something different is happening? If the website has a service indicator or live map, does it incorrectly show “good service” for the route with the buses or something more useful to alert that trains are not running as usual?
- (iv) Does the NRE status indicator show the disruption?
- (v) Is it clear on TOC service updates/journeycheck page that something different is happening?
- (vi) Is Twitter (TOC and Network Rail accounts) showing the same information as the relevant websites? [J3]
- (vii) Is the work shown on the NRE planned engineering works and does it stand out as being major work affecting services all day?
- (viii) If there is also ticket acceptance on local buses is there any way of getting information about them and does it say you can use your rail ticket at no extra cost?

(c) On the way to reach the rail replacement services on the day of travel

- (i) If part of the route is trains and then the remainder is buses is this explained at the origin station? For example if the normal service from London to Hastings is replaced by buses from Tunbridge Wells. Does the Customer Information System (CIS) in London say Tunbridge Wells as if there is no onward link and trains never went anywhere else, Tunbridge Wells with buses to Hastings, Hastings with buses from Tunbridge Wells or the normal CIS as if there were no buses. Tunbridge Wells with buses to Hastings is preferred
- (ii) Is there information at the stations that you pass through on the train to say that buses are in use on part of the route? This should be using a

recognisable brand that is consistent and may be on special notices, banners, Operational Information Systems (OIS) and posters

- (iii) When you are on the train to the station that has the buses is there any mention of the use of buses? Does the PIS show the normal journey even though the train will terminate before that? Are there any manual announcements to say where to change/what to do? Overall, is the on train information correct?
- (iv) When you arrive at the station where you need to change onto the bus is there information on board the train to tell you where you need to go? Most likely to be a manual announcement

(d) At the interchange where you catch the replacement service on the day of travel

- (i) Are there announcements about bus departures and where to catch the bus? Could be automatic announcements, manual announcements CIS or OIS messages
- (ii) Are there posters/banners/signs about the engineering work and do they use the consistent branding?
- (iii) Does the TOC app show buses in its live departures?
- (iv) Does NRE live departures app show buses in its live departures?
- (v) Is the bus departing from the location that you expected? Are you guided to the location by direction signs on the station? If the stop is not at the station, is it clear how to get there.
- (vi) Is the stop marked as a replacement bus stop? [D7]
- (vii) Are there staff on site to assist passengers (may not be railway staff) or are they all busy monitoring the buses? [E1]

(e) Boarding the rail replacement service

- (i) Do the buses have “rail replacement”, TOC name and destination visible on the outside of the vehicle? Is it clear if buses are operating different routes, e.g. an express and all stations version? [D7]

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- (ii) Are the buses parked in such a way that any low floor boarding can be used, i.e. at a kerb. Do the vehicles appear to be low floor or are there steps to climb to board? [D6]
- (iii) Was your ticket checked?
- (iv) Did the staff engage with you to check your destination or check you were on the right bus? Might be off-bus staff rather than the driver

(f) On board the rail replacement service

- (i) Did the bus leave at the scheduled time?
- (ii) Did the driver announce the stations?
- (iii) Did the bus call at ordinary bus stops too?
- (iv) Were the bus stops at intermediate stations marked for the replacement bus?
- (v) Were staff available at the intermediate stops to assist passengers?
- (vi) Did the bus arrive at the intermediate stations at the scheduled time?

(g) At your destination bus stop where you leave the rail replacement service

- (i) Did the driver announce the stop?
- (ii) When you left the bus was it at a marked stop?
- (iii) Did the bus arrive at the scheduled time
- (iv) Were staff available at the stop to assist passengers
- (v) Did the bus stop in such a way that accessible features such as the low floor could be used e.g. was it close to the kerb to reduce the stepping distance
- (vi) Was there any information at the stop to give replacement bus times?

Annex B: Detailed findings grid

B.1 We have summarised our findings in Chapter 4 of the report and the individual findings for each trip are given here. The individual trips have been anonymised so that we can draw general conclusions. However, the detailed findings from individual trips have been shared with the relevant train operators.

	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7
1. Before the journey (on a different day)							
a. Does the NRE engineering work information link to a specific Network Rail or TOC page about the works rather than just use generic wording such as “engineering work”?	No						
b. Is there a specific brand/logo/description for the work that is used consistently on the TOC/Network Rail/NRE publicity	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
c. If there is a Network Rail page, does it link to an appropriate, up to date page at the TOC and NRE?	No						
d. Is the information in the NRE entry consistent with that provided on the other sites so that you don't have to look at more than one place to get the full story? [J3]	No						
e. Is a map available showing which part of the route was buses and which was trains?	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
f. Can you find the location of the bus stop from the advance information? (A link direct from the engineering information rather than having to know to look on the TOC station pages)	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
g. Does the knowledgebase replacement bus information match that on the onward travel poster [F5]	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
h. Is there any information about whether the bus will be accessible? [D6]	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
i. Is it clear in journey planners that buses will be in use? [D5,NRCoT]	Yes						
j. If you plan a journey on the TOC website and NRE is there any extra messaging such as a pop-up box to alert you to the buses?	Yes						
k. Do the buses show all the stops that they call at?	Yes						

	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7
2. Before the journey (on the day or another day when buses are running)							
a. Does TOC live departures show bus departures?	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	
b. Does NRE live departures show bus departures?	Yes						
c. Is it clear on the website/app that something different is happening? If the website has a service indicator or live map, does it show “good service” for the route with the buses or something more useful to alert that trains aren’t running as usual?	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	
d. Does the NRE status indicator show the disruption?	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	
e. Is it clear on TOC service updates/journeycheck page that something different is happening?	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	
f. Is Twitter (TOC and Network Rail accounts) showing the same information as the relevant websites? [J3]	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
g. Is the work shown on the NRE planned engineering works and does it stand out as being major work affecting services all day?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
h. If there is also ticket acceptance on local buses is there any way of getting information about them and does it say you can use your ticket at no extra cost?	N/A						

B.2 On the way to reach the bus

	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7
3. On the way to reach the bus on the day of travel							
a. If part of the route is trains and then the remainder is buses is this explained at the origin station?	Yes	Yes	N/A	No	No	No	No
b. Is there information at the stations that you pass through on the train to say that buses are in use on part of the route? This should be using a recognisable brand that is consistent and may be on special notices, banners, OIS and posters	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
c. When you are on the train to the station that has the buses is there any mention of the use of buses?	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
d. When you arrive at the station where you need to change onto the bus is there information on board the train to tell you where you need to go? Most likely to be a manual announcement	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes

B.3 At the first station where you catch the rail replacement service

	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7
4. At the first station where you catch the replacement bus on the day of travel							
a. Are there announcements about bus departures and where to catch the bus? Could be automatic announcements, manual announcements CIS or OIS messages	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
b. Are there posters/banners/signs about the engineering work and do they use the consistent branding?	Yes						
c. Does the TOC app show buses in its live departures?	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
d. Does NRE live departures app show buses in its live departures?	Yes						
e. Is the bus departing from the location that you expected? Are you guided to the location by direction signs on the station.? If the stop is not at the station is it clear how to get there.	Yes						
f. Is the stop marked as a replacement bus stop?	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
g. Are there staff on site to assist passengers or are they all busy monitoring the buses? [E1]	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

B.4 Boarding the rail replacement service

	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7
5. Boarding the replacement bus							
a. Do the buses have "rail replacement", TOC name and destination visible on the outside of the vehicle? Is it clear if buses are operating different routes, e.g. an express and all stations version.	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No
b. Are the buses parked in such a way that any low floor boarding can be used, i.e. at a kerb. Do the vehicles appear to be low floor or are there steps to climb to board?	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No
c. Was your ticket checked?	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
d. Did the staff engage with you to check your destination or check you were on the right bus?	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

B.5 Onboard the rail replacement service

	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7
6. On board the rail replacement services							
a. Did the bus leave at the scheduled time?	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
b. Did the driver announce the stations?	No						
c. Did the bus call at ordinary bus stops too?	No						
d. Were the bus stops at intermediate stations marked for the replacement bus?	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	N/A
e. Were staff available at the intermediate stops to assist passengers?	No						
f. Did the bus arrive at the scheduled time?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No

B.6 At your destination bus stop

	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7
7. At your destination bus stop							
a. Did the driver announce the stop?	No						
b. When you left the bus was it at a marked stop?	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
c. Did the bus arrive at the scheduled time	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
d. Were staff available at the stop to assist passengers	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
e. Did the bus stop in such a way that accessible features such as the low floor could be used e.g. was it close to the kerb to reduce the stepping distance	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
f. Was there any information at the stop to give replacement bus times?	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No

Annex C: Customer Information Pledges

The [Customer Information Pledges](#) are the approved code of practice adopted by train operators under their passenger information licence condition. Pledges that are appropriate to this work on rail replacement services are listed below. We refer to pledges throughout the document by including their reference in square brackets, e.g. [D1].

To help you plan your journey we will:	
D1	publish the changes in our journey planners as soon as possible, we aim to do this no later than 12 weeks in advance for planned works
D5	let you know if you need to travel on a different mode of transport when you would normally expect it to be a train, when planning your journey
D6	run trains and road transport that is accessible for everyone. If this isn't possible, we will tell you and offer to arrange an alternative if you get in touch with us
D7	ensure replacement buses display their destination and depart from an identified departure point which is clearly shown
Our team members will:	
E1	be happy to help and be visible so you know where to find them
When you are at a station we will:	
F5	provide details about onward travel options
When you are on a train we will:	
G2	let you know when we are approaching the next station, to give you time to get ready to leave
G3	let you know the destination of the train and the stations it will call at
We will clearly explain things to you by:	
J3	making sure our information is clear (easy to understand and jargon free), consistent (you'll get the same information whatever channel you use), correct (we'll give you factual information) and concise (we'll keep things simple). Passengers should not have to look at multiple sources of information to get the information that they need
In the future we hope to:	

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M4	let you know the departure point of any replacement bus when you're planning the journey, so you know where to go
M5	show you where replacement road transport is in real time to reassure you



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