Passenger information when rail replacement services are in use

Follow up report



Executive summary

Planning and making a journey when planned rail replacement services are in use should be as easy for passengers as when travelling by train. We have reviewed industry progress in improving the information available to passengers when they are planning and making journeys that involve rail replacement services for a part of the journey.

Last year, we challenged industry to improve passenger experience, identifying areas where it needed to improve passenger information for rail replacement services. This year we ran a second round of fieldwork to assess progress. We made 17 journeys on planned rail replacement services across England and Wales during summer 2024. We acknowledge our fieldwork covered a small sample of operators and did not cover Scotland. We supplemented our fieldwork with an information request to 23 train operators to gather more detail on their processes. We consider these sources of information sufficient to indicate where there are potential concerns with passenger experience that warrant further investigation.

On the basis of our fieldwork sample and information request, it would appear industry has made good progress in a number of areas. Information when planning your journey in advance is generally accurate and of good quality, while operator staff and agents providing information on the day were informative and friendly, and added to the reassurance of passengers. We also saw improvement in the information provided at the stations where passengers change to rail replacement vehicles (interchange stations), and the majority of services now appear in station customer information screens (CIS). We are encouraged by the collective efforts from industry via the Smarter Information Smarter Journeys (SISJ) programme, which has worked this year to develop real time tracking of rail replacement vehicles and the production of new videos outlining maps of planned disruption.

We are however disappointed to see little improvement in the information provided on the rail replacement journey itself. Too often, the final destination and intermediate stops for rail replacement vehicles were not displayed or announced. More also needs to be done to explain at origin stations that a portion of the journey can, and will, be made via rail replacement. We found instances where the information appeared to suggest that the journey would end where the rail journey ends.

We have set out a number of further actions that we expect industry to implement in order to build on progress. The key recommendations for industry and operators are that they should:

- continue to improve the quality of information provided online about engineering works
- provide information about the accessibility of rail replacement vehicles set out in their Accessible Travel Policy on their assisted travel webpages, rail replacement FAQs and webpages for specific engineering works
- continue to improve the availability of online maps in advance of travel
- ensure passengers understand how they can complete a journey that includes a rail

replacement service on the day of travel
- review their approach to ensuring that destinations are consistently displayed on rail replacement vehicles and intermediate stops are announced throughout the journey

A full list of the actions we expect industry to take under each recommendation can be found under next steps. We will write to individual operators asking them to demonstrate that their approach is fit for purpose in response to some of our findings.

We will hold a workshop with industry in early 2025 to discuss the cross-cutting issues identified in this report and will continue to monitor activity, escalating issues or considering more formal action if we do not see the expected improvements.

- → Next Introduction

Introduction

Planned engineering works sometimes require temporary railway closures, with disruptions ranging from brief overnight work to extended blockades lasting several months. To maintain a passenger service, rail replacement services (usually buses or coaches) may be arranged to cover affected routes.

Passengers need to be provided with information that enables them to plan their journey in advance, taking account of the impact of the rail replacement services, and to travel with confidence on the day itself.

This report scrutinises the quality of passenger information for planned rail replacement services. Engineering work is scheduled 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 Network Rail, National Rail Enquiries (NRE) and train operators to provide passengers with informative and timely information as they plan, book and undertake their journeys.

In November 2023 we concluded that passengers were not getting the information that they need in advance, nor on the day of travel on planned rail replacement services.

We identified some areas of good practice, most notably that passengers buying tickets online before travel were being told when rail replacement services would be in use for planned engineering work. However, we also identified several areas of concern that we asked train

operators, Network Rail and NRE to address. Our key recommendations focused on:

- improving the quality of advance information provided online
- ensuring that rail replacement services are shown in live departure information at stations and online
- improving information provided about stations on NRE
- ensuring that rail replacement services display their destination on the vehicle and that passengers onboard are informed when a rail replacement service is approaching a stop

We also invited the industry to work together to explore how to make real time bus location data available to passengers.

We committed to undertaking a follow-up review in 2024 to assess industry's progress with addressing the issues we highlighted. We hoped to find an improved experience for passengers. This report sets out our findings and highlights further activity and actions that we consider need to be taken.

Regulatory framework

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 and accessible travel policy licence conditions.

The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) investigate and enforce the related requirements in the Public Service Vehicles Accessibility Regulations (2000) (PSVAR) and new Public Service Vehicles (Accessible Information) Regulations (2023) (PSV(AI)R) and where appropriate, will report offences to the Traffic Commissioners.

Complementary requirements are set out in the National Rail Conditions of Travel (NRCoT), the contracts issued by the contracting authorities, and the Passenger Charter's issued by train operators.

Passenger information licence condition

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 supported by wider consumer law requirements.

All operators have adopted the industry Customer Information Pledges as their regulated passenger information Code of Practice. This sets 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. 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.

Annex A lists those pledges that are most relevant to this work, with the codes that we use to refer to individual pledges throughout this report. For example, pledges include operators informing passengers if part of the journey will require travel on a mode of transport where it would normally be expected to be a train (Pledge D5).

Accessible Travel Policy licence condition

All operators are required, by their operating licences, to establish and comply with an Accessible Travel Policy (ATP), setting out what they will do to help disabled people use the railway. The mandatory minimum requirements are set out in our ATP Guidance.

Our ATP Guidance requires operators to provide passengers in advance of planned disruption with appropriate, accurate and timely information about the accessibility of the rail replacement transport they will be providing for the affected service and the options available to the passengers to be able to make their journey.

Public Service Vehicles Accessibility Regulations

PSVAR (2000) require drivers of regulated service vehicles to at all times display destination signs on the front or nearside of a scheduled rail replacement vehicle.

DVSA is responsible for enforcement of PSVAR. ORR has a Memorandum of Understanding with DVSA and we regularly share issues and insights.

Public Service Vehicle (Accessible Information) Regulations

Following the introduction of the Public Service Vehicle (Accessible Information) Regulations 2023, or PSV(AI)R, between 2024 and 2026 it will become mandatory for the majority of bus and coach services to meet accessible information provisions. The regulations are intended to result in all

passengers having access to high-quality and accurate on-board information. This includes providing relevant information consistently in both audible and visible formats, identifying upcoming scheduled stops on the service route and - if necessary - the driver announcing information manually.

These regulations took effect on 1 October 2023 but the date from which they apply will depend on when the operator's vehicles were first used on local services. As set out in DfT's guidance, newer vehicles must comply more quickly. Vehicles first used from 1 October 2019 need to comply from 1 October 2024 (and so therefore after our fieldwork was completed). Vehicles first used from between the 1 October 2014 and 30 September 2019 have until 1 October 2025 to comply. Older vehicles (dating from 1973 to 2014) have until October 2026 to comply with the regulations. As for PSVAR, DVSA is responsible for enforcement of PSV(AI)R. More information is set out in the next steps section of this report about how we work with the DVSA.

In October 2024, a Technical Exemption was granted by DfT for coaches used for Rail Replacement services. Buses used for rail replacement are not covered by the exemption.

The Technical Exemption for rail replacement coaches require vehicles to meet the 'spirit' of the regulations by:

- displaying journey information, including stops the vehicle will make and the destination
- making audio announcements on the Public Address system (where fitted)
- providing alternative transport where a passenger requires announcements about the stops a journey might make that cannot be otherwise provided

Other obligations

The 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.

The contracts with train operators may include requirements to provide rail replacement services in the event of planned or unplanned disruption.

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.

Our evidence base

Information request

We issued an information request to 23 train operators who operate rail replacement services (Heathrow Express were excluded as they do not operate rail replacement services). Operators provided qualitative information about their rail replacement services and processes. This included responses to questions about information they provide to passengers ahead of the engineering works and how they work with Network Rail. There were also questions on information they provide during the engineering works at stations, on trains and rail replacement vehicles.

Summary of 2024 fieldwork

We assessed the passenger information relating to rail replacement services for 17 planned line closures for 12 operators across England and Wales from May to August 2024. All assessments were for journeys made on weekdays. A full list of the rail replacement services we travelled on is available in Annex B.

Our assessments were based on requirements set out in the Customer Information Pledges and ATP Guidance and informed by our findings from our fieldwork conducted in 2023.

We gathered evidence from the NRE website and app, Network Rail's website, train operator websites and apps, and from our observations as we travelled.

We acknowledge our fieldwork covered a small sample of operators across 17 trips and did not cover Scotland. However, we consider our findings in conjunction with our information request sufficient to indicate where there are potential concerns with passenger experience that warrant further investigation. We outline a summary of our findings in the following sections of this report.

Review of information provided by operators on the accessibility of rail replacement vehicles

We carried out a review of all operators' websites in relation to the provision of information about the accessibility of rail replacement vehicles. We looked at:

- information provided to passengers about the accessibility of their rail replacement vehicles on their accessible travel and rail replacement FAQs pages

- information provided in operators' ATP documents

Smarter Information Smarter Journey's Programme (SISJ)

We have previously challenged the industry to develop a single, transparent strategy to deliver improvements in passenger information. In response, the industry established the Smarter Information Smarter Journey (SISJ) programme, which is jointly led by the Rail Delivery Group (RDG) and Network Rail.

The SISJ programme now plays a central role in enabling change that requires cross-industry collaboration. SISJ was key to the launch of the Customer Information Pledges in December 2021 and are leading initiatives on the live status of rail replacement services and production of short information videos for planned engineering works that are discussed in this report.

ORR's Consumer Expert Panel

We sought advice from ORR's Consumer Expert Panel on our emerging findings and recommendations. The panel provides independent advice and plays a key role in bringing a consumer perspective to our policy and regulatory decisions. It was supportive of our recommendations, recognising the potential for harm when passengers are not provided clear and accurate information throughout each stage of the passenger journey.

This report

This follow-up report identifies what progress Network Rail, operators and NRE have made in improving the quality of passenger information for planned rail replacement services following our 2023 recommendations.

The structure of the report is as follows:

- section 2 sets out our main findings with a summary of the supporting evidence
- section 3 sets out recommendations for industry to address our findings and our next steps

- ← Previous Passenger information when rail replacement services are in use
- → Next Our findings and recommendations

Our findings and recommendations

Like last year, we have set out our key findings and any recommendations for each stage of the passenger journey:

- **Section 1:** planning a journey online before travel
- **Section 2:** the quality of information provided at stations and on trains on the day of travel
- **Section 3:** the quality of information whilst travelling on the rail replacement service

Section 1: Information provided online before travel

We want passengers to be able to easily find all the information they need about planned rail replacement services when planning a journey. This information needs to be in a format that is accessible and easy to understand. Passengers should not have to look in multiple places to find the information they need.

There are a number of websites that passengers can go for advance information:

- **NRE** and **operators** provide a detailed summary of the impact of engineering work for passengers online, including the impact on train services and the rail replacement services on offer
- **Network Rail** provides technical information on the engineering work taking place, helping passengers understand how they will benefit from the planned improvements

It is positive to see that there has been an overall improvement in the quality and level of information when planning journeys since our review in 2023. Online journey planners and train operators' live departure information now consistently provide information about rail replacement services. Passengers are alerted as to which part of their journey will consist of a rail replacement service.

All operators now also provide dedicated information about upcoming engineering works and most have separate web pages outlining the impact of engineering works and provide key information about the rail replacement services on offer.

Quality and availability of information provided online

Finding: Information provided to passengers on amended timetables and the wider impacts and benefits of engineering work is generally of good quality. However, industry could make it easier for passengers to find additional information about the wider context.

Passengers need to be able to plan their journeys and operators' amended timetables for engineering works remain clear both on operator and NRE websites, with rail replacement services clearly identified.

However, if passengers want to know more about what has caused the disruption and its wider impacts or intended benefits, it can be more difficult to find the information. This is because direct links to complementary information pages on operator, NRE and Network Rail websites are not always provided.

Last year we asked Network Rail to provide web pages setting out the context for engineering work lasting a week or more, similar to information provided by NRE and operators. We are pleased to see that Network Rail is now consistently doing this. We also want to see Network Rail providing direct links to NRE information on these pages.

NRE and operators sometimes provide direct links to the Network Rail pages in the information they provide for passengers, and we want to see this done more consistently.

Consistent branding and naming of engineering works

Finding: Network Rail, NRE and operator websites often use inconsistent branding and naming when referring to the same engineering works.

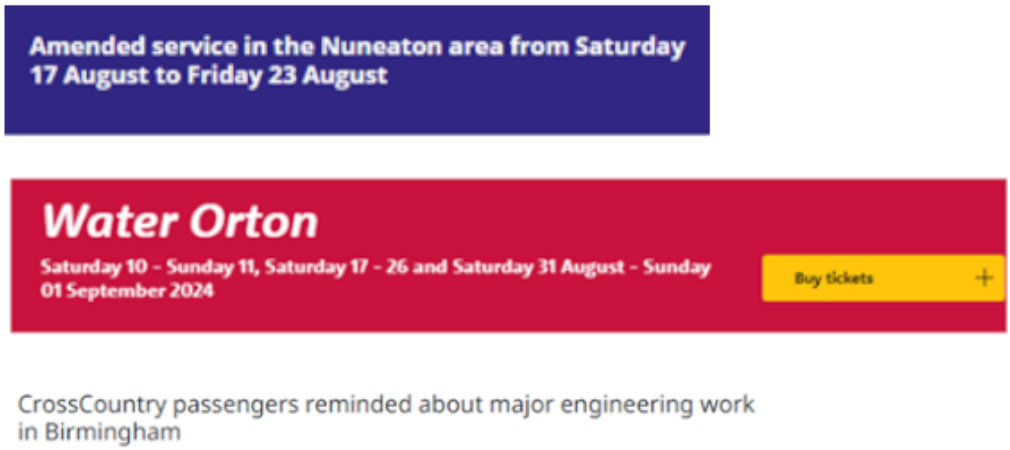
Consistent branding helps passengers to more quickly identify relevant information and associate one information source with another. Last year, we suggested that the Network Rail infrastructure page should introduce a consistent branding and description of the work that can be used by operators and NRE.

Our analysis this year found that engineering works still often had inconsistent branding across the websites of different organisations when referring to the same disruption or blockade.

Figure 1 shows the different ways disruption was referred to on our journey between Birmingham New Street and Coleshill Parkway the disruption was referred to as:

- an “amended service in the Nuneaton area” on the NRE website (Nuneaton itself still had trains serving it)
- the operator CrossCountry referred to it as “Water Orton” (where the work was taking place)
- Network Rail referred to “engineering work taking place in Birmingham”

Figure 1: Different naming conventions of the same engineering work disruption. First image: NRE, second image: CrossCountry, third image: Network Rail



Clarity of information online on upcoming engineering works

Finding: The industry has an established process for enabling detailed information to be provided across websites, but that process is not being applied consistently.

Industry has an established process that is designed to support the provision of consistent and accurate information for engineering works, based on production of a Weekly Engineering Circular (WEC). Each week, Network Rail asks operators to provide information about forthcoming engineering works for passengers. Network Rail draw this information together to create the WEC, and the content for the NRE website is then drawn from the WEC.

The amount of information and level of detail provided for the WEC is determined by individual operators and there is little consistency. This in turn impacts the information that NRE is able to provide for passengers on their dedicated engineering work pages. The process for delivering information to the WEC has not been reviewed for some time.

Recommendation 1:

Industry should continue to improve the quality of information provided online about engineering works via:

- reviewing the process for generating the Weekly Engineering Circular with the aim of enabling greater consistency in the information provided to passengers
- establishing a consistent approach to the branding and naming of works for a disruption or blockade
- providing passengers with direct links between complementary pages on their websites

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Advance information about the accessibility of rail replacement vehicles

Finding: Operators are not consistently providing passengers with easily available information about the accessibility of rail replacement vehicles on their websites.

We expect passengers with specific access requirements when travelling to be easily able to find information in advance of travel about the accessibility of rail replacement vehicles. Passengers must also be informed of alternative travel arrangements if the vehicles are not accessible to them.

In recognition of this need to promote the accessibility of rail replacement vehicles, there are existing requirements on operators both in the Customer information Pledges [D6] and ATP Guidance (section A4).

Review of operators' websites

We reviewed the general information operators provide on their websites about the accessibility of rail replacement vehicles. We looked at the information operators provide on their assisted travel pages and their rail replacement FAQs.

We found around half of operators do not provide information on these general webpages. They do all however, as required, provide information in their ATPs, outlining the general accessibility of rail replacement vehicles and options if a rail replacement service does not meet an individual's accessibility needs.

Several operators only noted that for any questions about accessibility, their accessibility team

should be contacted. Other operators provided more detail, noting the types of vehicles used and how to travel safely onboard.

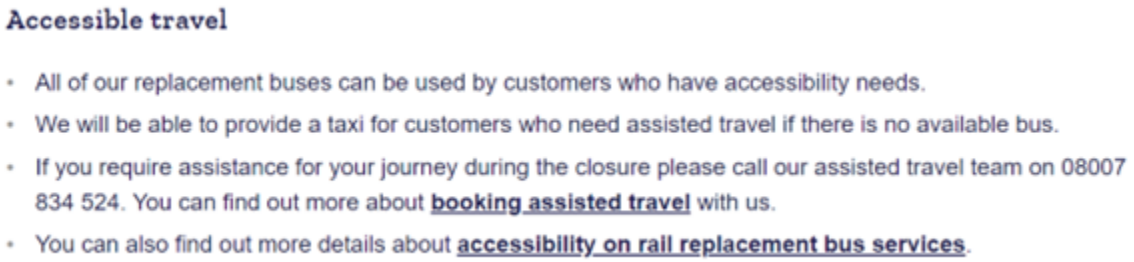
We also reviewed the information NRE provides on their rail replacement pages. There is a general overview of the types of rail replacement vehicles used, and the accessibility of these vehicles. There are also links directing passengers to individual operator websites for further information.

Fieldwork findings

During our fieldwork we reviewed the information operators provided about the accessibility of rail replacement vehicles in the dedicated information they provide online for each block of engineering work. Our findings suggest operators do not consistently reference the accessibility of rail replacement vehicles in this information.

London Overground, Southeastern and West Midlands Trains are the only operators we observed that provided dedicated information, outlining the accessibility of the rail replacement vehicles that will be used during the engineering work. Southeastern went further, noting how to book assistance and options if a rail replacement service does not meet an individual's accessibility requirements. For all other operators, passengers needed to look at the operator's accessible travel page, rail replacement FAQs, or ATP.

Figure 2: Southeastern provided information on the accessibility of rail replacement vehicles that would be used for its Kingsferry Bridge engineering work, including how to book assistance and alternative arrangements



During our fieldwork we observed several journey planners that provided a bulletin indicating whether accessible rail replacement vehicles were being used. This provides passengers with clear information when planning their specific journey. We did not collect this information for all our journeys and so do not know how many operators' journey planners offer this service.

Figure 3: A journey planner notifying passengers that a rail replacement vehicle will be accessible during the upcoming engineering work



Recommendation 2:

Operators should provide information about the accessibility of rail replacement vehicles set out in their Accessible Travel Policy on their:

- assisted travel webpages
- rail replacement FAQs
- webpages for specific engineering works

Disruption maps

Finding: More operators are providing online maps in advance of travel to indicate which part of a journey will consist of a rail replacement service.

We want passengers to be easily able to identify which section of their journey will be a rail replacement service when planning a journey. Visual maps are a helpful tool to provide passengers this information.

We were pleased to see in our fieldwork and the responses to our information request that more operators have begun to provide maps. However, for some operators, fieldwork findings were inconsistent with responses to the information request. We found that 10 of the 17 operators in our fieldwork did not provide a map online in advance of travel. However, several of these operators did provide maps at stations.

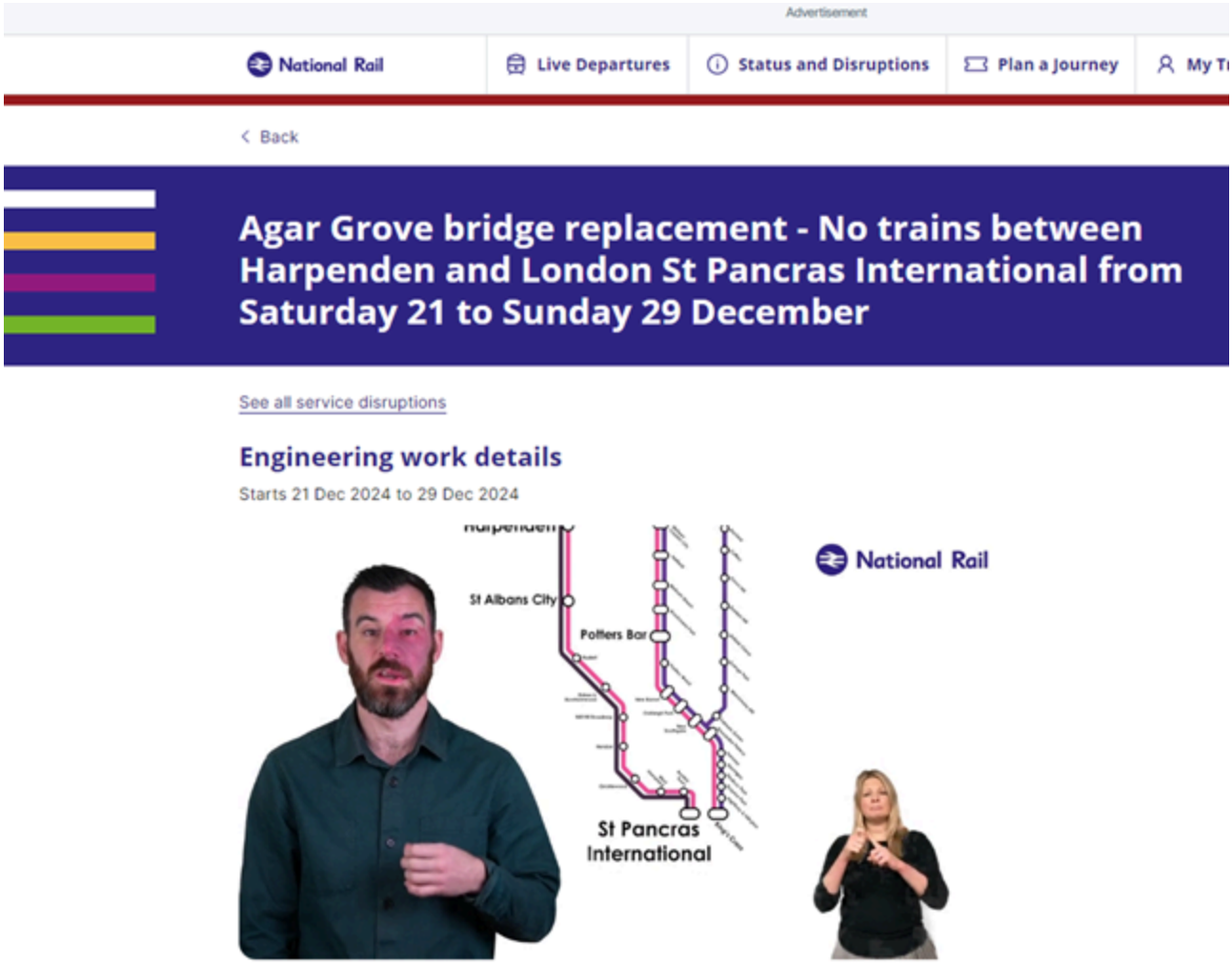
Figure 4: Two maps provided by operators to help passengers identify which part of their journey will include a rail replacement service



We are pleased that the SISJ programme has launched Visual Disruption Maps as a new way to provide passengers with information about engineering work. These are short videos where a presenter stands in front of a map of the rail network providing information on a disruption event and alternative travel options. The videos will be available on the NRE website and social media channels, operator websites and at stations. All videos will have captions and a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter.

The first videos went live in December 2024 ahead of planned Christmas engineering work.

Figure 5: A screenshot from a visual disruption map video available on NRE



Onward travel maps

Finding: Operators are not linking to onward travel maps on their rail replacement information webpages.

Last year we asked NRE to fix broken weblinks for onward travel maps so that these resources are available for all stations (in England). These maps show the local area around stations and include onward travel information such as the location of rail replacement bus stops, bus routes, taxi ranks, and cycle hire in order to help passengers plan or complete their journeys. The maps should be available on station webpages under the 'maps' section.

We are pleased that NRE has resolved this issue. However, we found that operators are not linking to these materials consistently from their own station webpages, despite many saying in their response to our information request that they do.

Recommendation 3:

Operators should continue to improve the availability of online maps in advance of travel by:

- working with the SISJ programme to support the production and dissemination of the new visual disruption map videos
- providing maps showing the impact of engineering work both on their websites and at stations in advance of the engineering work taking place
- linking to onward travel maps on their station webpages

Section 2: information available at stations and on trains on the day of travel

Information at stations

Finding: Not all operators make it clear at origin stations that it is still possible to travel to an intended destination when rail replacement services are running on part of the route.

Where there are normally through trains to a destination it should be clear at the origin stations and stations where passengers change to rail replacement vehicles that passengers can still reach their intended destination but will require a rail replacement service for part of the journey.

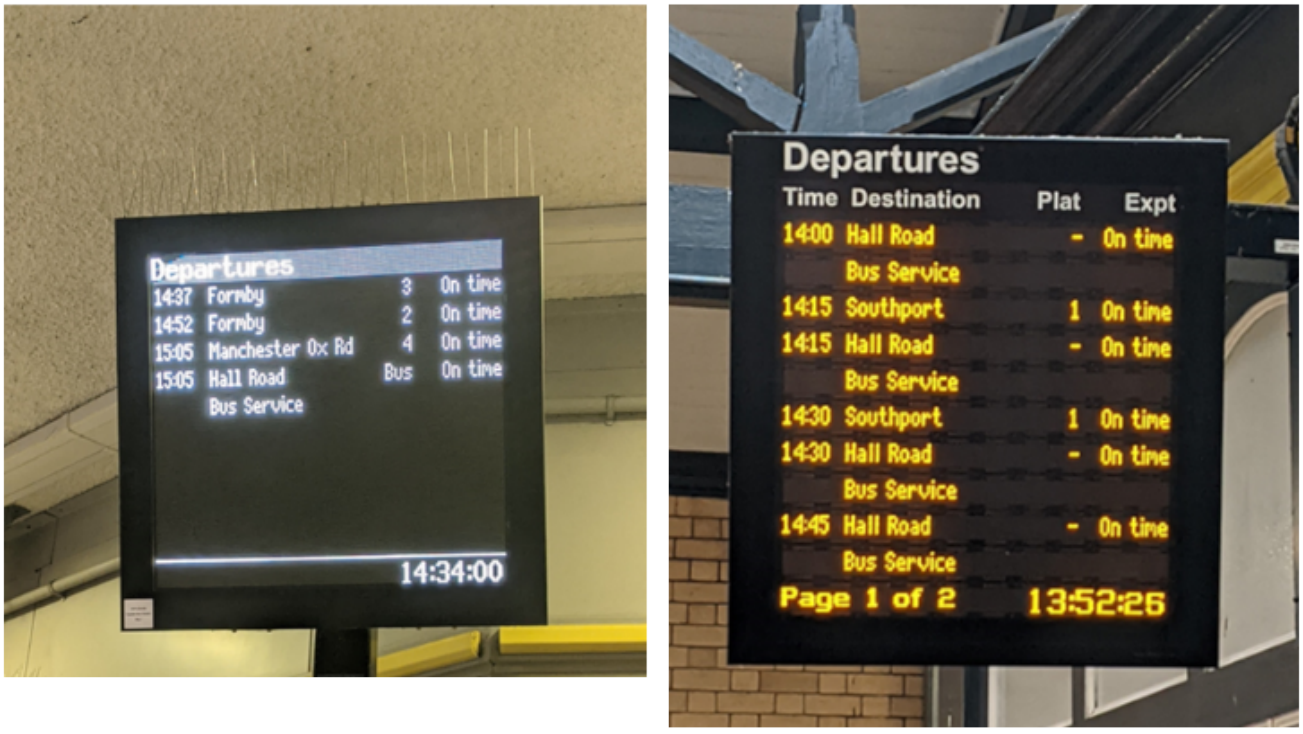
During our fieldwork we were pleased to see an improvement in the information provided at stations where rail replacements were running from during our fieldwork. We found that branding including posters, leaflets, maps and banners were informative and frequently available at these stations. Helpful and friendly operator staff and agents were often on hand to provide information to passengers. Station CIS clearly showed rail replacement services running.

We were however disappointed that it was often not clear at origin stations that passengers could still travel to their intended destination. In most cases it was as if the final destination, which could normally be reached by train, had never been served. There was often a lack of branded material including posters or information screens at stations, notifying passengers that they could reach their intended destination by travelling by train and then taking a rail replacement service.

In some instances, CIS showed the journey as only available to where the train stopped. For

instance, under normal circumstances, there is a direct train service between Southport and Liverpool Central. However, during this summer's engineering work, passengers had to travel by train between Southport and Formby, switch to a rail replacement service to Hall Road and then catch a connecting train service to Liverpool Central. During the engineering work the CIS at Southport only displayed services to Formby, while at Formby, the CIS only showed services to Hall Road. Neither station's CIS provided information about the onward train service from Hall Road to Liverpool Central, the usual final destination. This was not limited to this example, we observed similar instances on other fieldwork trips.

Figure 6: Customer Information screens at Southport (left) and Formby (right) did not mention a rail service would be available from Hall Road to Liverpool Central



We did see some good practice during our fieldwork. For example, when travelling from the Chiltern Railways managed station London Marylebone to Banbury on a Chiltern Railways train service, there were notices on the main CIS alerting passengers it would not be possible to travel as normal directly from London Marylebone to Banbury. Passengers were advised to take a train to Bicester Village where a rail replacement service would be available to Banbury and further destinations.

We are aware that some operators have trialled other approaches, and we want to see all

operators developing solutions that improve passengers' understanding of how they can complete their journey.

Live status of rail replacement services

Finding: The Smarter Information Smarter Journeys programme (SISJ) has made welcome progress in the development of live information for passengers about the rail replacement services, including completing a successful trial.

In our report last year we invited SISJ, working with operators and Network Rail, to explore how to provide passengers with live information about rail replacement services. This will allow passengers to better plan their journeys during disruption with access to real-time information for rail replacement services online through journey planners and live departures and at stations on CIS. The information also allows for improved data on the reliability of services to be compiled, which makes it easier for passengers to claim compensation if their service is subject to delay.

We are pleased that SISJ has taken this forward and made such positive progress. Southeastern, Travelnet Systems and Go Ahead London ran successful trials in November and December 2024 to enable real-time tracking of planned rail replacement vehicles. Passengers were able to see the expected time that the rail replacement service would arrive at stations. The trial will continue until the end of the year before being analysed. South Western Railway & First Travel Solutions are also hoping to undertake a trial in early 2025.

Figure 7: A screenshot from the trial by Southeastern that shows a delayed rail replacement vehicle on the NRE live departures app

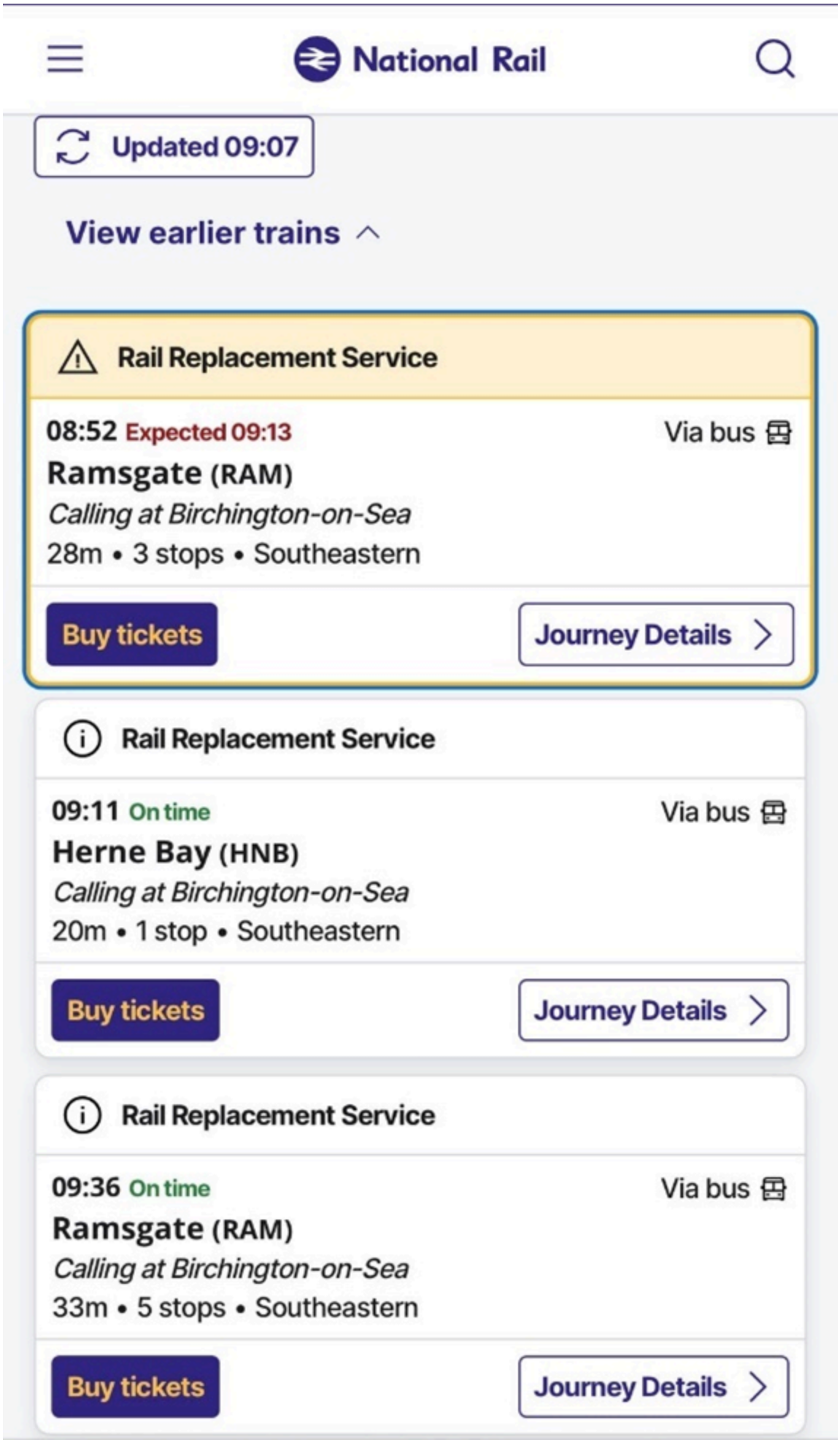
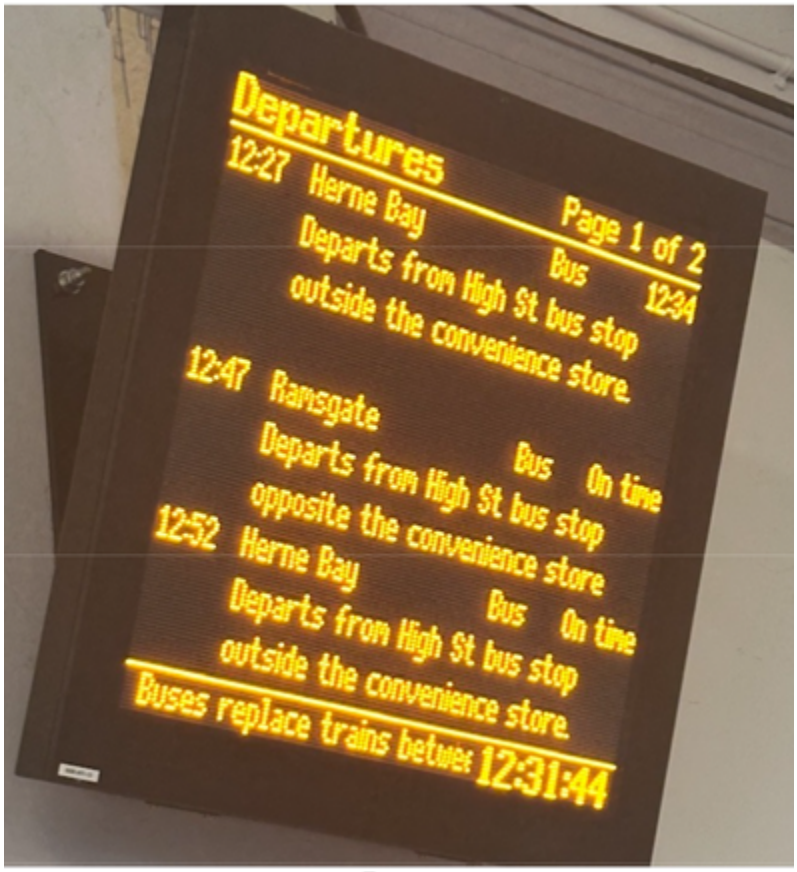

National Rail
Updated 09:07
View earlier trains
Rail Replacement Service
08:52 Expected 09:13
Via bus
Ramsgate (RAM)
Calling at Birchington-on-Sea
28m • 3 stops • Southeastern
Buy tickets
Journey Details
Rail Replacement Service
09:11 On time
Via bus
Herne Bay (HNB)
Calling at Birchington-on-Sea
20m • 1 stop • Southeastern
Buy tickets
Journey Details
Rail Replacement Service
09:36 On time
Via bus
Ramsgate (RAM)
Calling at Birchington-on-Sea
33m • 5 stops • Southeastern
Buy tickets
Journey Details

Figure 8: A picture of a station CIS that shows a delayed rail replacement vehicle



Recommendation 4:

Operators should ensure passengers understand how they can complete a journey that includes a rail replacement service on the day of travel via:

- providing announcements and visual information at stations
- working with SISJ to trial and roll out the provision of real time information for passengers on rail replacement services

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Section 3: information whilst travelling on the rail replacement service

Finding: We are disappointed that information provided during the rail replacement journey remains generally poor, with information on intermediate and destination stations being

inconsistently displayed or announced.

Displaying correct destination on rail replacement vehicles

Passengers should be able to easily identify which replacement vehicle to board. The information a passenger needs includes signage showing that it is a "rail replacement" service, with the operator name and destination clearly signed on the vehicle. Last year we found that information was generally poor when boarding the rail replacement service.

Although there were often staff available to ensure that passengers were boarding the correct vehicles, we are disappointed that our 2024 fieldwork showed that information during the journey itself remained generally poor across our trips. In many cases, the rail replacement services did not display the correct destination. We are concerned that operators information request responses did not match our observations during the fieldwork.

London Overground, Merseyrail, Southeastern and TransPennine Express were the only operators that consistently displayed the required information on all rail replacement vehicles observed during the fieldwork. TfW Rail, Great Western Railway and CrossCountry displayed this information for some services, but we did not see this present for all blockades reviewed.

Figure 9: Rail replacement services operating between Birmingham New Street to Coleshill Parkway and Hackney Downs to Chingford, displaying "rail replacement", operator and destination signage





Our fieldwork found most operators are still inconsistently displaying information required on rail replacement vehicles. We found that some displayed only the operator name and "rail replacement", and others only “rail replacement”. In some cases, the destination had not been updated once the original destination was reached. These issues were prominent on all types of rail replacement vehicles, including buses and coaches

Figure 10: Rail replacement vehicles we observed in our fieldwork that did not display all required information





Eleven operators told us via their information request response that within the terms and conditions (sometimes referred to as a 'Code of Conduct') agreed between the rail replacement vehicle supplier and operator, certain requirements must be met, including that the correct destination must be displayed on the vehicle. Some operators told us that they have an auditing process in place to ensure that destinations are being displayed on vehicles consistently.

Operators auditing processes often required coordinators to upload results to a "Coordination Portal". For example, Cross Country told us that they have coordinators who use an app to check operators are meeting requirements, including signage. SouthEastern have undertaken mystery shopping which they use to inform new KPIs. However, it is unclear how operators use this audit information and how any identified non-compliance was remedied, potentially leading to these processes not being effective.

Seven operators did not set out any actions that they take to ensure correct destination signs are in place.

Announcing intermediate stops on the rail replacement journey

It is also essential that, if the rail replacement has intermediate stops, these are made clear to passengers on the service. This is particularly important if stops are not at the train station, as passengers may be unfamiliar with the local area.

Eleven operators told us that within their supplier contracts, they require drivers to announce the intermediate stops. Although our sample size was relatively small, our fieldwork suggests that this requirement is not generally being met. For most of our rail replacement journeys, drivers did not consistently announce intermediate stops. These issues were prominent on all types of rail replacement vehicles, including buses and coaches

We acknowledge that the delivery of audio announcements is reliant upon drivers, who may be focused on safety critical aspects of driving at points when passengers believe announcements should be made. Should an announcement be made when the vehicle has stopped, we would expect that drivers ensure that customers are given time to identify if it is their stop and alight as appropriate.

Recommendation 5:

Operators should review their approach to ensuring that they consistently:

- display destinations on their rail replacement vehicles
- announce intermediate stops throughout the journey

Monitoring the provision of information during a rail replacement journey

We expect to see operators taking appropriate steps to ensure that their rail replacement services are providing passengers with information about destinations and intermediate stops. We will be asking operators to report to us the outcome of their review, setting out how their process is fit for purpose to secure consistently good information for passengers.

We have also identified the use of self-reported monitoring data to provide a degree of insight to ORR in our oversight of the passenger information licence condition, DfT in its decisions on any future regulations or exemptions from regulations, and DVSA in its oversight of PSV(AI)R.

Working collaboratively with DfT

When DfT issued the exemption to PSV(AI)R for rail replacement coaches, it set out its intention to strengthen the evidence base on rail replacement services and to engage with ORR to explore how we could support their evidence needs. DfT want to understand the total volume of vehicles which are either compliant with PSV(AI)R or have a medium-term exemption, and to monitor

progress towards achieving full compliance with PSV(AI)R.

ORR already collect data on PSVAR compliance from train operators for both buses and coaches, as set out in our Core Data guidance. We will shortly consult with operators on the feasibility of collecting data on volumes of PSV(AI)R exempt vehicles, and on the technical capability of vehicles to comply with PSV(AI)R. The data would be self-reported by operators, and we would share the data with DfT.

Operators have separately agreed to self-audit 10% of all buses and coaches per day of an operational blockade for operational compliance. The sampled vehicles will be assessed for signage in use and, where the vehicle is joined by a route coordinator, whether announcements are being made. RDG will collate this information and share with ORR and DfT on a quarterly basis. We will use this information to provide additional insight to support our monitoring under the passenger information licence condition. We understand that this self-reporting will continue until at least July 2026, at which time the exemption to PSV(AI)R exemption granted by DfT for rail replacement coaches will elapse.

Working collaboratively with DVSA

We have an established relationship with DVSA with our ways of working set out through an existing MoU. We have been engaging with DVSA to explore how data that we collect from the industry may support the DVSA and the Traffic Commissioners in holding operators to account against PSVAR and PSV(AI)R requirements.

We have agreed that we will share any additional data we receive from operators with the DVSA. We are in the process of updating our MoU to reflect PSV(AI)R requirements and this updated data sharing approach.

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Next steps

Operators and industry need to implement the recommendations outlined below in line with the associated timescales provided. To support further improvements in this area we will:

- Write to individual operators setting out specific actions we expect them to take in our

response to our findings. For recommendation 5, we will ask operators to demonstrate to us that their approach is fit for purpose.
- Hold an industry workshop in early 2025 to discuss our key findings and recommendations from this report and improve collaboration on some of the cross-cutting issues identified.
- Work with the DVSA to update our MoU to reflect new PSV(AI)R requirements and data sharing agreements.

We also encourage operators to consider how they could secure insights from passengers to better understand their experiences when travelling by rail replacement services, to inform further improvements. Transport Focus, on behalf of industry, will explore the feasibility of undertaking a passenger survey to gain views from passengers on the quality of information provided on rail replacement services.

Recommendations and actions

Recommendation 1:

Industry should continue to improve the quality of information provided online about engineering works via:

- reviewing the process for generating the Weekly Engineering Circular with the aim of enabling greater consistency in the information provided to passengers
- establishing a consistent approach to the branding and naming of works for a disruption or blockade
- providing passengers with direct links between complementary pages on their websites

Action required: ongoing - through SISJ, RDG's Customer Information Group and ORR industry workshop.

Recommendation 2:

Operators should provide information about the accessibility of rail replacement vehicles set out in their Accessible Travel Policy on their:

- assisted travel webpages
- rail replacement FAQs

- webpages for specific engineering works

Action required: we will be writing to all operators who do not provide this information on their general webpages.

Recommendation 3:

Operators should continue to improve the availability of online maps in advance of travel by:

- working with the SISJ programme to support the production and dissemination of the new visual disruption map videos
- providing maps showing the impact of engineering work both on their websites and at stations in advance of the engineering work taking place
- linking to onward travel maps on their station webpages

Action required: ongoing - through SISJ, RDG's Customer Information Group and ORR industry workshop.

Recommendation 4:

Operators should ensure passengers understand how they can complete a journey that includes a rail replacement service on the day of travel via:

- providing announcements and visual information at stations
- working with SISJ to trial and roll out the provision of real time information for passengers on rail replacement services

Action required: ongoing - through SISJ, RDG's Customer Information Group and ORR industry workshop.

Recommendation 5:

Operators should review their approach to ensuring that they consistently:

- display destinations on their rail replacement vehicles
- announce intermediate stops throughout the journey

Action required: we will be writing to all operators to demonstrate that their current, or updated,

processes are fit for purpose.

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Annex A: 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

D3: widely communicate details of upcoming changes to train times, so you know to re-check before you travel.

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:

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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Annex B: list of rail replacement services in our 2024 fieldwork

The rail replacement services we travelled on in 2024 were:

- Chiltern Railways (Bicester Village and Banbury)
- Cross Country (Leamington Spa to Banbury) and (Birmingham New Street to Coleshill Parkway)
- Greater Anglia (Ipswich to Saxmundham)
- Great Western Railway (Severn Beach to Bristol Temple Meads), (Bristol Parkway to Severn Tunnel Junction) and (Charlbury to Moreton-in-Marsh)
- London Overground (Hackney Downs to Chingford) and (Harrow and Wealdstone to Watford Junction)
- Mersey Rail (Formby to Hall Road)
- Northern Trains (Shipley to Guiseley)
- Southeastern (Sittingbourne to Sheerness on sea)

- South Western Railway (Barnes to Kew Bridge)
- TransPennine Express (Leeds to Huddersfield)
- TfW Rail (Rhoose Cardiff International Airport to Bridgend) and (Severn Tunnel Junction to Gloucester)
- West Midlands Trains (Birmingham New Street to Tame Bridge Parkway)

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