Passenger information when rail replacement services are in use

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

Accessible travel

- All of our replacement buses can be used by customers who have accessibility needs.
- We will be able to provide a taxi for customers who need assisted travel if there is no available bus.
- If you require assistance for your journey during the closure please call our assisted travel team on 08007 834 524. You can find out more about **booking assisted travel** with us.
- You can also find out more details about **accessibility on rail replacement bus services**.

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.

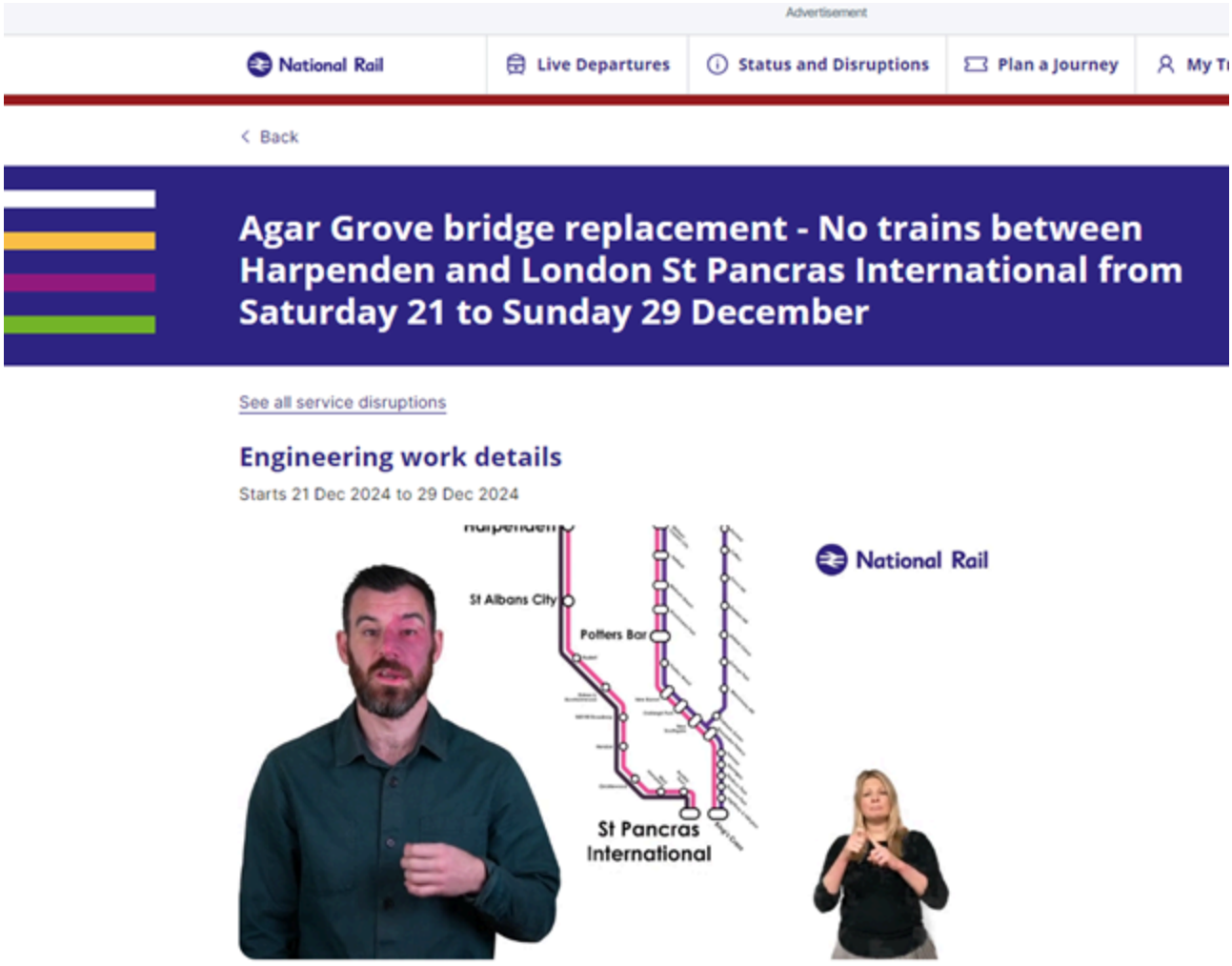
Figure 4: Two maps provided by operators to help passengers identify which part of their journey will include a rail replacement service



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.

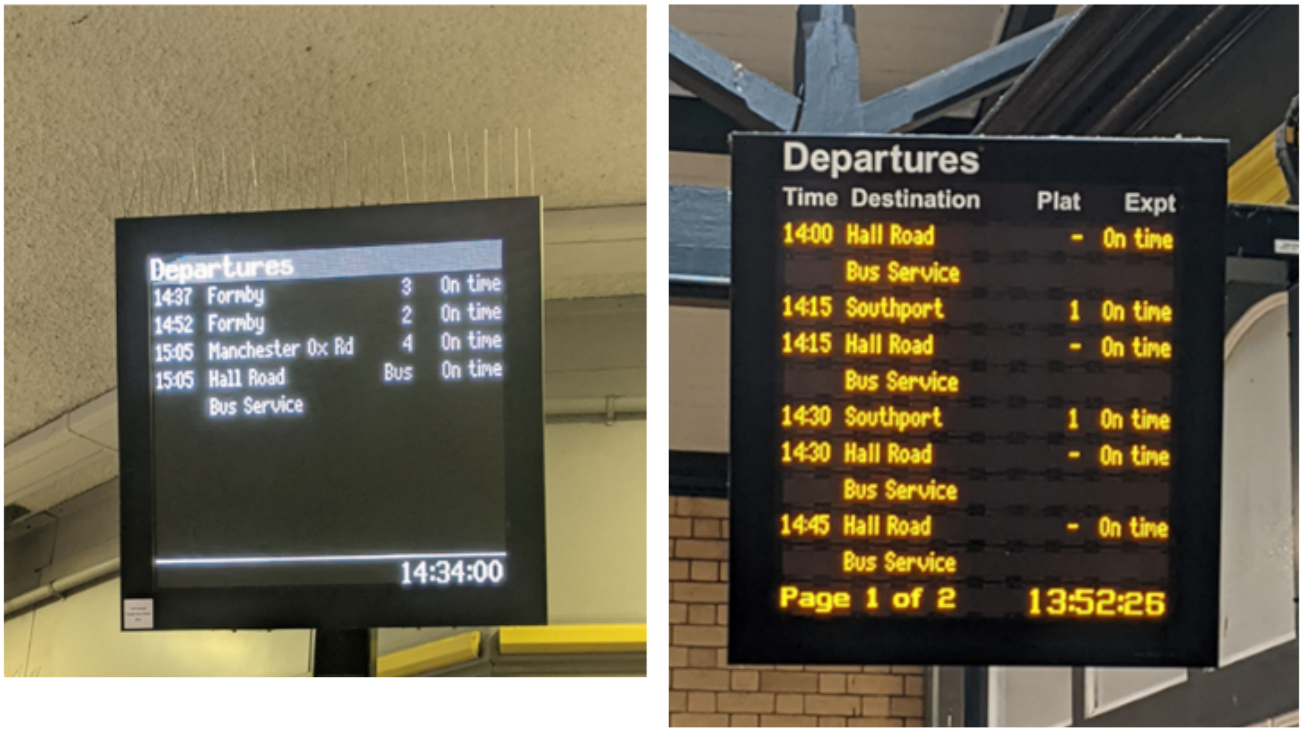
During our fieldwork we were pleased to see an improvement in the information provided at stations where rail replacements were running from during our fieldwork. We found that branding including posters, leaflets, maps and banners were informative and frequently available at these stations. Helpful 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

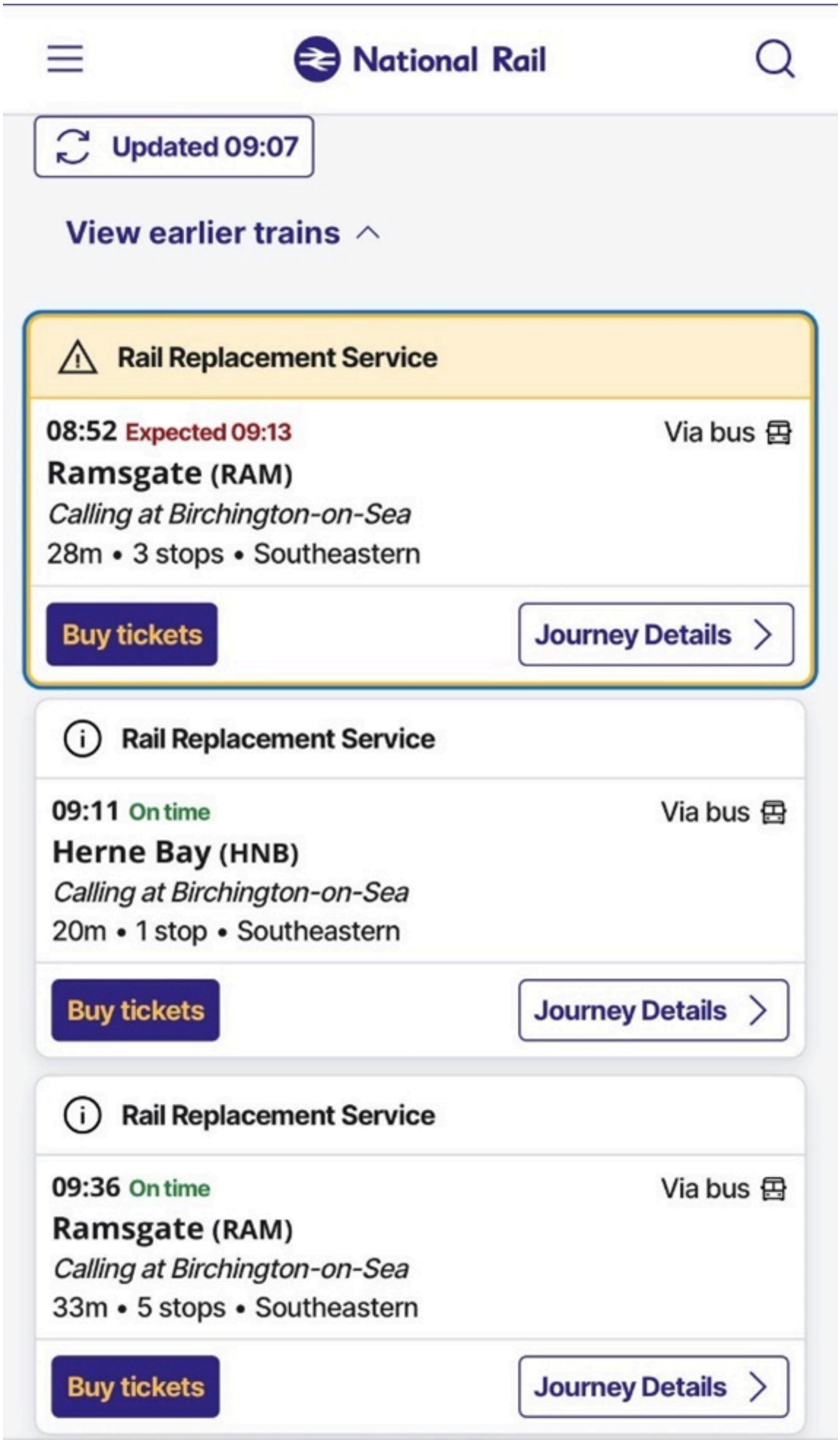
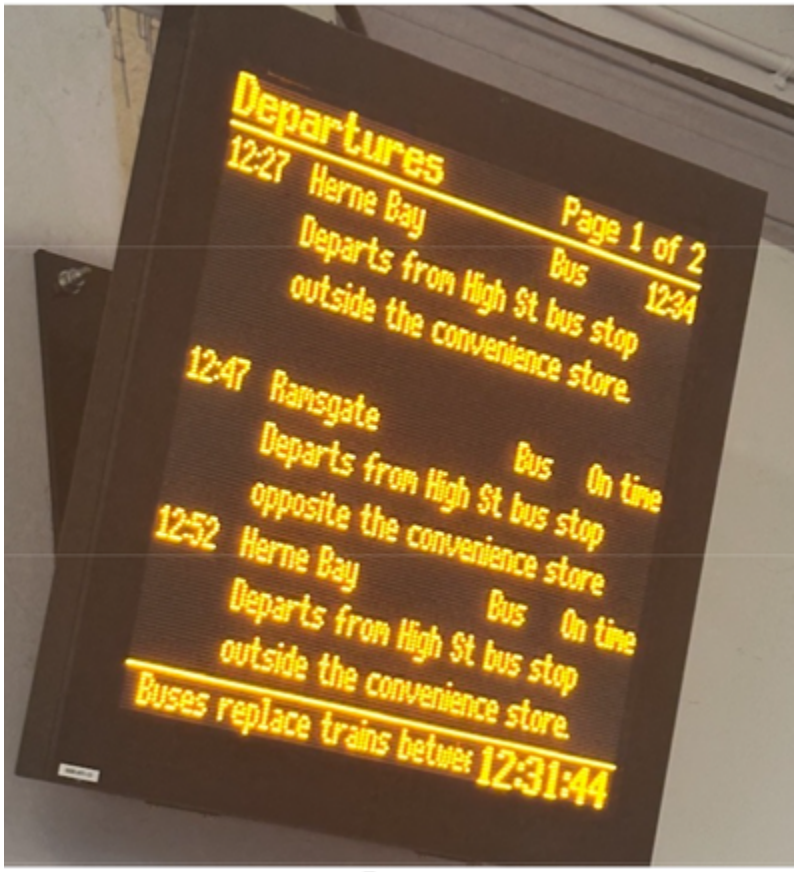

National Rail
Updated 09:07
View earlier trains
Rail Replacement Service
08:52 Expected 09:13
Via bus
Ramsgate (RAM)
Calling at Birchington-on-Sea
28m • 3 stops • Southeastern
Buy tickets
Journey Details
Rail Replacement Service
09:11 On time
Via bus
Herne Bay (HNB)
Calling at Birchington-on-Sea
20m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