



How do you communicate with passengers about future railway engineering works when there are no passengers...?

Keith Bailey, Senior Insight Advisor

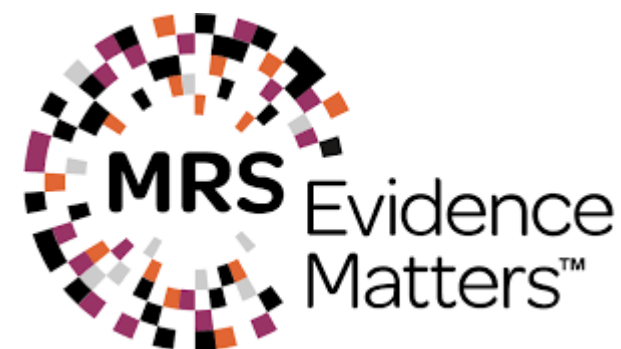
4 May 2022

What is Transport Focus?

Transport Focus is the independent transport user watchdog. We represent the interests of:

- all users of England's motorways and major 'A' roads (the Strategic Road Network)
- rail passengers in Great Britain
- bus, coach and tram users across England outside London

We use our insight to influence decision-makers and to make a difference for all transport users



What do you remember from early 2020?

It seems so long ago, but we were just starting to understand what 'Covid-19' was to mean for the country

- **16 March** - PM says “now is the time for everyone to stop non-essential contact and travel”
- **19 March** - PM says the UK can “turn tide of coronavirus” in 12 weeks
- **23 March** - PM announces the first lockdown in the UK, ordering people to “stay at home”
- **25 March** - Coronavirus Act 2020 gets Royal Assent
- **26 March** - Lockdown measures legally come into force

Source: <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/timeline-lockdown-web.pdf>



What do I remember from early 2020?

I was setting up a qual/quant research programme for Network Rail and the train companies to inform the planning for a three-month partial closure of London King's Cross station (half of the platforms at a time)

- Reduced capacity at King's Cross meant various options were under consideration to keep passengers moving including
 - Fewer trains
 - Slower journeys (to call at more stations)
 - Shorter trains (because the longer platforms were out of use)
- Options for passengers
 - Using different lines/stations
 - Travelling at different times
 - Working from home (before the country knew what this meant!)
- Research was needed to identify what would be 'least bad' in passengers' eyes



[Link to the King's Cross report: https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/publication/engineering-works-at-kings-cross-passenger-reactions-to-planned-disruption/](https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/publication/engineering-works-at-kings-cross-passenger-reactions-to-planned-disruption/)

What else do I remember from early 2020?

Covid-19 suddenly turned our well-laid plans on their head...

- **17 February** - Future Thinking (now Savanta) commissioned to run the study - first groups scheduled for **16 March**
- **12 March** - Future Thinking report interviewers turning down the work...
- **16 March** - one focus group (n=4) achieved in London
- **23 March** - replacement online community convened; quant intercept interviews replaced by panel survey

- In the event, lockdown and WfH continued into the partial closure and travel was substantially reduced meaning that disruption was a lot less than anticipated
- **And would the results have still held post-Covid...?**



What else was planned to happen in 2020?

Several other major engineering projects scheduled for the Summer – notably at Bristol East Junction and on the West Coast Mainline (WCML) from London Euston

- **Transport Focus** has developed a ‘model’ approach to measuring/tracking passenger awareness of planned disruptions including benchmarking against similar projects
- Usually three or more waves of awareness tracking, typically six, three and one month ahead of the work
- Traditionally, an intercept approach handing out self-completion questionnaires – delivers a representative mix of genuine passengers
- **Bristol fieldwork** scheduled to begin 9 February, **WCML/Euston** 16 March
- **Online approach adopted** (acknowledging likely impact on benchmarks)

Comms activity



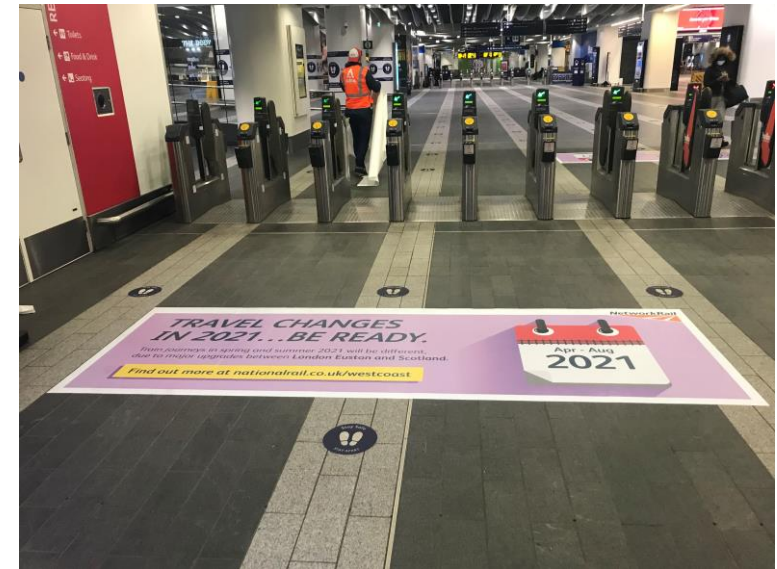
BRISTOL
RAIL REGENERATION

Check your journey

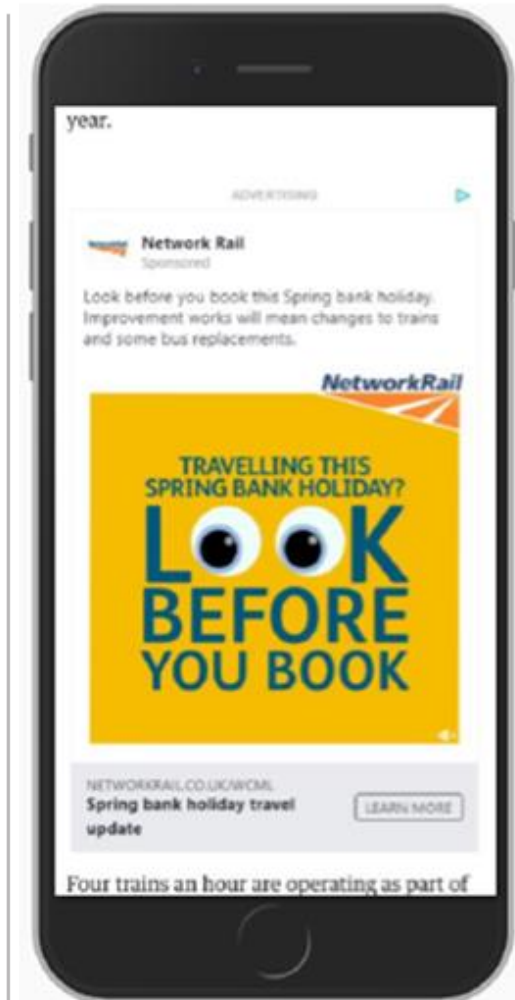
Track upgrades 10 July – 3 September

This summer we're replacing a major junction near Bristol Temple Meads.

nationalrail.co.uk or GWR.com/Bristol
[#BristolRailRegen](https://twitter.com/BristolRailRegen)



Comms activity



NetworkRail

LOOK BEFORE YOU BOOK THIS SPRING/SUMMER

Trains may be on a different schedule and buses may replace trains. Major upgrades are planned between **London Euston** and **Scotland** to improve passenger journeys.

networkrail.co.uk/wcml

GWR Track and station upgrades

Travelling via Bristol Temple Meads this summer?

There'll be **no direct services** between Bristol Temple Meads and Cheltenham or Gloucester **between 10 July** and **3 September**

Please change at Bristol Parkway for replacement trains and buses

Before you go, check the latest information at GWR.com/Bristol



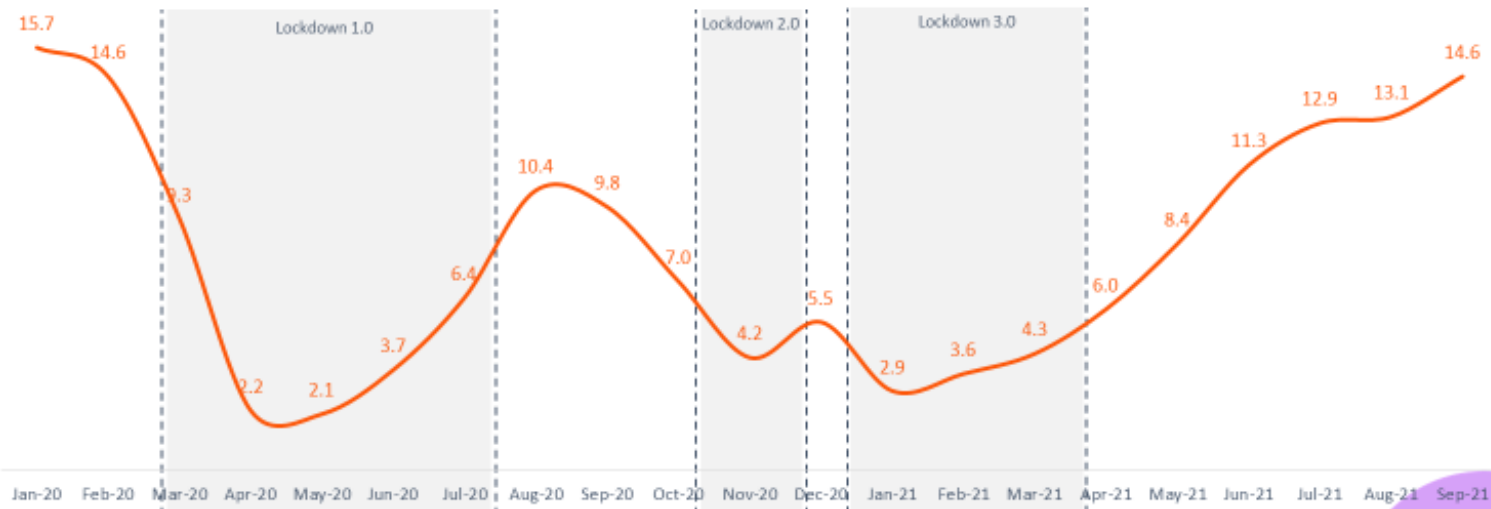
What wasn't happening in 2020?

People weren't travelling by train

Usage of rail services during the Covid pandemic

Source: BVA BDRC "Clearsight on recovery" survey [<https://hcontent.bva-bdrc.com/clearsight>]

% of UK adults claiming usage of a train during the applicable month.



q1a. When have you done the following activity/activities?

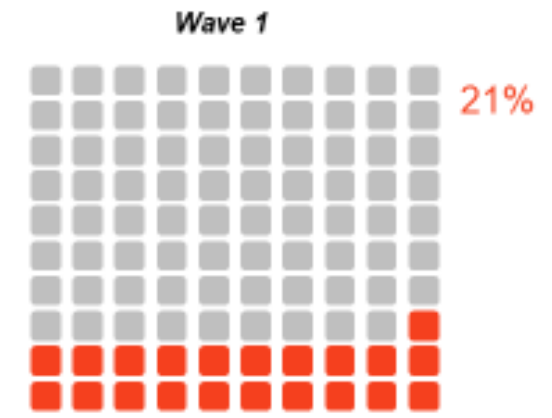
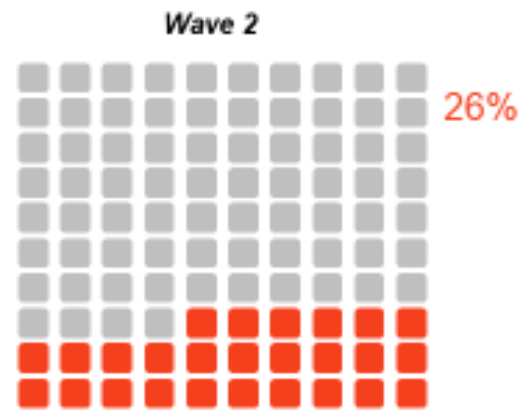
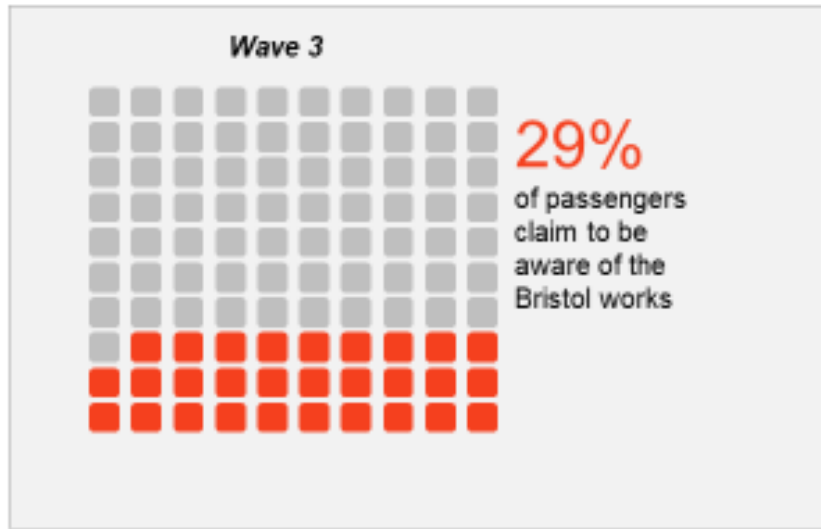


- Even online, challenging to find 'current' travellers
- Had to accept past users of the routes with an intention to travel in next six months
- Benchmarks different

BVA BDRC

What was the effect on awareness (Bristol)?

Spontaneous awareness – based on all respondents



Benchmarks*	W1	W2	W3
Derby	28%	47%	63%
London Waterloo	41%	81%	88%
Bath Spa	42%	67%	84%
King's Cross	33%	77%	n/a
Brighton	45%	50%	88%



*Please find details of these studies and differences in methodology in the introduction section (slide 4)
 Q18. Before today, were you aware of these infrastructure works in Bristol?
 Base: W1/W2/W3 All respondents (407/406/420)

No significant differences vs Wave 2

What was the effect on awareness (Euston)?

Awareness – based on all respondents

Wave 2

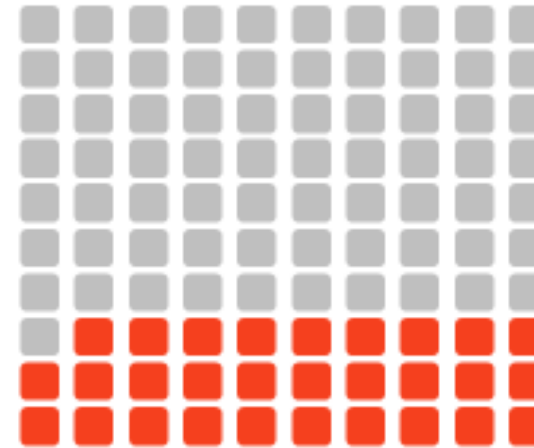


38%[↑]
of passengers claim to be aware of the WCML works

Benchmark comparisons (Wave 2)*

Derby – 47%
London Waterloo – 81%
Bath Spa – 67%
King's Cross – 77%
Brighton – 50%

Wave 1



29%

- Decision taken after Wave 2 not to continue with a third wave

Benchmark comparisons (Wave 1)*

Derby – 29%
London Waterloo – 41%
Bath Spa – 42%
King's Cross – 33%
Brighton – 40%

.YONDER

[↑]/_↓ indicate significant difference vs Wave 1

*Please find details of these studies and differences in methodology in the introduction section (slide 3)

Q15. Before today, were you aware of these infrastructure works on the West Coast Main Line?

Base: All respondents W1/W2 (537/520)

Unsurprisingly, the devil's in the detail

Those aware of the works claimed to know a fair deal...

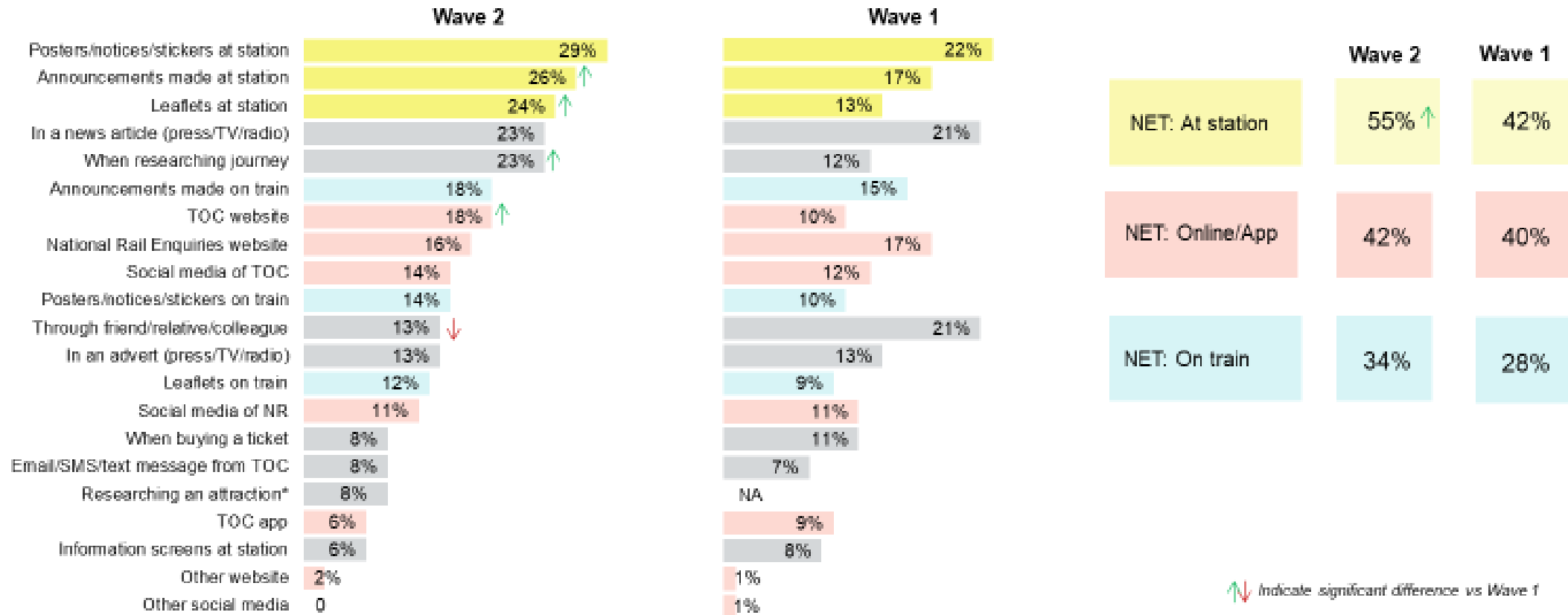
Passengers saying they knew 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount'	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3
Derby	31%	47%	55%
London Waterloo	17%	36%	38%
Bath Spa	34%	49%	n/a
London King's Cross	25%	30%	n/a
Brighton Main Line	34%	18%	47%
WCML/London Euston	52%	53%	n/a
Bristol East	65%	49%	37%



- Although at one point, those in Bristol were more likely to be aware of works to the roof (32% at Wave 2) than that trains would be diverted or replaced by buses (26%) – improved at Wave 3
- Commuters and recent users more aware

How they found out about the Euston works?

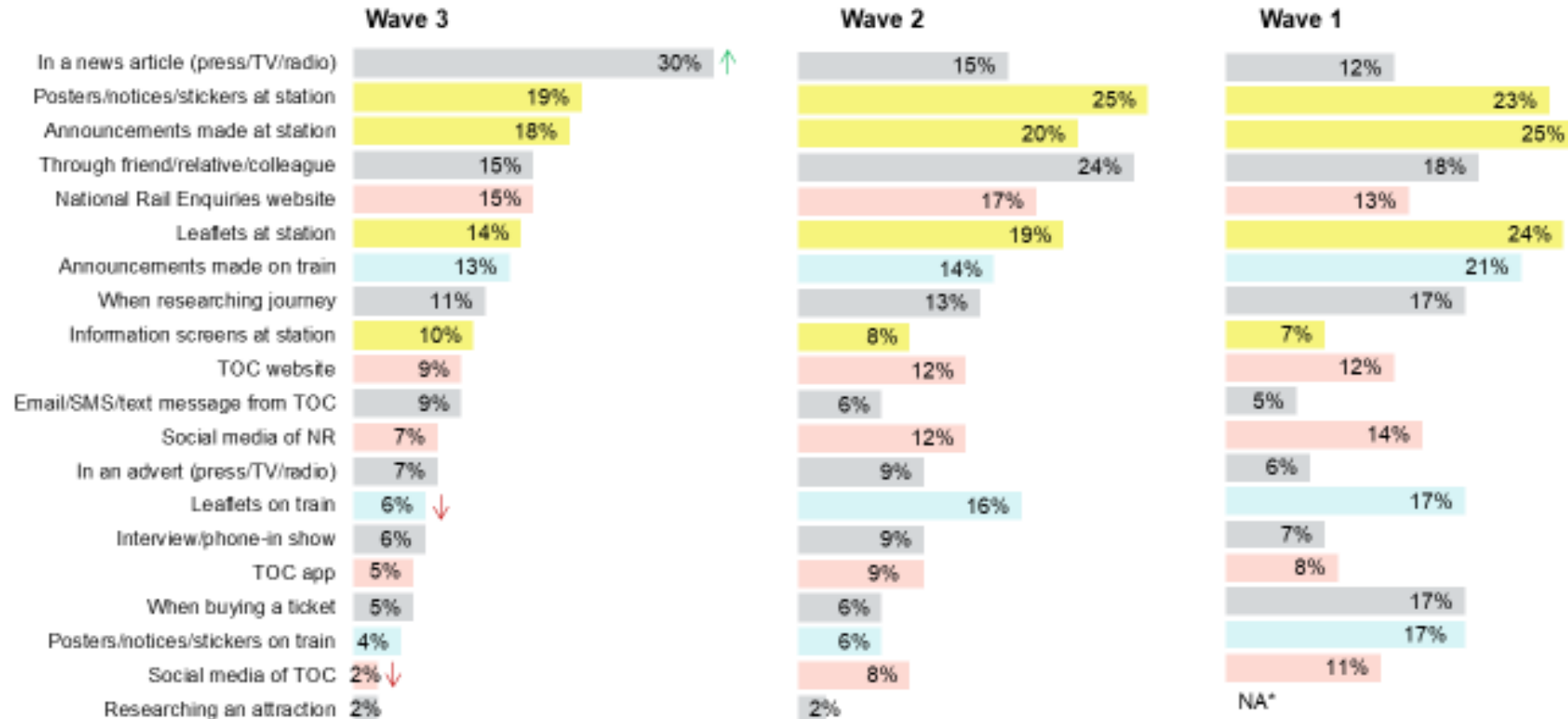
How passengers found out about the WCML works – based on all aware



*New response code included in Wave 2
 Q20. In which of the following ways did you find out about the infrastructure works on the West Coast Main Line?
 Base: All respondents aware of the WCML project W1/W2 (155/186)

How they found out about the Bristol works?

How passengers found out about the works – based on all aware



*Code not included in Wave 1
 Q23. In which of the following ways did you find out about the works in Bristol?
 Base: All aware of works W1/W2/W3 (87/106/123)

↑↓ Indicate significant difference vs Wave 2

Lessons to be learnt



- ‘At station’ and ‘on train’ communications activity is highly effective for those using the railway regularly – but during the pandemic they were not...
- Online and social media are important parts of the mix, particularly in the immediate run-up to the works when passengers are actively researching a potential journey
 - imperative that disruption is flagged when tickets go on sale
- But again, people were not travelling and hence were not engaging with the railway online or through social media; digital communications were not effective
 - also meant that social media did not work for survey recruitment!
- Disruption message should be the most prominent; passengers like to know why their journey may be disrupted, but only after they understand what’s happening and how their journey will be affected
- There can never be too much information; the railway needs to use all the channels available to get the disruption message out there
- Passengers have proved to themselves and their employers that WfH is viable for any future disruption

Were they satisfied with the information?

Yes, if they were aware of the works...

	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3
Derby	14%	30%	43%
London Waterloo	16%	35%	42%
Bath Spa	19%	35%	62%
London King's Cross	23%	48%	n/a
Brighton Main Line	16%	21%	43%
WCML/London Euston	48%	52%	n/a
Bristol East	39%	39%	38%



"I have not seen any information on this disruption and bearing in mind it is significant, I would have thought that Network Rail would have used every avenue to get the message out there."

Bristol East passenger (wave1, in March)

"I was not aware of the works stated in this survey. But as I haven't travelled by train for a while, I haven't been looking at train information."

WCML/London Euston passenger (wave 2, in May)

- Satisfaction in Bristol surprisingly static; did not increase over time as elsewhere
- Euston far better

So, just how do you communicate about engineering works when there are no passengers...?

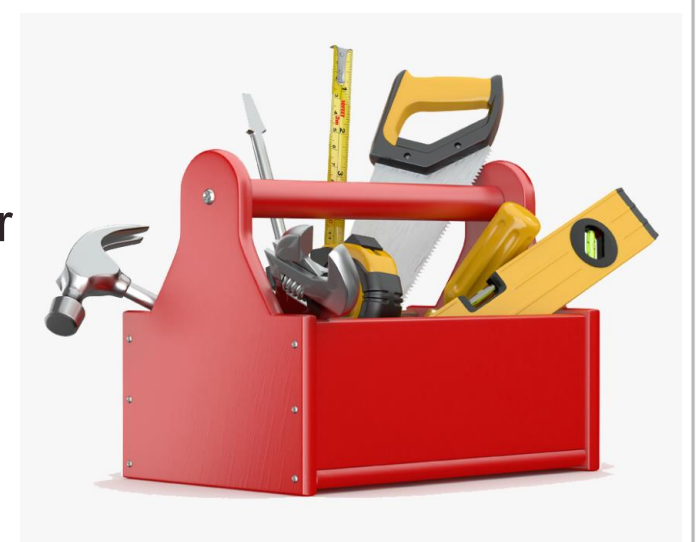


- I'm not sure I have an answer!
 - Press coverage can be effective, but impossible to control the message...
 - 'At station', online and 'on train' channels remarkably effective for those who do travel
 - Reaching infrequent, out-of-area leisure passengers has always been a challenge
- Covid (hopefully) a one-off challenge
- Does it actually matter?
 - Key thing is that potential passengers are made aware when researching a journey
 - Disruption information must be clearly available when bookings open

So, what have we learnt about online qual?

It's clearly in the tool-box to stay

- Most participants are comfortable with the technology – probably not so beforehand
- Allows more dispersed geographical coverage – but recruiters may stay local...
- More opportunities to observe – blessing or curse?
- Groups or communities – project dependent
- Number of participants/group duration – down to the moderator
- Stimulus – is it legible on a smartphone...?
- Laptops/tablets preferable to phones...
- 'Assistant' helpful to manage participants' issues/stimulus



Want more detail?



Communicating with passengers about engineering works during the pandemic:

- Research among passengers on the West Coast Main Line and at Bristol
December 2021

All our research is published on our website:
<https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/publications/>

Link to the Bristol/Euston report:

<https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/publication/communicating-with-passengers-about-engineering-works-during-the-pandemic-research-among-passengers-on-the-west-coast-main-line-and-at-bristol/>

Link to the King's Cross report:

<https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/publication/engineering-works-at-kings-cross-passenger-reactions-to-planned-disruption/>

Or, buy me a beer afterwards...

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