



THREE WAYS DISABLED RAIL CUSTOMERS CAN EXPECT DISRUPTION TO THEIR JOURNEY

A closer look at the issues faced by disabled rail customers

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Kristian Green | Divisional Director | GfK | kristian.green@gfk.com

Executive Summary



In June 2017 we conducted a survey that looked into challenges faced by disabled rail customers. The project looked at the key parts of the customer journey: the booking of assistance, ticket purchase, and assistance received from staff.

There were three key findings:

- mystery travellers did not always get the cheapest ticket,
- assistance point information was not always provided at the booking stage,
- not all customers were provided with assistance at their alighting station.

We have made recommendations in each of these areas that aim to facilitate a move towards more spontaneous ‘turn-up and go’ travel for disabled customers.

The sample consisted of 18 journeys in Greater London. Assistance bookings were made with 7 different Train Operating Companies (TOCs) as well as Network Rail. The journeys were conducted by wheelchair users and visually impaired mystery travellers in June 2017.

Objectives



1 Identify any barriers disabled customers face purchasing tickets on the day
Look at whether staff are able to provide assistance to help purchase the cheapest ticket for the customer's journey.

2 Establish the level of information being provided at the booking stage
Identify what information was collected by the operator about the customer and whether this information was useful.

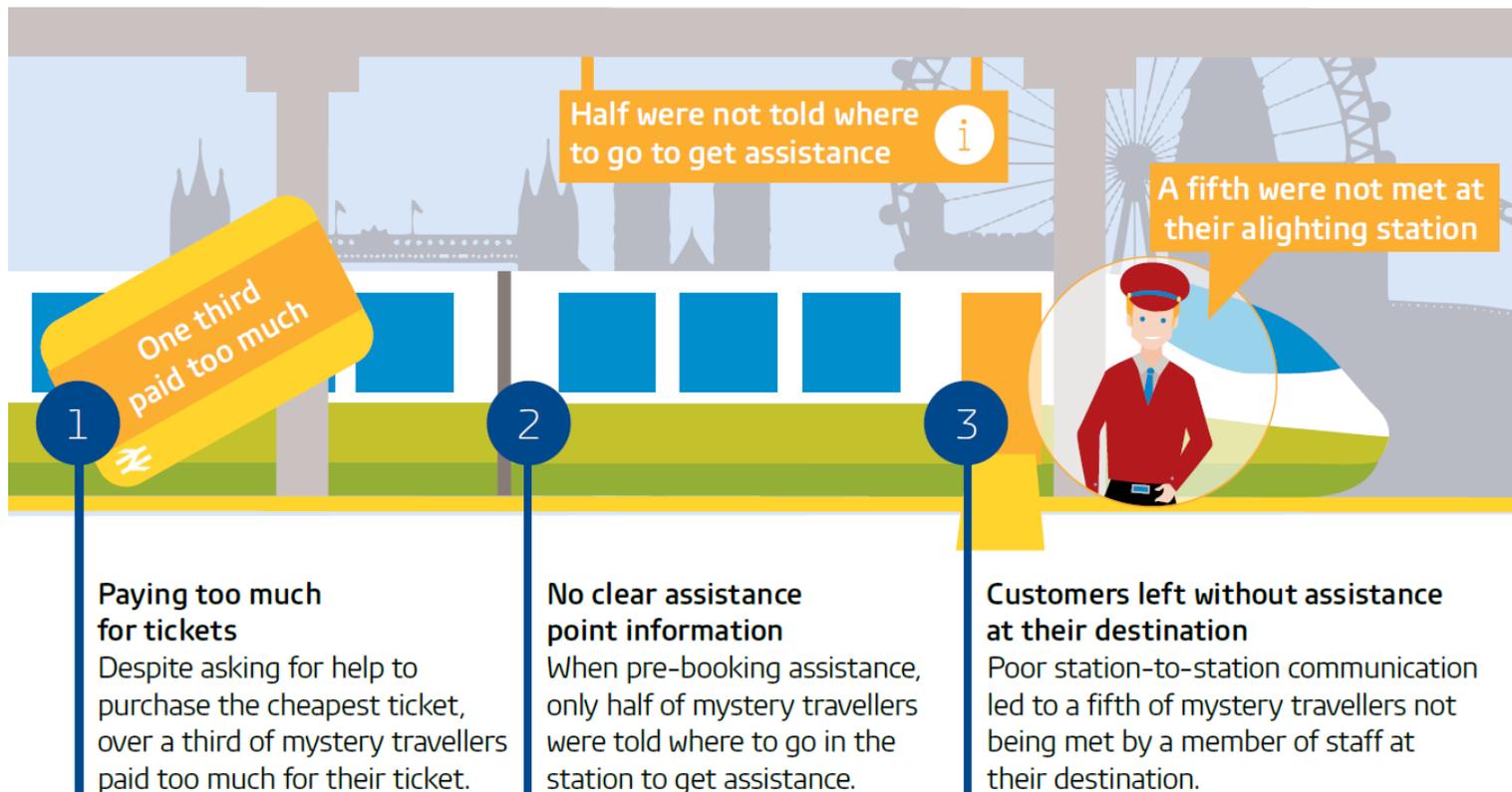
3 Identify whether assistance required by each disabled customer was received
Look at whether staff utilise the information from the booking stage and whether the customer received the required assistance at all stages of their journey.

Our findings

THREE WAYS DISABLED RAIL CUSTOMERS CAN EXPECT DISRUPTION TO THEIR JOURNEY



Our June 2017 mystery traveller survey identified three ways that Train Operating Companies (TOCs) are failing to provide end-to-end assistance to disabled customers. All of our mystery travellers encountered at least one issue with the assistance process.

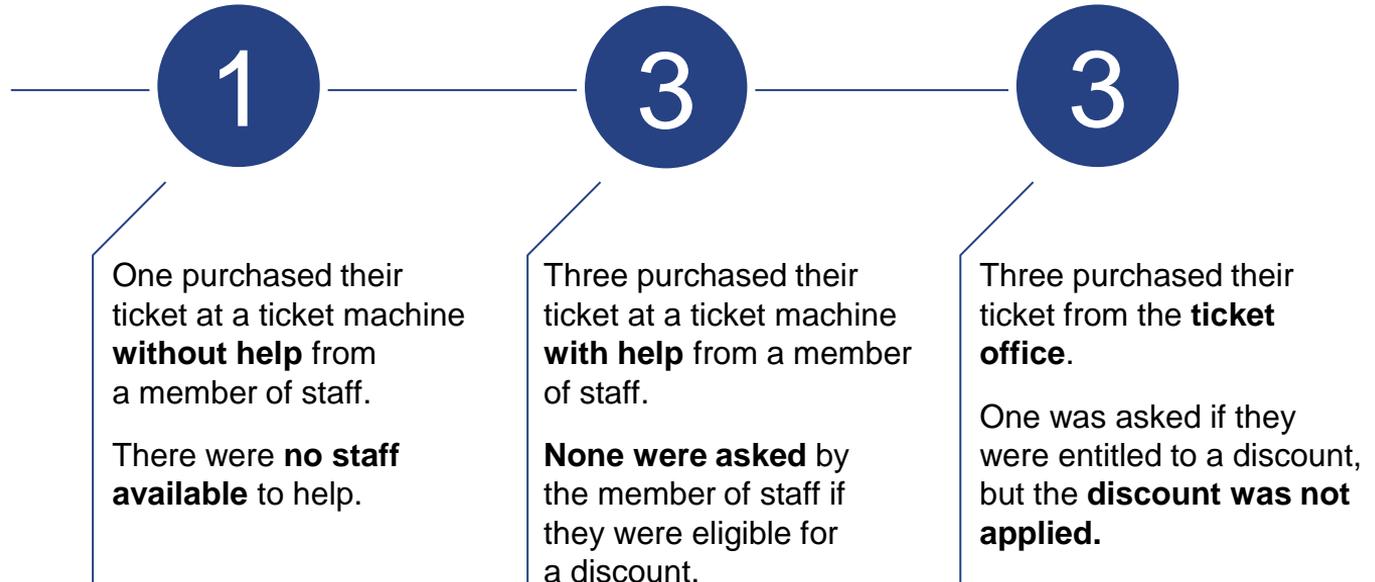


Purchasing tickets on the day

More than a third paid too much for their ticket



A total of 7 mystery travellers paid too much for their ticket. In all cases this was because the discount they were entitled to was not applied. Only 9 of the 17 who purchased a ticket with the help of a staff member were asked if they were entitled to discounted tickets.



*7 of 18 mystery travellers – 39%

Recommendations

In order to successfully provide assistance for customers who ‘turn-up and go’, help will need to be available to aid customers with ticket purchases. Staff should always ask if the customer is entitled to discounted fares.

Always ask
about
discounts

Mystery travellers who were not asked about eligibility were more likely to have paid too much.*

Staff should ask all customers if they are eligible for discounted travel.

*5 of 9 mystery travellers were not asked about discounted travel paid too much vs 1 of 8 who were asked.

Confirm
the ticket is
the
cheapest

Mystery travellers commented that staff did not confirm or offer reassurance they had purchased the cheapest ticket.

Staff should confirm and reassure customers who require help to make a purchase that they have bought the cheapest ticket.

Ensure
staff are
available

One mystery traveller paid too much because no staff were available to help make their purchase.

Ensure all stations have staff in customer facing areas to assist those who require assistance.

Mystery Traveller Comments



“The member of staff was very friendly and polite but did not know how to get the discount on the ticket for me.”



“I purchased a ticket, but the member of staff made no comment about it being the cheapest.”

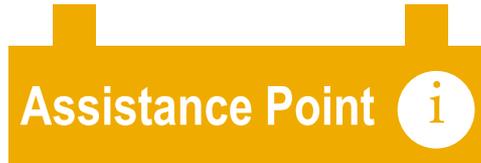
Booking assistance

Half were not told where to get assistance

Only 9 of 18 were told where to go in the station to get assistance at the booking stage. The majority of those still had issues identifying where to get assistance, in particular visually impaired customers who found the information given inadequate.



Nine were told the location of the assistance point



Nine were **not** told the location of the assistance point



All visually impaired mystery travellers struggled to find the assistance point despite being given information at the booking stage.

Most wheelchair users were still able to find the assistance point without being given the information at the booking stage.

Recommendations

Visually impaired customers require more detailed information about where to go when arriving at the station as most cannot rely on signage. Booking staff need to tailor the level of information given to the customer's individual needs.

Provide detailed information when booking

All but one visually impaired mystery traveller had issues identifying the assistance point. One commented that works taking place at the station made this even more difficult.

Detailed directions to the assistance point should be provided, taking into account any works taking place at the station.

Tailor information to the customer's needs

Even when provided with information the majority of customers had issues identifying the assistance point. One mystery traveller commented that navigating to the assistance point was difficult in a wheelchair.

Staff should tailor the information they provide to ensure individual needs are taken into account and the level of information given is appropriate.

Ensure assistance points are clearly signed

The majority of mystery travellers had issues identifying the assistance point.

Ensure all stations have clear signage to the assistance point and ensure there is consistency over its location wherever possible.

Mystery Traveller Comments



“I feel vulnerable and isolated if I do not know where to go and there are no staff.”

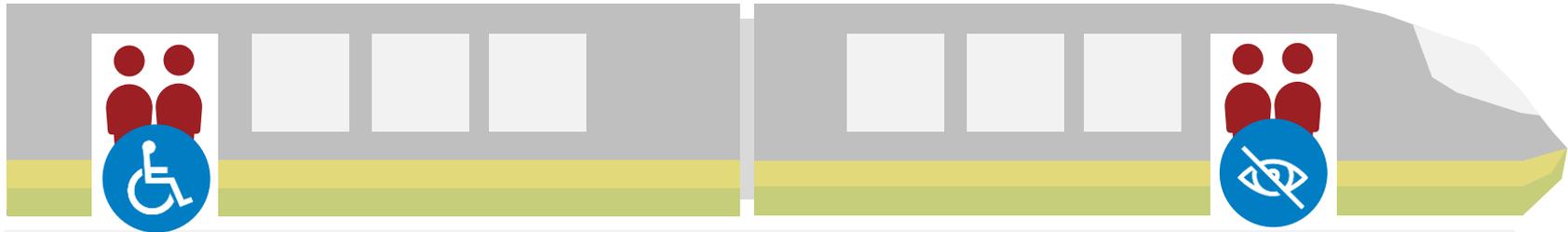


“I did not know where to go. It would have been useful if the staff who took the booking told me where to seek assistance, as it was not obvious at the station.”

Providing assistance

A fifth were not met at their alighting station

Four mystery travellers were not met by a member of staff at their alighting station, highlighting issues with the current communication process. In three of the of four cases staff did not look up the details of the assistance booking when the customer arrived at their boarding station.



Two wheelchair users were not met at their alighting station



"There was no member of staff in sight when the train arrived. A passenger waited by the door with me until someone arrived."



"When we arrived no one was waiting. The train guard went and got the ramp, which was on the train, to help us alight."



Two visually impaired mystery travellers were not met at their alighting station

"I waited a number of minutes and no one came to collect me. The journey was just let down by not being met off the train".



"I had to step off the train on my own. The step was high. After waiting without being met I sought out a member of staff."

Recommendations

Although the assistance process worked well in the majority of cases, the failures have highlighted the need for better communication and the risk associated with staff not using the details provided during the booking process.

Utilise the booking information

On 12 occasions staff did not look up the details of the assistance on the booking system. This could contain crucial details of the assistance provided and the journey the customer is making.

All staff should use the information from the booking to ensure customers receive the assistance they have booked.

Improve station-to-station communication

All four cases of mystery travellers not being met could have been avoided if the communication process had worked successfully.

Review the current communication process and identify how this could be improved to ensure all customers receive the assistance they need.

Have a failsafe process

Those who were not met at the end station had no instructions about what to do in this situation. This caused anxiety and confusion.

Ensure all customers are informed of what to do in the unlikely event of assistance not being provided at the alighting station.

Appendix

Sample



The journeys were completed by mystery travellers with visible disabilities:

- Visually impaired (9)
- Wheelchair users (9)

All mystery travellers were eligible for discounted travel.



All journeys were carried out during off-peak hours. 15 were carried on weekdays and three carried out on weekends.

All journeys took place in June 2017.



Assistance was booked with seven different TOCs as well as Network Rail.*

All journeys were carried out within the Greater London area.

* Booked through the central number:
0800 022 3720

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