



# National Rail strikes June 2022:

the passenger experience

July 2022

## Summary

In the week of 20 June 2022 rail passengers across Britain who use National Rail services experienced significant disruption as a result of strikes by members of the RMT union. Many lines were closed completely, and fewer trains ran on those that were open. First and last trains were in most cases significantly later/earlier than normal, and services generally started later than usual on the day after each strike.

This report describes Transport Focus's activities and findings as a result. It concludes with a number of recommendations to the industry to ease the pain for passengers if there are further strikes, whether they take place across the whole of Great Britain or are more localised. An example of the latter is the strike on 2 July by Greater Anglia staff belonging to the ASLEF union.

How did passengers get on during the June strikes? It varied hugely. If the route you intended to use was closed, the impact was clearly significant. Not everybody can work from home or just alter their plans. However, those who used routes that were open generally had a positive experience and the rail industry deserves credit for that. Refund and compensation arrangements were in the main fair and information was generally good, although we identified areas for improvement with both.

We hope that new strikes are not inflicted on passengers – but they may be. We encourage the industry to address our recommendations (pages nine to 16), some of which will benefit passengers during any disruption, not just related to strikes.

In summary, our recommendations are:

1. seek to open more routes during future strikes – if it can be done reliably – and/or minimise disruption on the morning after a strike
2. plug gaps in otherwise good refund/redress arrangements that made things unfair for passengers in particular circumstances
3. improve the weaker areas of what was otherwise good passenger information.

## Transport Focus activity

### Before the strikes

In advance of the strikes, Transport Focus set out to achieve two things:

- clarity for passengers about the trains that would and would not run, including times
- that arrangements to refund or compensate passengers who would no longer travel, including season ticket holders, were fair and clear.

Two weeks' notice is required for industrial action. The rail industry – through the Rail Delivery Group – was therefore able to consult Transport Focus as it developed its approach to, among other things, information, refunds and compensation. We were pleased to champion the passenger interest in through that process.

While there were areas where we wanted the industry to go further for consumers, the arrangements overall felt reasonable. In particular, we welcomed the Government's confirmation that season ticket holders could claim a day's compensation if they did not travel because of the disruption.

We reviewed train company and ticket retailer websites to check that information was clear, focusing on clarity about where trains would and would not run and refund/compensation arrangements. The information provided in advance of the strikes was generally good. Where we felt things could have been clearer, we contacted relevant organisations and pressed for improvements, many of which were made.

### Week of the strikes (week commencing 20 June 2022)

With our consumer-focused, evidence-based approach, during the week of the strikes themselves Transport Focus sought to:

- understand the impact of strike action on those travelling and those who could not
- provide useful insight that allowed the rail industry to, where possible, improve the passenger experience and passenger information on subsequent strike days.

Each day we shared a summary of our findings from the insight we gathered with senior rail industry stakeholders, individual train companies and other organisations (see page five for an overview of our insight activities). We created a dedicated area of our website and updated it each day to highlight key issues and activity, supported by social media.



David Sidebottom  
@TF\_davidS



Had a look at first services after second strike day from [@northernassist](#) Cheadle Hulme. Couple of people boarded 0823 to Crewe. 0837 to Mcr Piccadilly busy. Around 30 people boarded. Service looked full as it left. Typical for the 'new Friday' levels I guess?  
[@TransportFocus](#)



9:10 am · 24 Jun 2022 · Twitter for Android

## Insight gathered

We gathered insight in five ways.

1. Between 17 and 19 June we surveyed over 2000 people to understand their travel intentions for the following week. We published the [findings](#) on Monday 20 June.
2. We obtained feedback through the week from people across England, Scotland and Wales who were intending to travel by train anyway.
3. At three different points in the week we asked members of our Transport User Panel about the impact on them and, if they had travelled, asked them to report back about their experiences.
4. Our staff provided extensive [feedback](#) from stations across England, Scotland and Wales.
5. Between 24 and 26 June, we surveyed 2000 people about their experiences during the week of the strikes and published the [findings](#) on 29 June.

### One in five passengers still plan to travel

We spoke to a **representative sample of more than 2000 people** across Britain between 17 to 19 June to find out how strikes were affecting their travel plans.

Of those people that had planned to travel by rail on affected days this week:

- approximately three in five said they won't be doing so because of the strike
- but around one in five still plan to travel on a strike day
- around one in 10 were unaware of the strike action until we asked them about it.

Of those people that had looked for information and were either still planning to travel by train or had changed their plans:

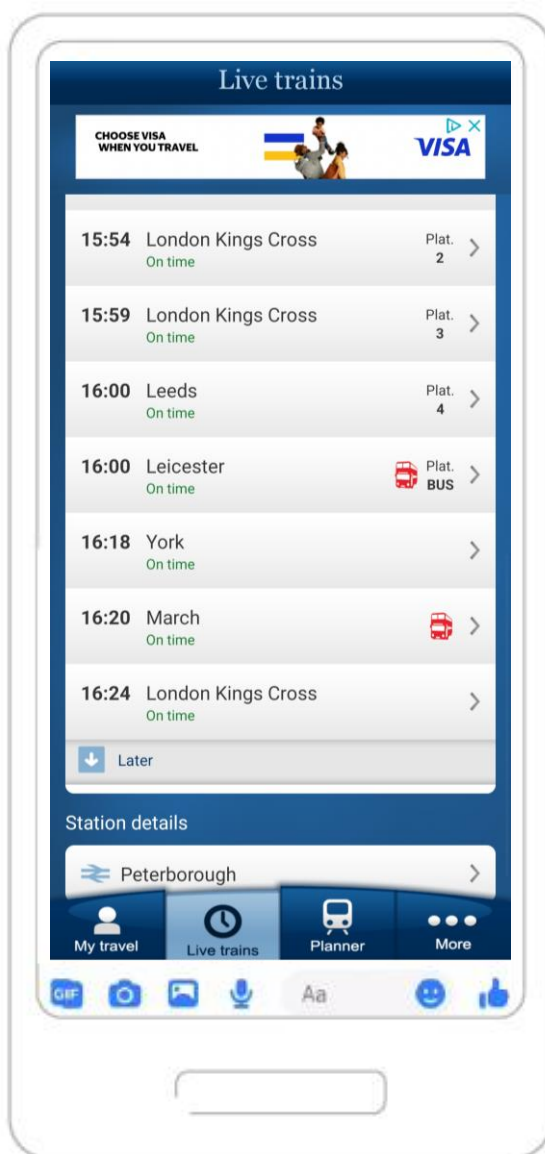
- around half (49 per cent) rated the information about the train services that will and will not be running as fairly or very good and around one in three (35 per cent) said it was fairly or very poor
- around half (47 per cent) rated the information on arrangements for changing your ticket, or obtaining a refund if you are no longer travelling, as fairly or very good and around three in 10 (30 per cent) as fairly or very poor.



## What did we find?

Most people clearly heeded the message to travel only if necessary and those who did reported a good journey experience (85 per cent satisfied, 4 per cent dissatisfied), with plenty of staff on hand to help. Notwithstanding the areas for improvement discussed below, information was generally clear and timely – although we noted some frustration that schedules were not correct in journey planners until later than desirable, particularly for Saturday 25 June.

There were instances of crowding, but in general the capacity provided on strike days appears to have met demand. Replacement buses were not provided as a matter of course, but it was good to see some train companies providing them so children could still get to/from school. Overall, the refund and compensation arrangements seemed fair and reasonable – although we identified some areas for improvement.



Peterborough live departures. The 16.00 Leicester and 16.20 March bus departures shown here were provided in place of trains that carry significant schools traffic.

Asked how the rail strike disruption had affected them, some passengers said:

*“Not much, to be honest as I worked from home. But I presume it may be more difficult this weekend”*

*“Usually I take 10.40 train from Edinburgh to Musselburgh, but due to train strike, I had to change my time to 12.40, because there’s no train earlier than that.”*

*“Caught bus instead, was no issue, buses are more frequent and cheaper”.*

However, nothing above is intended to suggest that there wasn’t significant passenger detriment. There was. There is no escaping the fact that if no trains are running, or they start later and finish much earlier than normal, those who need to use them are severely impacted. That included loss of income through not being able to get to work, cancelled or rearranged special occasions (sometimes with emotional or financial implications) and journeys being made by inconvenient, costly alternative means.

We have grouped a selection of the comments we received into four categories:

- impacts on employment
- impacts on personal business - financial
- impacts on personal business - emotional
- trips requiring alternative methods of transport.

#### Impacts on work

*“I am furious. All my work was cancelled due to the strike (I am on zero hours contract so nobody cares about people like us losing income when strikes happen). All other plans had to be altered or cancelled. Travelling by alternative means was a nightmare.”*

*“I was over 2 hours late getting into my work experience as there wasn’t a train till after 9.30 am and I start at 9.”*

*“We as a company had to shut up the shop as some of the staff could not get in.”*

*“I had to take a day off on the first day of strike, struggle to reach work (leaving an hour earlier and still arriving 45 minutes later) on the 2nd day and reroute travel on the 3rd. Absolutely stressful period.”*

#### Impacts on personal business – financial

*“I had to cancel the show due to the strike, however the show was unable to refund.”*

*“Had to rearrange plans and re-book train tickets at an additional cost. Had to travel home from visiting family a day early and missed an event with family due to this.”*

*“I travel by train every week Tuesday to Saturday to get to work. This week I had to change my plans and buy a weekly season ticket for the bus. This extended my daily commuting time from 34 minutes to more than two hours, cost me an additional £20 over and above the money I’ve already paid for my rail season ticket and made a*

*very stressful week much worse. I have applied for compensation on the Great Western Railway's Delay Repay website, but the money has not been paid yet, which means my budget as I approach the end of the month is very tight, as I have had to pay for one week's travel twice."*

#### Impacts on personal business – emotional

*"I was due to attend a school trip to London with my child's school. This would have been their first trip due to the previous lockdowns. It had to be cancelled and could not be rearranged."*

*"I was supposed to be travelling to London on the first day of the strike, for a medical referral that I have been waiting for for some time. Rather than lose the appointment I decided to make the journey by car, which took ages and, as the hospital was in Central London, it involved considerable extra expense for the congestion charge and car parking. It added considerably to the stress and worry of the day."*

*"Wanted to travel out and back on the day to attend a memorial for a deceased relative. We might have been able to get there but would have been unable to get back. So unable to travel."*

*"70th birthday planned 3 months ago – unable to go as there was no way to make the return trip home. This was deeply hurtful."*

#### Trips requiring alternative methods of transport

*"I live in Caithness and had to take my son to Inverness twice due to unreliability I had to take him the 120 miles and wait to take him home."*

*"I knew well in advance that there would be a strike, so I altered my plans and bought a coach ticket. York to Bristol took 3 hours longer than it would do by rail and the journey was cramped as the coach was entirely full."*

*"I should have been travelling by train from Bromley South to Seaford. I had to get a bus from Bromley South to East Croydon and another bus from Brighton to Seaford. This was a challenge for me as I am a registered blind person and don't find buses easy – though it is better now they 'speak'. I was, however, pleased that there was a train running to Brighton. I travelled from about 10.30. Everything was very quiet. Train was nearly empty."*



## Recommendations

### Areas for improvement if there are more strikes

Taking account of the context, we identified areas where the passenger experience could have been better. As a result, we make a number of recommendations in three broad categories:

- the service itself
- refunds/redress
- passenger information.

Examples of what passengers said should be done differently another time:

*“Timetables should be released earlier than 1 week before the strike and trains should run later than 4pm. My travel plans were severely disrupted and I had to change hotels etc. because there was no trains to get me to my destination. This was not advised until less than 7 days before the strike so it would have been very helpful to know this sooner. I also was disappointed there was no notice inside Euston station that referred to the strike, if I did not know about it before I arrived I would not have known anything about the strike as there was nothing to advise there was a limited service or no trains after 4pm the following day.”* London Euston to Milton Keynes

*“I would like to see more announcements made on board trains and at stations to make people aware of disruptions over the coming days. Whilst the posters were well located, people in a hurry could easily walk by without reading them. I would also be interested in knowing a brief reason as to why the strike was occurring. In the event that other trains are cancelled in the future, I would like to see more information around stations for delay repay, as I'm sure there are customers who aren't aware of the availability of it.”* Llandudno to Llandudno Junction

*“The news coverage of the imminent strike gave adequate information about when the strike would be taking place, in good time to reorganise travel if need be. I can't see any better way of doing it. I was prepared and I'm sure the majority of the travelling public were aware of the disruption to their travel. The staff at the stations were pleasant and helpful and it is difficult to see how things could have been better organised. Apart from the small number of passengers and fewer trains running, there was little change to the station scenes.”* Manchester Victoria to Stalybridge

*“I would prefer that large portions of the country were not completely cut off during the strike days. It would have been preferential to have had at least a skeleton service running. I would like to see much more advance notice where trains are not running at all on routes and details of what those routes are so people can prepare better. I would also like the strike days spread out so there are not more than one day occurring in any week. I would also like to know what percentage of workers voted to strike and more information on the reasons for the strike.”* Glasgow to Paisley

### The service itself

#### Opening more routes/reducing the impact after each strike

Of course we hope that further strikes do not occur. But if they do, passengers will expect the rail industry to explore whether more routes could be kept open – so long

as it can be done reliably – than in June. Even if expanding the number of routes open is not possible, the late start to service on the days after each strike should be looked at. It was difficult to communicate, more difficult for passengers to fathom and exposed a weakness in the redress arrangements for season ticket holders. Could there be a solution to the problem of shifts starting during a strike period remaining ‘uncovered’ after it has ended?

**Transport Focus recommends that the industry explores how additional routes could be opened reliably on another occasion and/or how services could resume earlier than occurred in June on days following strike action.**

## **Refunds/redress**

### Compensation for season ticket holders (monthly and longer)

A positive in the June strikes was that season ticket holders, including those with flexi-seasons, were entitled to compensation equivalent to one day’s travel costs if they could not travel or heeded advice not to do so. However, some train companies offered this only on strike days themselves, despite services starting late the following day. And passengers have highlighted that no compensation was available to season ticket holders who did travel, but who arrived later than usual – in some cases significantly so.

Some passengers felt particularly hard done by if they needed to travel on days unaffected by a strike, but where the service started much later than normal. They were not entitled to Delay Repay compensation, unless they experienced a delay against the *revised* timetable. And with some train companies neither were they entitled to a day’s compensation if they did not travel. One passenger put it like this:



**Transport Focus recommends that the industry considers how to compensate season ticket holders who:**

- a) do not travel on non-strike days because of a late start to the service**
- b) do travel on a strike day or the day following, but arrive significantly later than normal as a result of a late start to the service.**

Refunds for outward and return journey (or vice versa) if passenger does not travel  
Another positive from the June strikes was the 'no quibbles' clarity that if you could not travel, or followed advice not to, then you could have your money back. However, passengers highlighted an anomaly relating to refund entitlement if using single tickets for each leg of an outward and return journey. Some were entitled to a refund for the outward leg if it was on a strike day, but not for the return leg if it was on a date not affected by a strike. Clearly, if somebody has not travelled out, they do not need a ticket to return. This issue applies to refund entitlement in any scenario and is not just about a strike situation.

**Transport Focus recommends that the industry clarifies in the National Rail Conditions of Travel that if a passenger is entitled to a refund for their unused outward ticket, they can also have their money back on the ticket for their return leg (or vice versa).**

Compensation for season ticket holders (monthly and longer) – customer service improvement

Season ticket holders were able to get compensation by making a claim using the Delay Repay system of the relevant train company. However, in these circumstances there was *no* delay and yet some passengers were required to tick to confirm that they had been delayed (by two hours). It is important that passengers are not put off claiming because the webform does not make sense to them, or they are concerned about being accused of fraud if they tick to confirm that they have been delayed when they did not travel anywhere.

**Transport Focus recommends that improvements are made to the webforms season ticket holders complete when applying for a day's compensation if they cannot/do not travel. The language used and the information collected needs to be relevant to not travelling rather than to a delayed journey.**

Refunds on tickets no longer required – customer service improvement

**Transport Focus recommends that “no longer travelling because of strike” is added to webforms used when applying for a refund – so passengers don't have to type in the reason.**

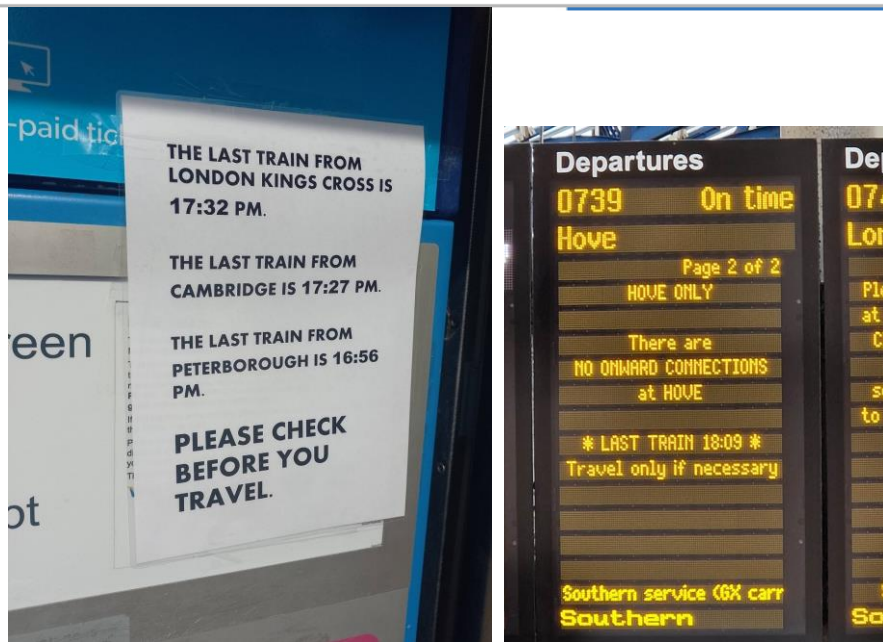
## **Passenger information**

Highlighting first and last trains

Some passengers were caught unawares by the late start and early finish to the service from Tuesday 21 to Sunday 26 June. We highlighted good practice and encouraged communication of the last trains home. Asked what they would like done differently another time, one passenger said:

*“Clear communication for commuters of revised timetables so you can see at a glance what trains are running. It would also be useful to have return train times from Leeds station displayed at Sandal so commuters can plan the best they can.”*

Sandal and Agbrigg to Leeds



Good practice to be replicated

**Transport Focus recommends that significantly increased efforts are made to help passengers understand when the service will start later or finish earlier than normal, including on the day *following* strike action. This should include publicising the last trains back.**

#### Positioning of information at stations

A theme in feedback from passengers, and from our staff, was the low profile of information at stations. If you arrived at a station unaware of the strikes and/or implications for you (and plenty appeared to be in that category), then unless a station was physically locked up it was often easy to get to the platforms still unaware. It would be better if passengers were not unnecessarily accessing platforms only to then discover that there are no or many fewer trains. Where stations were locked up completely, there was not always information outside to explain why, and when services would resume.



Notice stuck to the shutters at Stockport could have been more informative.



Screens that could have displayed more useful information.



Good practice to be emulated

**Transport Focus recommends that, whether through use of ‘A frames’, customer information systems (CIS) or other means, greater effort is made to display information about ‘no trains’ or ‘reduced service’. This would give passenger a greater chance of seeing information at or near the station entrance. Where a station is physically closed, it should be clear why and when services will restart.**

#### Information on ticket vending machines

We acknowledge that many ticket vending machines (TVMs) are not linked with a timetable database to check that there are trains to the station a passenger selects (and there are downsides to those that do). However, in circumstances where there are either no trains at all or trains to certain destinations only, reasonable efforts should be made to encourage people to check before they purchase. This will avoid the inconvenience to passengers of needing to claim a refund, not to mention administrative costs to the industry.

*“Staff told me someone had bought a ticket to X from the TVM on Tuesday, gone up to the platform and found out there were no trains and gone back down to the ticket office to get a refund.”* Transport Focus staff member



## Customer notice

Due to strike action taking place on 21, 23 and 25 June, please check trains are running to your destination before purchasing a ticket.

South Western  
Railway

Good practice from LNER / SWR produced this sign prompted by Transport Focus

**Transport Focus recommends that it should be made clear on ticket vending machines during future strikes that passengers should check that there is a train to their intended destination before they buy a ticket.**

Ensuring passengers arriving by air are aware of the strikes

It was clear from passenger feedback and observations by our staff that people were getting off flights unaware of the strikes and implications for their onward travel.

And things didn't seem geared up to explain what people needed to do to reach their destination by other means; they seemed to be abandoned to their own devices. We have raised this with the Civil Aviation Authority as well as highlighting to the rail industry.

*"I landed at Southampton Airport and found the last trains that I could have taken were a couple of hours before. Information was scarce and the station was deserted."*

*"My main concern was the absence of any staff at Gatwick North to help the many hundreds of bewildered passengers. Two National Express drivers did well to field a barrage of questioning as they were trying to load suitcases, but there was no sign of any airport staff. Of course, there may have been some staff providing advice at the rail station at Gatwick South, but most of us had no reason to head there (and the shuttle was operating a reduced service)."*

**Transport Focus recommends that train companies work with airlines, airports and others to:**

- a. ensure that arriving air passengers are aware in advance if their onward travel will be severely affected by a strike (or any other planned disruption)**
- b. ensure that sufficient staff, whether from the railway or airport, are on hand to help passengers with their onward travel.**

Information about alternative travel options

A number of passengers felt train companies should have done more to help them understand their alternatives when no trains could run, whether for all or part of the day. In short, they wanted to know the times of scheduled buses running parallel with the railway. Passengers turning up unaware of the disruption would have found this particularly helpful.

*"If there were signs or information on buses that were running to get to the destination. It would be helpful if the public were advised of alternate ways to travel and what would be best recommended. It was a shame there were no staff around at the station at all to help answer any questions. There were clear notices that no trains were running and the reason why this was, but I felt very confused about what to do next to make my journey. Even if there were options of bus routes on the website this would help people prepare better beforehand."*

**Transport Focus recommends that train companies signpost passengers to sources of information about alternative transport options when it is not possible to run trains. Where possible, the times of scheduled buses should be displayed. At the very least, passengers should be directed to a reliable bus journey planner, such as [www.traveline.info](http://www.traveline.info).**

#### Timetable information on websites

Some passengers prefer to see the timetable as a whole, rather than rely on a journey planner to present options to them. A PDF of the contingency timetable for a strike day would therefore be helpful, in the same way they are for snow or high winds scenarios. Publishing PDFs also gives the potential for revised timetables to be in the public domain sooner than they appear in journey planners.

*“Ensure full timetable PDF files are made available on TOC/@nationalrailenq websites rather than being lazy and forcing you to use journey planners that mean you to have to check every service individually!”* Passenger contacting Transport Focus

**Transport Focus recommends that train companies publish a PDF of contingency timetables on their websites to supplement information provided through journey planners.**





Transport Focus is the operating name of  
the Passengers' Council

© 2022 Transport Focus

Albany House  
86 Petty France  
London  
SW1H 9EA

[www.transportfocus.org.uk](http://www.transportfocus.org.uk)  
[info@transportfocus.org.uk](mailto:info@transportfocus.org.uk)