Managing Disruptions: the issues involved

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1 Introduction

1.1 About this document

1.1.1 This document is the first phase of the project *Managing Disruptions.* It is Technical and Guideline task 11/3.7 of the RTIG-INFORM Business Plan 2011-12.

1.1.2 This work has been sponsored by Merseytravel, and the document has been compiled with the assistance of TfL, ATOC and South Yorkshire PTE. We are very grateful for this assistance and support.

1.2 Background and context

1.2.1 During 2010 severe weather brought much of the UK to a standstill. Buses and trains were all badly affected. The transport industry was severely criticised for its lack of good quality, consistent and timely information to passengers during periods of severe disruption. A Passenger Focus report commented that "too many passengers experience patchy, inaccurate or conflicting information – and some get none at all". Similarly, David Quarmby CBE noted in the *Winter Resilience Review* the importance of "comprehensive information and communications to stakeholders and the public at large".

1.2.2 Quarmby made some specific recommendations. He commented that there was an over-reliance on the railways on electronic systems for passenger information which "do not have the flexibility to advise passengers what is going on during disruption or to show that anyone cares". He urged the rail industry "to put in place information processes and methods of communicating with passengers which do not depend on the full functioning of all the electronic systems, and which embody the necessary flexibility to convey the relevant information and advice".

1.2.3 The Office of Rail Regulation and Network Rail have also reviewed the period of severe winter weather in 2010 and this is published in their report, *Passenger Information during Disruption*. RTIG has considered this as a source for some of the commentary on rail.

1.2.4 The high levels of criticism of the transport industry has brought passenger information into the spotlight and found it wanting during periods of disruption. This document addresses some of the issues which face information providers in trying to continue to provide an accurate service during periods of disruption.

1.2.5 This document has three main sections:

- Section 2 covers the basis for disruption information services;
- Section 3 covers the available channels for providing information;
- Section 4 covers the characteristics expected of disruption information.

1.2.6 A running theme across all of these is the need to ensure, not merely accuracy, but also consistency of information. When passengers are feeling vulnerable, it is crucial to ensure that the information they get through the various channels on offer is helpful and avoids confusion.

1.3 Status of this document

1.3.1 This document is a **draft for public review**. In developing further guidance, we are happy to receive feedback and comment; please contact us at secretariat@rtig.org.uk.

2 Disruption Information Delivery

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 Arguably, disruption information is the most important information to passengers. When everything is running smoothly and as expected, many regular passengers will use information only to confirm what they already know. When there is an incident and the route or schedule of their current journey is disrupted, then they need to know how their journey is changing and how, under these new circumstances, they can still get to their destination.

2.1.2 Transport disruption can vary enormously across a wide number of variables. Disruption can range from a car parked in the bus lane, to localised flooding, to severe weather, to a terrorist attack. Each of these requires different responses and different responders.

2.2 Anticipating the Event

2.2.1 Some events can be anticipated. Some are even planned. Much can be learned from previous experience of comparable events or conditions. The impact of a sporting event with localised heavy traffic is likely to be known well in advance, and happens frequently enough to give planners a good idea of impact and behaviour. Roadworks on a busy trunkroad are often planned, although emergency utility work (eg a gas leak) cannot be planned. Weather events can sometimes be anticipated, and the Met Office, through the National Severe Weather Warning Service (NSWWS) provides a range of warnings about weather that could be disruptive or dangerous both to the public and to Civil Contingency Responders. Even though the details are subject to chance, the broad impact can often be extrapolated from previous similar conditions.

2.2.2 Some events, such as roadworks or engineering works on the railways, also happen frequently which allows responders the luxury of practice. Indeed many local authorities have a dedicated portion of their website established for roadworks information; similarly, National Rail Enquiries publishes current rail engineering work to give passengers as much information as possible before they travel.

2.2.3 Where events can be anticipated, responders at all levels have the ability to prepare the response before the event. Buses can be diverted, police can be deployed, or schedules can be adjusted. Messages can be available to the public before the event too, allowing passengers to alter their journeys before they set out.

2.2.4 Ensuring that the correct message is available across the right channels is a significant issue for any disruptive event. Providers will also want to consider how strong a message to put out in anticipation of an event, particularly given that once a message is released, it may assume a life of its own. A message which warns passengers that heavy snow expected the next day may result in transport delays can rapidly be picked up by the media and turned into "travel chaos to affect the country during winter snow".

2.3 Preparing ahead

2.3.1 All events, planned or unplanned, are better managed if the key processes are in place and are well tested. This will ensure the successful delivery of disruption information under most circumstances. Much can be done to prepare ahead for various types of incident:

- Establish what constitutes an incident and what severity is required before the public need to be informed. Severity might be defined according to length of delay to the passenger, geographical spread of the incident or danger to the public.

- Identify the key people and roles in managing information during an incident. Some of these are established in law in the Civil Contingencies Act, but not all. It is important to understand exactly who will be involved in getting information out both within and between organisations.

- Clarify the chain of command for releasing information to the public: specifically, who will decide when to release a disruption message to the public.

- Establish what channels will carry disruption messages and determine the content in principle for each channel. The message should be consistent between channels (even if it is expressed in different ways to accommodate differences between channels such as character limits).

- Ensure that bus and rail staff are trained to deal with people and information during an incident. This is really a two-pronged process. Not only do staff need to be able to communicate effectively and compassionately with passengers, but they also need to be able to get regular updates to pass on to passengers. This is probably best achieved through a technological solution which permits staff to remain engaged with passengers during an incident.

- Develop protocols to ensure that actors talk to each other as appropriate for each type of event. The chains of command and the cascade of information is complex. It is crucial that a protocol is established so that the necessary people speak to one another. This should ensure that the communication pathways are sufficiently complex and varied to get a rounded picture, without being so complex that the actors spend all their time talking among themselves.

- Develop standard messages as far as possible, to avoid having to do it at the time of the event. Standard messages provide another level of consistency for passengers. If passengers always see the words "minor delay" for particular kind of incidents, they will have a better understanding of what this means.

Key Players

2.3.2 Key to preparing ahead is identifying the key actors and their roles. Who is responsible for what and how does this cascade? Not all responders will be required for every disruption event and it is important that the process for information delivery is established with sufficient flexibility to accommodate a wide variety of potential incidents. For some events the responders are defined in law. The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 is intended to cover incidents which pose a serious threat to human welfare, to the environment or to national security. The Act establishes Category One and Two Responders and defines their roles. Category 1 Responders include:

- Local Authorities;
- The emergency services (police, fire);
- Health services (including ambulances);
- Environment Agency;
- Secretary of State.

2.3.3 The primary duties of Category One Responders include contingency planning, warning and informing the public and sharing information with Category Two Responders. In addition there is coordination among them: for instance, many local transport authorities are a part of the Police Gold and Silver commands for major incidents.

2.3.4 Although Category One Responders have a duty to warn and inform the public, this does not mean that they will be directly responsible for the information which passengers need and want to complete their journeys. A process will need to be in place which allows the correct people to be informed of the event so that they in turn can relay to the passenger how this disruption will affect their journey.

2.3.5 Category Two Responders include:

- Utilities;
- Transport Operators (Aviation, Maritime and Rail).

2.3.6 Category Two Responders are less involved in planning work, but more involved on the ground during the incident. Note that as current legislation stands bus operators are not Responders under the Civil Contingencies Act.

2.3.7 Not all incidents, however, require this level of response. Most incidents are small scale and do not pose a serious or widespread threat. Incidents such as localised flooding, a traffic accident or a broken down vehicle are likely to cause only modest disruption and perhaps only to a small proportion of the network. It is unlikely to be necessary to involve the Secretary of State for these events.

2.3.8 Operators and LAs need to be aware that where there is a disruption, there is a potential for crowds to develop because the transport is not moving them to their destinations in the normal way. This will mean that part of their duty will be crowd control and safety. Furthermore, if they are sustained for a long time, there is the potential for the crowds to become another focus of disruption – for instance when rail passengers abandoned a failed train, and walked along the track to the nearest station, causing the line to be closed.

2.3.9 Many events can use the same planning and processes which are established for more serious events. However, this must be flexible enough to accommodate a variety of circumstances. It is therefore important to remember that the decision to reroute a bus or to take it off the road may not come from the police or indeed from any of the other Category One Responders. If a bus operator, for instance, feels that the weather conditions are too dangerous for his buses and his drivers, he may decide not to send them out. A process and resources needs to be in place to ensure that this information still gets to those who will be disseminating information.

2.3.10 However, it is still necessary to inform passengers of how their journey will be affected by the incident. This will in part depend on where in the journey the passenger is when the disruption occurs. If the passenger is still at home, he will need different information from if he is already on his way. He will need still different information if he is already on the vehicle when the disruption occurs.

2.3.11 For disruption information delivery concerning buses there are also a number of other actors who will always be involved: bus operators; bus drivers, station managers/staff, train drivers; and passengers. This adds another level of coordination and therefore complexity to the process of ensuring that information is distributed in a timely fashion and through many channels.

2.3.12 It may be difficult to ensure that the appropriate people are available outside of normal 9-5 working hours to ensure that good disruption information is available before people leave for work and into the evening rush hour. Different channels will be effective at different times. For instance while people are still at home in the morning, it may be easiest to reach them through radio and television, while before the evening rush hour this will be less practical since fewer people have access to these channels. This may be a particular challenge for smaller local authority who may struggle to have sufficient staff available dedicated to providing information. However, while transport runs, information is required and this is a hurdle which needs to be addressed.

2.3.13 3rd party information providers also have a role to play, though this is more remote and largely out of the direct and immediate control of the LA, rail operators and bus operators.

2.3.14 Finally, passengers have a role to play. Not only will they receive the information, but they should also play a part in how information is delivered to them. Passengers are also a link in the information provision chain, not only as absorbers of information but as providers. With the proliferation of social networking sites and texting, passengers will convey information (and misinformation) to one another. Information providers should monitor such sites and intervene as necessary to help to control this other source of information which will be available to people; automated tools are beginning to be available which can help with this.

Passenger Preferences

2.3.15 What information and how it is provided to passengers should reflect, at least in some measure, the preferences of the passengers. Passengers can feel frustrated if they feel that the information that they receive is insufficient or does not help them to make decisions about their journey. While it can be difficult to get this balance right, particularly where there is a developing situation, the aim of information providers should be to ensure that passengers are given enough information to respond practically, whether that means waiting until the disruption passes or choosing a different route or deciding not to travel at all.

2.3.16 It is worth investigating which channels passengers use under what circumstances and what information they would like to see on them. However, it may not be possible to accommodate these preferences all of the time. For instance, if passengers prefer to receive their information through their mobile, this may not be possible if phone channels are not available during certain sorts of emergency. It may also be difficult to get a consistent picture. Some passengers, for instance, may want frequent updates while others may find the repetition annoying.

2.3.17 David Quarmby points out in his report that there are circumstances where relying on electronic systems comes across to passengers as uncaring and remote. There must also be processes in place to allow staff on station platforms and on buses and trains to be accessible to passengers and to relay information and absorb frustration, upset and discontent. This will require that those people who are expected to be in direct communication with passengers are appropriately trained. It will also require that there are established protocols for when people are deployed and what messages are given out.

2.3.18 Passengers will want their information delivered through different channels depending on where they are in their journey. Quite a lot of information can be given on a website or journey planner which is most likely to be accessed before travel begins. Less information can be given through SMS texts or through real time signs. Those with smartphones may prefer to access information through social media. Information should be delivered through each channel appropriately, giving as much information as possible without overwhelming or confusing the passenger.

2.3.19 Many passengers now choose to use their smart phones using apps to access travel information. Apps are normally provided by 3rd parties who have access to data made available by local authorities. Local authorities release their information with terms and conditions attached. For instance, TfL requires the data user to "warrant and undertake [to] reproduce the Transport Data accurately and only in the form provided by TfL".

2.3.20 Nevertheless, the more information providers there are, the more difficult it becomes to police accuracy and it is nearly impossible to do so during an incident. Inaccurate or inconsistent information does a great deal of damage to the reputation of information providers. Unfortunately, passengers may hold the transport operator or local authority responsible for any lapses in accuracy by the third party and once the lapse has occurred, it can be difficult to reestablish trust with the passenger for information provided. Damage to reputation and public confidence should be serious considerations for local authorities who release their data for 3rd party use.

2.4 Assessing the Event

2.4.1 Regardless of whether the event is planned or unplanned, information providers will need to assess the severity of the event. This will include:

- How widespread is the disruption? Does it affect the route/line, a local network or the national network? Not all disruption is widespread or affects an entire journey. Most disruptions are fairly localised. This means that information providers need to target those passengers who are actually going to be affected. Being clear about where the disruption is taking place will help people to decide whether to alter their routes, suspend their journey or simply get off a stop or two earlier. This needs good experienced people with a good understanding of the "network" and the impact of disruptions to lead within the team.

- What modes of transport does it affect: buses, trains/trams/underground, cars, pedestrians? We are primarily concerned here with buses and trains/trams/underground. However, there are significant differences between them. Since trains, trams and underground run on fixed tracks, if there is a problem on the line, then there is very limited scope for diversion. Buses by contrast can re-route more easily avoiding a road with a localised problem

- How long will it last? How much information is given out may also depend on how long the disruption is expected to last. If the disruption can be cleared in a matter of moments, then it is probably not worth putting large amounts of information out on a wide variety of channels. If, by contrast, the incident is going to last for a significant period of time, then a different level of information will be required. Passengers do not like to feel like they are kept in the dark. They will want to know both how long the delay is going to last and what is causing it.

– What delay is likely to be experienced? Information providers will need to decide what kind of delay constitutes disruption. This might be categorised into minor delays, major delays, service partially suspended, service completely suspended. Each of these will require defining such that a message which gives appropriate information and advice goes out to passengers.

3 Channel Options

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 Once the decision has been taken to release information about a disruption event, it then remains to actually get the information out across the variety of channels. This will also include coordinating with partner organisations so that the information given out remains consistent. Passengers will be confused and lose trust in the information services if they do not know who to believe. So it is crucial that local authority websites, train platforms and bus real-time are consistent with one another.

3.1.2 What information and how much should be appropriate to the channel. At both at stop and in station real-time displays, information may have to be restricted to only the delay information for that service. The information on a website can give the cause of the delay, the time expected for it to last and the areas covered by the disruption. Some time should be put into establishing what information is reasonable and appropriate for each channel.

3.2 Channels

3.2.1 The channels which people use to get their information will vary depending on personal preference as well as what kind of journey they are taking, where they are in the journey and what modes of transport they will be taking. All of these should be taken into consideration when choosing which channels through which to make information available.

3.2.2 Some channels reach passengers who actively seek them out, like websites. Other channels are most effective because they are able to reach passengers without the passenger doing anything much out of the ordinary. In many ways, the more passive channels may be the most useful for attracting passengers' attention – though active channels may be able to provide more detailed information and guidance.

3.2.3 Some channels to consider are as follows.

Local radio

3.2.4 Local radio can be a good way to get information to people before they set out in the morning or while they are driving to the train station or park and ride. At present, much of the information which comes out on radio is network-based information such as accidents, roadworks and congestion. All of these lead to disruption, but local stations do not cover whether specific bus routes will be affected.

National radio (for particularly widespread and severe disruption)

3.2.5 National radio does cover rail line closures and disruptions when they are particularly severe. However, this is often as part of a wider story and is unlikely to cover much detail which is useful to passengers. National radio should be encouraged to tell passengers to check appropriate websites for full information.

Television (for particularly widespread and severe disruption)

3.2.6 Television tends to cover only widespread disruption usually as part of another story such as severe weather, striking employees, a major accident or a terrorist incident. Again, there is no detail on the effect of specific lines, routes or journeys. Television coverage of these sorts of events should encourage passengers to seek more information from appropriate websites or phone lines.

Website

3.2.7 Websites have the advantage of plenty of space to go into detail about the disruption, how long it will last and other impacts. However, it may not be able to reach many people while they are on the move, so it will primarily be of use to those who have not yet set out. For those with smart phones, they will be able to access websites more regularly throughout their journey.

3.2.8 Disruption information should always be easy to find on the website. Passengers who have to dig to find the information may give up before they find it. Where appropriate for severe disruption, consider placing as a headline on the front page which can be "clicked" for more detail.

3.2.9 Information should be tailored to the greater space without becoming cumbersome. How much information to give is finely balanced and may be difficult to get right for everyone. However, too much information is as bad as not enough. Passengers do not want to wade through enormous amounts of detail to get to the significant information for them. Design of the website can play a valuable role here.

3.2.10 If your website also sells tickets, ensure that the tickets will be useable. This will need to be updated regularly while an incident develops.

SMS texts and alerts

3.2.11 Many LAs offer passenger information through SMS texts. These are a good way to notify people who are already on the move. However, the information that can be given over a text is limited and what can be said needs to be designed carefully to deliver information accurately and clearly.

3.2.12 Passengers do need to sign up for text alerts and there may be a cost involved for texts received. However, the Annual Survey suggests that this is a fast growing dissemination method.

Mobile Apps (most of these will not be produced by LAs or transport operators)

3.2.13 Much has been made of the potential for delivering passenger information through mobile apps. These provide an opportunity to reach a different set of users, and/or to provide a different set of information services, from "traditional" channels.

3.2.14 This has been made possible by the release of all sorts of transport data for use by independent third parties. The point of this release of data is to encourage innovation within the private sector to develop new uses for the data to the advantage of passengers. This means that very few qualifiers are put on the use of data.

3.2.15 Data providers should therefore ensure that their Terms of Use have clear statements about the accuracy of data and how the information is attributed. It is important that apps users are aware that LAs and bus and rail operators are not responsible if the service does not meet their needs.

Station and stop display boards

3.2.16 Station and stop display boards are aimed at the people who have already arrived at the station. Space is limited to a fixed number of characters in most instances and messages need to be designed to be clear, simple and easy to understand.

3.2.17 Boards are able to display both service specific information ("the 12:45 is delayed by sixteen minutes") and general disruption information ("all services on this line are subject to severe delays owing to the bad weather"). Passengers may want both, but it is important not to confuse the two messages.

Station personnel and bus drivers

3.2.18 Station personnel, bus drivers and train guards can have a vital role to play during an incident. Passengers appreciate getting their information from a "real" person and not just from technology. During times of stress and while there is a great deal of uncertainty about a situation, passengers want to feel that they are being taken into account, that bus and train operators sympathise with their plight and are doing their best to alleviate it.

3.2.19 This can be a tall order especially when the staff on trains, at stations and on buses are also under pressure and may be trying to negotiate a complicated situation. It will be crucial to offer staff who may be in this position the right kind of support and training so that they have the tools to deal with disruption events.

3.2.20 Being available to passengers to answer questions and reassure them can make it difficult for staff to keep up to date with new information coming in. It will not be helpful to passengers if staff cannot stay current with events as they evolve. A process needs to be established such that staff who will interact with passengers are able to get regular updates so that they can be passed on. However, this needs to be done in such a way that staff are not taken away from passengers.

Facebook and Twitter

3.2.21 Many people now like to receive their information through social media site, either from home or on the move. Once people sign up to follow a specific page, person or industry expert and they have Facebook or Twitter open on their phone, it is easy to get messages to them. This means that passengers don't need to seek out the information actively. So they may get the information earlier than they would have had they needed to wait until they ran into the disruption on their journey. This means they may be able to react to the information sooner.

3.2.22 There do not seem to be many guidelines for operating a Facebook or Twitter page. However, it's worth considering the following general issues when deciding to have a presence on a social network site:

- *Who will operate the page*? The page will only work if it is kept up to date. Someone will need to manage the page.

- *Will you interact with the people who are following you on your page*? It will take a lot more time and energy if you plan to respond to questions and issues. If you don't plan to do so, then you need to make it clear to people that you won't.

- *Pointing your follower to other information sources*. Be sure that if you are not going to respond to queries and issues that you give your followers that you give them alternative places in which they can contact you.

- *Messages*: these should be clear, concise and not too involved. Don't post large blocks of text which are cumbersome for people to read quickly. Be sure that when you update, you consider that this will push previous messages down the page and they will become less accessible to followers. Therefore if there have been a lot of updates, consider repeating the basic information periodically to avoid losing it.

- *Ensure that you monitor the page for trolling and other inappropriate behaviour*. It is possible that some people will abuse your page. This needs to be monitored and people who do this can be blocked. Make it clear that you will do so.

- *Make it clear to whoever will manage the site that it is for professional use only*. The purpose of the social networking page should be to convey information to its followers. It is not intended for idle chat with customers or to develop new friendships.

Paper

3.2.23 Although it is not a "high tech" solution, paper notices can be very effective at stops and at heavily used locations for short term (unplanned) disruptions. It can also be effective and advising travellers of future disruptions or long term disruptions.

3.2.24 Paper is cheap and reaches a large number of people, and by its nature it targets those who are physically present at the point of display. No one needs to have a special device to receive the information. The greatest expense will be in the resource required to take the paper announcements to the right places.

3.2.25 When using paper to disseminate information, care should be taken to ensure that it is protected against weather and vandalism to ensure that the message remains available to passengers.

3.2.26 Do not forget to remove paper announcements when they are no longer relevant. Out of date paper announcements might cause confusion. Paper based displays should always be clearly dated.

3.3 Controlling Information

3.3.1 Information can have a life of its own. Once you have published any information, other people probably will pick it up and repeat it. They may not have the same care at ensuring that what they repeat is accurate. Rumour and half-truths can travel quickly and undo much of the care and accuracy which information have taken trouble to design into their messages.

3.3.2 It is not possible to control every repetition of your information by other people. However, the clearer you can be and the more precise, they less room there will be for people to extrapolate misinformation. But you will never get rid of the problem entirely. It is also important to note that you should not let the possibility of rumour prevent you from giving out good quality information. Rumour can also abound where there is no information.

3.4 Special Considerations

3.4.1 It is worth remembering that passengers with some disabilities may be unable to access some channels. For instance, a person who is deaf or hard of hearing will not be able to access information which is given as an audio announcement. A blind person cannot access information which is given as visual information. This is particularly important where safety or emergency information is being communicated. Therefore, there needs to be a process which acknowledges the needs of disabled passengers and ensures that they are adequately informed.

4 Disruption Information Characteristics

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 Ensuring that the message is right for passengers is the essence of disruption information. There are a number of primary characteristics which should be taken into account when designing messages for various channels.

4.1.2 It is difficult to emphasise strongly enough the relationship between good customer relations and good passenger information. A failure to provide good information in a timely fashion can cause a loss of trust which can be difficult to retrieve. Passengers who are delayed are likely to be frustrated. Information providers need to do everything in their power to avoid that frustration. While it may be impossible to make a disrupted journey a pleasant one, providers should strive to ensure that they do not make it any worse by failure to give information; by giving information too late, discourteously, or confusingly; or by giving inconsistent information.

4.2 Content

4.2.1 What information passengers want will depend partly on where they are in their journey. A passenger who is still at home will want to know if it's worth setting out. A passenger part way through their journey wants to know how they will complete it.

What is going on?

4.2.2 Passengers want to know why they are delayed. This information is regularly given on the trains in an audio announcement by the guard, but is not often given on the buses. Most buses still do not have audio-visual fitted to give arrival or disruption information and bus drivers rarely address the bus as a whole. Not knowing why a journey has been disrupted can be extremely frustrating, particularly if the passenger is trying to get to an engagement.

4.2.3 It may not be practical for this information to be released on all channels. Some displays simply don't have the character numbers to give extensive information of this kind. It also may not be practical to release this information immediately, while a disruption event is still developing.

How long will it last?

4.2.4 Passengers want to know how long the disruption is likely to last. If the road is going to be dug up for weeks, and this will involve a diversion on their bus route during that time, they will want to know that. It helps them to make alternative arrangements. When this information is available, it should be given to passengers.

4.2.5 It may not be possible to know how long an incident will last, particularly if it is unplanned and still developing. However, passengers would prefer to have partial information than none. It helps them to know that they are not being ignored. It is probably better to tell passengers that the situation is still developing and that its duration is not known, rather than say nothing at all.

4.2.6 Again, it may not be practical to release this information on all channels for reasons of space. Ensuring that staff at stations are well briefed to answer passenger questions will help to offset this for trains, while bus drivers could play a similar role on buses. Most bus stops do not have the facilities to allow for extensive information dissemination and bus operators will have to rely on mobile devices for this information.

When will my bus/train arrive?

4.2.7 Passengers who have already made it to the bus stop or rail station will want to know when their bus or train will arrive. Real time information signs are ideally suited to display this information.

4.2.8 But don't give information to the nearest minute, unless this level of precision is intended. The chain "*15 mins ... 20 mins ... 25 mins ... Delayed ... Cancelled*' is the worst of all possible worlds: a service is promised, in "real time", and then withdrawn.

How does this affect my onward journey?

4.2.9 Passengers who are already travelling and have run into a disruption event will want to know whether they will be able to complete their onward journey and how best this is to be done. Ideally, passengers want to be assured that if they get on the next bus or train that they will be able to make future connections. To deliver this information will require information providers to coordinate across multiple modes and regions.

Emergency/safety information

4.2.10 Where there is emergency or safety information to be delivered, it must not be lost in the other information which is being delivered. Providers need to ensure that this information stands apart and is easily recognisable to passengers so that they can act on it as soon as possible. This information also needs to get to passengers without them having to actively seek it out.

4.2.11 Providers should also be aware that how this information is delivered is crucial. The content should be accurate without being alarmist. It is not in the interest of anyone that passengers should panic when emergency or safety information is delivered. Where instructions are also delivered (eg evacuation instructions) these must be clear.

4.2.12 Any emergency or safety information or instructions should not be provided only in audible formats. Remember that deaf people cannot access this information.

4.3 Clarity

4.3.1 All information should be clear. Messages should not be too long and should avoid using complex sentence structures. For most message boards, there is simply not the room for long-winded messages, but the information put out on websites has greater scope for more explanation and complexity. Providers, therefore, need to balance the quantity of information with simplicity and clarity.

4.3.2 While clarity is important for all passengers, it is particularly important for passengers whose first language may not be English or for passengers who suffer from mental impairments. Bear in mind that "26 million adults of working age have levels of literacy and numeracy below those expected of school leavers."[1]

4.3.3 Clarity is also particularly important for safety messages, particularly where the message requires the passenger to take an action. Where messages are unclear, this may result in confusion and important time may be lost in implementing the safety instructions.

4.3.4 Where possible, messages may be best designed ahead of time. This will avoid the need to rush during the disruption event. Even where the specifics of the information are not known, some standard message formats can be designed for ease and timeliness.

4.4 Time

4.4.1 Passengers value knowing what is going on in good time. They are frustrated if they have to wait a long time to be told that there is an issue in their journey. So, it is a bit silly to tell them that their train or bus is delayed after it should have arrived. Even if they cannot change their decision to travel or their choice of modes, they appreciate knowing that they are going to experience delays as soon as is practical.

4.4.2 Passengers also need to get regular updates. This helps to confirm to them that they have not been forgotten about and that any developments in the situation are being passed on to them. Further, as new people arrive at a station or a bus stop, previous messages may not have got to them. So, some repetition of information is important to ensure that all passengers receive it. However, too frequent updates can also be irritating for passengers. It will be important to balance the need for information and the frequency of messages with possible irritation to passengers. This may be difficult to get right as personal preferences vary and some testing to achieve optimal repetition frequency may be required.

4.5 Consistency

4.5.1 The information given to passengers must be consistent across all channels. Failure to ensure this causes frustration and confusion among passengers, and is likely to engender distrust of all information. This can be quite difficult to achieve and is worth putting time and consideration into.

4.5.2 There are also many apps available for passengers to download to their smart phones. These are impossible for LAs and vehicle operators to police during a disruption. Yet, passengers may come to rely on them and if the information is inconsistent with the information given by those who are generating or providing the data, the same loss of confidence can occur. Where data is provided to third parties, the Terms of Use should be clear on the branding of information, the use of logos and the accuracy of information.

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1 National Audit Office and DfES, *Skills for Life: Improving Adult Literacy and Numeracy*, Dec 2004. Similarly, organisations including the Plain Language Commission, National Literacy Trust, and Plain English Campaign have from time to time made statements that the average reading age of adults in the UK is around 12.

4.6 Accuracy

4.6.1 It should go without saying that the information which is passed on to passengers should be accurate. Where information is uncertain, it should not be passed on to passengers. A retraction or change of information can cause confusion.

4.6.2 Inaccurate information will have the same effect as inconsistent information: passengers will not be able to depend upon it.

5 Conclusions

5.1 Summary

5.1.1 Periods of disruption are arguably the most important time for providing good information to passengers. It is when things don't go right that they need to know how their expected journey is likely to be affected. This is of course magnified, the more severe the disruption is. Failure to provide good information is also extremely damaging to the relationship between the passenger and the transport provider. It therefore makes good business sense to ensure that passengers are kept informed throughout a disruption event.

5.2 Way ahead

5.2.1 There are many threads all of which need to be brought together to provide good information. Many of the processes which need to be in place, to ensure good coordination and good cascading through the various people with responsibility for information, need to be established well in advance to be effective. Planning and preparation can smooth the processes, providing passengers with a more seamless experience. This is what information providers should be aiming for.

5.2.2 This current document is a collation of broad principles only, and is a first step in industry's response to the challenges of good information provision during disruptions. RTIG is taking a second step by using its 2011 Annual Survey to find out how Local Authorities are currently dealing with providing disruption information, the results of which will be published in early 2012.

5.2.3 Beyond this, over the next two years or so, RTIG aims to produce disruption information guidance to assist information providers, LAs and transport operators. We welcome input and feedback from the community that could help contribute to this.