Passenger needs at London's transport interchanges

In 2014 London TravelWatch commissioned some focus group research to better understand passenger views on interchanges. The results of this were used to develop our interchange evaluation tool.

The sample was constructed to represent the views of passengers using a spectrum of different interchanges including major London termini, medium sized interchanges and smaller stations. Group discussions were conducted among passengers living in a wide variety of locations across London and the South East.

The research highlighted certain stations at which conditions for interchanging passengers were considered to be excellent and some of which were very poor. The key findings can be summarised as follows:

Strengths of a good interchange
- Good quality and quantity of information available
- Easy to get from one mode to another
- Accessible bus stops nearby
- Legible London or other way finding information provided
- Level and continuous pavements

Weaknesses of a poor interchange
- Lack of signage and mapping
- Inadequate information about local bus services
- Pavements and surrounding areas not being accessible to all passengers
- Lack of pedestrian crossings or other connections beyond the interchange
- Surrounding streets cluttered with advertising hoardings and similar obstructions
- Out of date and incorrect bus stop signing system
- Poor pedestrian environments for those interchanging on foot

Here are some of the things people told us during the research!

1 Accessibility

Accessibility was consistently identified as the most important aspect of any interchange across the focus groups.

It is widely acknowledged that passengers with disabilities must be considered to be the priority in this respect. All recognise that accessibility is even more important for an interchange than other stations as a result of the additional complexities associated with needing to make a connection.

"This is mainly for people with disabilities but it would also be helpful for parents travelling with buggies or people with luggage." [G3, medium interchanges]

"Accessibility issues are more important for disabled people because they have no way to get round the problems so it's essential for them to know." [G5, smaller stations]

"It means how accessible the station is to all people not just disabled passengers. How easy it is for everyone to get into and around the station." [G4, medium interchanges]

"I need to carry a heavy case around for my work so I need to take notice of which stations have lifts even though I'm not disabled." [G1, London termini]

"Some places have accessible facilities but they are unusable. Liverpool Street has lots of escalators, but during rush hour they are absolutely packed so they can't cope with the volume of people and could be very difficult for a disabled person to manage." [G4, medium interchanges]

"It's not just about whether the station is accessible, but you need to know how accessible it is and what do they have there to help you." [G4, medium interchanges]

The questions need to relate to specific parts of the interchange because certain areas of it may be more accessible than others. At Marylebone, the tube station is absolute hell for wheelchair users, but the train station is perfect." [G1, London termini]

"If the station isn't accessible, it would be helpful to know how many steps there are and how easy they are to negotiate and whether anyone is available there to help you." [G4, medium interchanges]

"Some of the spirals on the Northern Line are dangerous when you have lots of people going down them. It would only take one person to slip and a whole batch could be taken out in one go." [G4, medium interchanges]

"The gap between the train and the platform is important to know about because that can be difficult for some people." [G4, medium interchanges]

"Accessibility can be important even if you are not disabled. At Clapham Junction, there are massive gaps between the trains and platforms and the height of them means there can be quite a drop." [G2, London termini]

"The gap is important for the elderly and people with pushchairs because I recently saw an old lady struggling to get on a train." [G6, smaller stations]

"It's essential to know about gaps because it can be dangerous and there are times when you literally have to jump. I once saw someone fall between a train and the platform at London Bridge." [G5, smaller stations]

"It's important to know if assistance is available and whether it needs to be booked in advance. It would be helpful to know when staff are available and to provide the phone number needed to book help." [G2, London termini]

"I think it's less important to know about the buses because they all have a step that comes out to the pavement now. Perhaps it would only be worth knowing if the buses aren't accessible." [G4, medium interchanges]

"I think the bit about kerb heights at bus stops is less relevant because all new buses have ramps." [G2, London termini]

"You would just need to know if the bus stops are not accessible so you could avoid that station and get off at another stop." [G6, smaller stations]

"I imagine all the important information is already out there so this is unlikely to come up with anything new. I also think accessibility would be difficult to assess if you are an able-bodied person" [G3, medium interchanges]

2 Layout

"This is all about how much room there is for the number of passengers using the station and how easy it is to get from one platform to another, or to different areas within the station." [G3, medium interchanges]

"I would want to know if the concourse is rammed all the time because I'm not very good in crowds – so it would put me off using the station and I would use somewhere else instead." [G5, smaller stations]

"It needs to be done at different times of the day because it will be completely different at peak and off-peak times and probably at the weekend, as well as week days." [G4, medium interchanges]

"I could walk round the station I rated blindfolded so I think it's important they should be visited by people who don't know them to get a true impression and fresh insight." [G1, London termini]

"I found it easy to do because I know the station really well so it would be better if they get people to do the assessments who aren't familiar with the interchange" [G4, medium interchanges]

"This is all about understanding where everything is in relation to everything else, especially if you haven't used the station before. It would be better if the person didn't already know the station because then they will need to think more and they will learn more." [G6, smaller stations]

"The key issue is where do you need to go to get where you are going. London Bridge is an example of a station that is confusing and could be difficult to understand for someone who doesn't use it regularly." [G2, London termini]

"London Bridge would be rated poor, Victoria is better, but the platforms are still in three sections and Waterloo would be best because there is one line of platforms." [G2, London termini]

"London Bridge is a nightmare. It would be helpful to give an idea of how long it takes to get from one part of the station to another, like they do at airports with departure gates." [G3, medium interchanges]

"You might want to know how long it takes to walk within the interchange, especially at busy times when you are having to dodge between other people." [G1, London termini]

"At some stations there are only a couple of the gates that are entrances and all the others are exits and that can cause chaos in the rush hour, so it would be useful to know things like that." [G4, medium interchanges]

"Sometimes it's a nightmare at Highbury and Islington because they hold people at the barriers when the platforms are too crowded, so that's an important element of the layout of that station." [G4, medium interchanges]

"It would be good to know what facilities are on the concourse and the platforms so you know what is on either side of the barrier." [G5, smaller stations]

"At Paddington you have to weave through all the little kiosks and it can be really annoying trying to get round the station – so I think it is relevant to know about the layout." [G1, London termini]

"I'm less concerned about whether there are retail outlets at the station and the layout of them, as long as they are not in the way when you are trying to move around." [G2, London termini]

"You would only need to have a list of the different retail outlets. It's not a layout issue." [G3, medium interchanges]

3   Information and continuing your journey

"Signposting is one of the most important things. We do things on automatic pilot so we know where we are going, but, if you go to a station for the first time, you want to take your time to look at the information while you are on the concourse because then you know what you are doing at it will make journeys much calmer." [G4, medium interchanges]

Information and signage

"I think this is one of the most important aspects of the whole thing because this is one of the only things I would be looking for." [G1, London termini]

"This is one of the most important criteria, but it's difficult to evaluate because there's lots to look for. It would be better to split this section otherwise it could be confusing." [G3, medium interchanges]

"You always need good information whether it's an interchange or not so this feels like it should be two separate sections." [G6, smaller stations]

"Lots of information is available on apps now, but it's still important to have good information because they are not always the first port of call and you may not have a smart phone or be underground." [G5, smaller stations]

"It would be helpful if they could ensure a uniform presentation of information so no matter where you are you always know what you are looking for." [G4, medium interchanges]

London Underground tend to be a bit ahead of the train companies in terms of providing information about their services. They usually have good updates and real-time running information – so that should be used as the benchmark." [G2, London termini]

"I want to know whether staff are available to help because, even if this stuff is available, I always ask to double check to avoid making a mistake and wasting time." [G1, London termini]

"It's pointless having an information point if there is never a human being there that you can talk to, like in the banks. Barking has a kiosk, but I have never seen anyone in it." [G4, medium interchanges]

Continuing your journey inside and outside the interchange

"It doesn't matter how complex a place is as long as the information is good." [G1, London termini]

"If it's a big station, there needs to be clear signage for which exit to use to make sure you leave at the right place. It's only a little thing but it would be really helpful and could save a lot of hassle." [G4, medium interchanges]

"Bank station is a good example of the type of information that should be provided for passengers. It's really big and could be confusing, but it's well signposted in terms of the exits and how to get to places of local interest." [G2, London termini]

"There is so much going on at some of the big stations in London, so passengers need to know how to navigate them. For example, Victoria coach station is a long way from the train station and the information on how to get there is really poor." [G2, London termini]

"Maps of the station and local area are probably one of the most important things that you need and they need to be situated somewhere where you can stand and look at them without being hassled." [G4, medium interchanges]

"The maps of local streets are not in every station, but they are very useful when they are available." [G4, medium interchanges]

"Legible London information should be included here for people continuing their journey, otherwise it will be difficult to provide an overall rating." [G3, medium interchanges]

"The aspiration should be to have the type and quality of information that was available during the Olympics for all forms of public transport that is available from all stations." [G6, smaller stations]

"I don't know why they have those [white] boards with written information; perhaps they think it will grab your attention more. I think they need a more modern version of it." [G3, medium interchanges]

4 Availability of staff for assistance and information

"The questionnaire is all about the number of staff that are there, but the more important thing is whether they are useful because, when I approached staff to ask a question, they were chatting and ignored me." [G1, London termini]

"The emphasis in this section should be on the helpfulness rather than the availability of staff because it's variable. London Underground staff tend to be more clued up and have a good attitude. Some staff are anoraks with specialist knowledge, but that's what you want as a passenger." [G2, London termini]

"It would be useful to know whether staff have knowledge and information available on the surrounding area, as well as the services that run from the station." [G5, smaller stations]

"Station staff are like the police; you might not need them very often, but it's reassuring to see them around." [G1, London termini]

"A human presence is a deterrent, so it's important to know whether there will be someone there." [G4, medium interchanges]

"The most important thing is to know what hours the station will be staffed. And it would also be nice to know where they are likely to be." [G4, medium interchanges]

"You want to know how many ticket windows are manned to help you plan your journey in advance. You also need to know how well staff are deployed and whether they are cross-trained to help you use the ticket machines if necessary." [G6, smaller stations]

"You need to know whether ticket machines are available and the average time you have to queue to get a ticket, so you can plan it into your journey time." [G5, smaller stations]

5 Personal security

"This is important because, if somewhere got a bad review, you would take notice of it and maybe choose not to use that station, especially if there has been recent crime there." [G1, London termini]

"This is a really important thing to know because I used to be scared of using Crystal Palace Station. You need to know how good the lighting is, whether there are panic buttons and if staff are available to make passengers feel safe." [G6, smaller stations]

"This is really important because there is a lot of crime in London and on public transport, so you want to know whether there are British Transport Police at the station, or if there is a police station nearby." [G5, smaller stations]

"This is something I would definitely want to know about because I often travel at the weekend with young children. It would be especially important to know whether the station is well lit and whether it is safe to use it after dark." [G2, London termini]

"I want to know how well-lit the station is at night, especially if it's a small station next to a park rather than on a main road." [G5, smaller stations]

"The point about CCTV is irrelevant in London because all stations will have it. The more important point is whether it is working and being monitored." [G1, London termini]

"I assume all stations have CCTV so the key issue is visibility and whether it's monitored and what level of CCTV is available." [G3, medium interchanges]

"CCTV is no substitute for a person and how can you tell if it is working? There's no point in evaluating it because it's no good unless it's being monitored." [G6, smaller stations]

6 Facilities

"There is a big difference between big stations and small ones so everything needs to be monitored because, as a passenger, you need to know what facilities are available. Everything is valid and necessary." [G2, London termini]

"Toilets are the most important thing. You need to know whether they are available, what condition they are in and whether they are free or not." [G3, medium interchanges]

"It would be more important to know about car parking than toilets because it's something that you need to plan to use. You would need to know cost per hour and any other relevant details" [G3, medium interchanges]

"You would want to know whether parking is available and how many spaces there are and how much it costs. Also, is there a drop-off point, or is there a red route outside the station?" [G6, smaller stations]

"I would want to know whether there is anywhere to shelter when it's raining because that could make a big difference and I might choose to use a different station on that basis." [G6, smaller stations]

"You need to know whether the station can be accessed with ease. Tulse Hill is a nightmare to drive to so people may decide not to drive there, or to drive to another station instead." [G5, smaller stations]

"I would like to know whether there are waiting rooms or shelters, and how many there are, and whether they are on all platforms." [G5, smaller stations]

"It would be a good idea to include symbols to provide a quick and easy snapshot of the facilities that are available, but it would be important to know what times they are available." [G6, smaller stations]

"They should differentiate between black cabs and mini cabs because some people wouldn't feel happy about getting into a mini cab." [G1, London termini]

7 Environmental quality

"The most important is to feel safe in the environment and that is related to the quality of the environment, so perhaps lighting should be included here." [G4, medium interchanges]

"You want the place to look nice and to create a good impression rather than being dirty and run down because it can tell you a lot about the area rather than just the station." [G2, London termini]

"You would just want to know about the scenery and visual aspects of the station, and whether there is a nice view if you need to wait there." [G3, medium interchanges]

"I want to know whether it's a nice place to wait because I often travel with my kids and I would prefer them to be in a nice environment." [G5, smaller stations]

"The reason why graffiti is important is because it affects your sense of security when you are at the station, especially if there are subways you need to use." [G1, London termini]

"Graffiti isn't a top priority, but you would want to know whether the station was subject to lots of vandalism due to it being in a rough area." [G6, smaller stations]

"Graffiti can be nice to look at; it depends on the quality of it. So I don't know how you could get someone to provide a rating for that." [G5, smaller stations]

"Graffiti isn't a big issue at the moment because it's gone the next day; so they are really on it at the moment." [G4, medium interchanges]

"You want to know whether the station is free from litter and whether staff keep it clean and tidy. The issue of litter is difficult in London because it's not always possible to have bins." [G2, London termini]

8 The area around the interchange

"You might want to know whether the area around the interchange is a ghetto for safety reasons or maybe if you are a tourist and thinking of staying in the area." [G1, London termini]

"The area is more important to know about, especially late at night. You need to know if it is isolated or has alleyways. Things like that could make the difference between me using that station or going to a bigger one." [G6, smaller stations]

"It would be important to know if there are any major works that will affect usage of the station and this would need to be updated on at least a monthly basis or even weekly, depending on the nature of the work." [G2, London termini]

"It's obviously important that things are in a good state of repair but it's not one of the most important things for passengers who are interchanging" [G1, London termini]

9 Physical quality and management of surrounding area and streets

"If you are just interchanging and passing through, then this isn't really relevant, only if you are stopping there. It depends how you are travelling." [G4, medium interchanges]

"It would be helpful to know if the outside is pedestrian friendly because sometimes, outside a station, it is impossible to cross the road and you have to walk for miles." [G1, London termini]

"The only thing I would want to know is how easy is it to find your way to other modes of transport if you have to go outside the station." [G1 London termini]

"You want to know what facilities there are to continue with public transport when you leave the station such as buses, taxis and cycle hire." [G4, medium interchanges]

"This needs to be more specific to the parts of your journey and travel experience that are more concerned with how you are getting from A to B." [G6, smaller stations]

"Whether there is rubbish or clutter outside is irrelevant because it won't stop me from using the interchange and I won't take it into consideration when I'm planning my journey." [G5, smaller stations]

Conclusions

1. Passengers recognise the value of an exercise that is intended to provide an evaluation of interchanges and understand the theoretical benefits of this to them as potential users of this information.

2. In reality, however, it is unlikely that data published by London TravelWatch will be widely used for journey planning purposes. The main reason for this is that it would not be possible for the intended Mystery Shopper exercise to be conducted with sufficient breadth or frequency for passengers to consider it as a reliable enough source of up to date information.

3. In order to maximise the effectiveness of the evaluation process, the design of the questionnaire needs to take into account how the information gathered will be used. Since passengers are unlikely to use it for information and guidance when using interchanges, there may be an opportunity for the exercise to be more specifically focused around London TravelWatch's broader campaigning agenda.

4. There are subtle differences between what passengers and London TravelWatch are likely to consider to be priorities for the interchange evaluation exercise. Passengers are mainly focused on the immediate, tangible aspects of how the interchange works for them at a functional level rather than wider public realm considerations and issues related to the station infrastructure and environment.

5. Passengers (and, therefore, Mystery Shoppers) are likely to find it difficult to evaluate elements that are perceived to require specialist knowledge or expertise. The exercise should therefore focus on issues that were considered to be most important and relevant to avoid evaluation from becoming too complex. The simplest way to achieve this will be to concentrate on issues that are most relevant to interchange.

6. It may be that the Mystery Shopper exercise originally envisaged is used by London TravelWatch as a means to an end rather than being the end itself. In order to best promote the interests of consumers, the draft questionnaire could be used to provide a deeper understanding of passenger needs and requirements of interchanges, and socialise these criteria by conducting a pilot exercise.

7. Once this has been achieved, London TravelWatch could use the insights gained as leverage to support their influence as a passenger watchdog organisation to encourage other bodies to conduct the Mystery Shopper exercise on a scale that would identify priorities for investment and improvement, and have more traction among end users of public transport in the London area.

Appendix - Focus group composition

The composition of six focus groups, each lasting approximately 90 minutes was as follows:

Composition of focus groups – main London termini

	Main London termini	
Age indication	20-40	41-65
Socio economic class	BC1C2	C1C2D
Location	Central London	Croydon
Group no.	1	2

Composition of focus groups – medium sized interchange

	Medium sized interchange	
Age indication	20-40	41-65
Socio economic class	BC1C2	C1C2D
Location	Croydon	Central London
Group no.	3	4

Composition of focus groups – smaller stations

	Smaller stations	
Age indication	20-40	41-65
Socio economic class	C1C2D	BC1C2
Location	Bromley	Bromley
Group no.	5	6

Additional Recruitment Criteria
- A mix of both sexes in each group
- All regular users of relevant interchange stations
- Some in each group to be interchanging from one mode of transport to another at these stations
- Mix of journey types represented, including commuters, leisure users and business users in each group
- Groups were recruited to be representative of the ethnicity of their local area

- Before attending the group discussions, all respondents completed a pre-sensitisation exercise. The purpose of this was to encourage respondents to consider and engage with the key interchange issues before attending the focus groups. This ensured that passengers were able to talk from a basis of recent and actual experience rather than merely recollections.