

traveline Research Project



Executive Summary

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

traveline provides a nationwide public transport information service through a single telephone number – 0870 608 2 608. The service was launched in 2000. In July 2002, the traveline Steering Group decided that it was timely to take stock of the service and identify the requirements and priorities for further development.

TTR was commissioned to carry out research into the effectiveness of the traveline service. The research was designed to answer three main questions:

What are the costs and benefits of changing the national standard opening hours for traveline?

Who currently uses traveline and what do they want from it?

What are peoples' travel information requirements and what is the scope for traveline to generate trips by public transport?

A key objective was to investigate the demand for extending the minimum opening hours of traveline beyond the current national standard of 0800-2000, and to assess the costs and benefits for doing so. This task was based primarily on an analysis of BT data logged for a sample of 10 call centres over a period of time, supplemented by site visits, telephone interviews and questionnaires to call centre managers.

The attitudes and requirements of existing users of traveline were investigated using focus groups, in-depth telephone interviews and a quantitative telephone survey amongst a random sample of 1008 callers to four call centres. These surveys were supplemented by analysis of call record data from the Plymouth Call Centre.

Evidence as to the types of information people look for when planning and making a journey by public transport was gathered by means of qualitative and quantitative research using focus groups and a nationwide on-street survey of 1000 members of the general public.

Opening Hours

Existing traveline users think that the service should be open for a longer period than the national standard of 0800-2000 hours. 70% of respondents to the telephone survey felt that call centres should be open later than their current closing time of 8pm (including 24% who felt that they should open 24 hours) and 47% felt that they should open earlier than the current opening time of 8am (including 24% who felt that they should open 24 hours).

This expression of demand for extended opening hours is supported by the analysis of calls received. Around 2-3% of daily calls are received in each of the hours 0700-0800, 2000-2100 and 2100-2200. There is little variation in this percentage between weekdays, Saturdays and Sundays.

Considering an extension to the national standard opening hours, the increase in staff costs is likely to be greater than the increase in call volume. Additional demand

resulting from extended opening hours will, however, offset some of the additional costs incurred.

The most promising hours for extended opening are 2000 to 2100, followed by 0700 to 0800 and 2100 to 2200. At these times the marginal costs incurred by call centres are of the same order of magnitude as the marginal revenue that would derive from handling extra calls.

traveline **User Requirements**

Who uses traveline?

The majority of traveline callers surveyed were women making short distance bus journeys. More than half the respondents had some access to a car.

Most respondents were occasional callers or were making their first call to traveline.

Most people call either on the same day or the day before their journey. Most people enquire about short distance journeys but longer distance journeys account for 23% of the enquiries made.

Two-thirds of enquiries are about bus journeys, 17% are about train journeys, and 13% want both bus and train information.

67% had already made the journey that their enquiry was based on before calling traveline.

Marketing

There is a general impression amongst those who have used traveline that it is not well advertised. Very few non-users know anything about the service.

The restricted opening hours of the service and the cost of the call are regarded as barriers to ease of use. Other problems relate to the call handling system when calling from a mobile phone, and the fact that traveline does not automatically reroute the user to National Rail Enquires, for rail information, or to National Express, for coach information.

Preferences for information media

There is a clear demand for a telephone information service to provide information about public transport. Amongst traveline users it is the most preferred single source of information (chosen by 44% of respondents) followed by printed timetables which 35% preferred.

The main reason for using traveline is the reassurance of a human voice, but 15% of those questioned feel that the information is more trustworthy and 14% like to double check information they already have.

Almost half of traveline users are interested in using internet or mobile phone technology to receive public transport information.

Information requirements

Ideally, travellers want to be able to obtain a complete array of information from one source. They are, however, worried about the cost of making calls and think that some information should only be given if asked for.

The types of information which at least two-thirds of current traveline users believe should be given without the caller having to ask for it are:

Departure time

Arrival time

Up to date information on delays

Frequency of the service

Potential disruptions to services due to engineering work or roadworks

Comparative information on journey times by different modes

Timetable information

Most people like to be given the exact departure and arrival time rather than service frequency information.

Fares

Most people expect fares information to be provided if requested. It is most important for long-distance journeys by train followed by long-distance coach journeys, local train journeys and, lastly, local bus journeys:

There is a particular demand to have information on special offers and discounts, especially from bus operators.

Most traveline users would prefer to receive information on the quickest route regardless of fare for both bus and train journeys. If fares information is given, people would prefer call handlers to ask them the time of travel and then quote the fare.

Real-time information

Most people think that traveline should give up to date information on delays. When told that it might be difficult for traveline itself to give real-time information in the near future, more than two-thirds of the 46% of respondents who were interested in receiving public transport information from the internet and on mobile phones said they would like delay information to be provided via these media.

How can traveline encourage greater use of Public Transport?

There is clear evidence that traveline generates public transport trips. While two-thirds of respondents would have found their required information from somewhere else if they had not been able to make their call to traveline, there is also a group for whom traveline had a major impact on their modal choice and whether to travel at all: 3% would have travelled by car and a further 3% would not have travelled at all.

Conclusions

traveline users are appreciative of the service. However, the public in general know little or nothing about traveline although the majority of people would use a telephone enquiry service to obtain information about public transport journeys.

It is clear that both users of traveline and latent users want more from the service. They want information on individual trips, guidance on changing routes, information on service frequency, information on fares and special offers, and up-to-date information on delays.

There is strong demand for extension of the minimum opening hours from the current national standard of 0800-2000 to 0700-2100 or even 0700-2200.

If a telephone enquiry service were to be able to provide all of the desired travel information requirements, 92% of respondents indicated that they would, or might, use the service. This raises the whole question of exactly what information should be held by traveline call centres and whether there should be national standards for the extent and quality of information provided. Such issues are beyond the scope of the present study.

Recommendations

traveline should continue to provide information to callers by means of a one-to-one conversation with another person, rather than with a mechanised system of pre-recorded voice messages.

traveline needs greater promotion, particularly emphasising what the service is and what it provides to the public transport user. Marketing should also be better targeted at people who are primarily car users or car sharers.

At present, the service is primarily used by bus users, but more marketing emphasis should be placed on the fact that it provides information for local and/or multi-modal journeys.

traveline should automatically reroute the user to National Rail Enquires, for rail information, and to National Express, for coach information.

For enquiries about bus services, priority should be given to imparting information on the departure time of a service

For enquiries about train services, priority should be given to imparting information on departure and arrival times

The default protocol should be for details of the quickest route, regardless of fare, to be provided

Consideration should be given to extending traveline to provide information on the times of earlier and later journeys, delays and cancellations, fares and connection details (where appropriate)

Consideration should be given to providing, in the future, a text messaging service to mobile phones, which should prove attractive to younger travellers; the latter group has indicated a particular interest in estimates as to the length of delays to services and the reasons for these delays

Consideration should be given to extending opening hours beyond the current national standard, with priority for the hour from 2000 to 2100 hours, followed by 0700 to 0800, and 2100 to 2200.

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