



## Manchester Piccadilly platforms 13 and 14: passenger experience and information

March 2019

# What is in this report?



Background and context

Experience of platforms  
13 & 14

Information and reaction  
to the new screens

Summary and  
conclusions

## Key questions to answer

- What is the experience on the platforms and how could this be improved?
- What are reactions to the information screens in the waiting lounge?

# Background and objectives

**Platforms 13 and 14 are very busy and can get congested**



**A new information system is in place in the waiting area for these platforms**



**Research to understand passengers' experience and reactions to this new information system**

Platforms 13 and 14 are the busiest in the station. They serve trains going to many different destinations, including Manchester Airport, Leeds, Newcastle, Liverpool and Scotland.

Due to the volume of departures the platforms get very busy, particularly at peak times. The situation is exacerbated when there are unexpected delays or cancellations.

Platforms 13 and 14 are located slightly away from the main concourse with primary access either through interchange or use of a traveller.

The platforms are more open to the elements than in other parts of the station.

There is a waiting area which directly serves these platforms and a new information system has been put in place in this area, alongside existing information.

Transport Focus commissioned research to understand passengers' experience on the platforms and in the waiting area/lounge, including their reactions to the new information system.

# How the research was conducted

Researcher visited platforms 13 and 14 for 2 days (15 and 16 January 2019) and conducted observations and intercept interviews



Observations of passengers and staff in the waiting area and on platforms.



Informal, short intercept interviews amongst passengers. Passengers were at different stages of the journey process, and ranged from someone newly arrived to the waiting area, to someone about to board a departing service.



Interviews were conducted in the waiting lounge that serves platforms 13 and 14 as well as on platforms and amongst passengers traversing between those areas.



15 January 2019 – 12pm to 5pm  
16 January 2019 – 8.30am to 1.30pm

*Weather – cold and wet  
Level of disruption/delays – not very significant.*



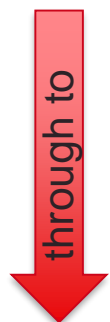
Some subsequent desk research.

# Broad range of opinions included

Researcher talked to a range of passengers ...



First time user of platform 13/14



Commuters/  
Regular users of  
platforms

Younger people



Older people

Short distance



Longer journeys

## Method of arrival

- Platform interchange at 13/14
- Changing trains from elsewhere at Piccadilly
- Using other transport to Piccadilly
- Starting journey at Piccadilly.

Other  
passenger  
types:

Passengers  
with  
luggage

Using  
service to  
airport

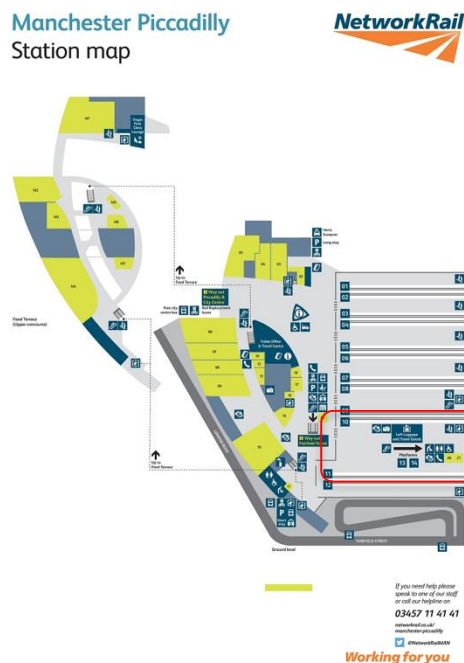
Leisure and  
business  
journeys

Passengers  
with  
disabilities

Mix of gender,  
socio-economic  
grades, ethnicities

# Platforms 13 and 14 are different

Apart from the rest of Manchester Piccadilly station, they are open to the elements, have fewer amenities and are often very busy



Boarding on platform 13 and 14 is not inside the main station



Access is via a traveller and takes 1-2 minutes to reach

There is a separate 'lounge' area at the top of the traveller most passengers will pass through to reach the platforms





# Passengers have raised concerns

Comments in Transport Focus's National Rail Passenger Survey highlight platforms 13 and 14 and concerns about the information available.

*"Inadequate information about platform layout - what/where is 14 A and 14 B - much confusion amongst irregular travellers. Inadequate and ill-informed staff. Too many train companies, not one person with overall knowledge. How do you know who to ask?"*

*"Platform 14 is shabby - really could do with an upgrade."*

*"Should be more platform information near platforms 13-14."*

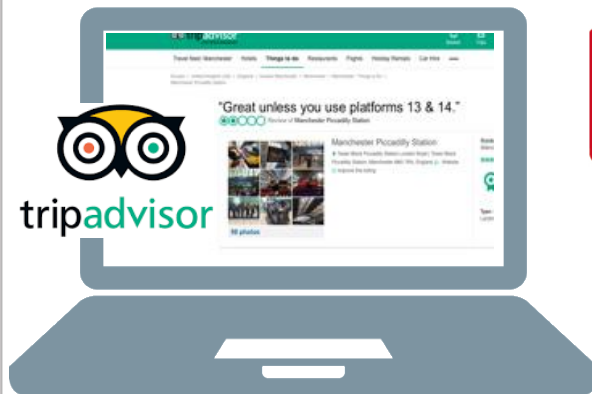
*"There was no screen with train arrival info on platform 13a, did not see any staff to ask."*

*"Platform 14 at MAN is primitive. I understand totally from an infrastructure standpoint because it's on a bypass line on a bridge, etc., It gets too overcrowded and is windswept. The rest of the station is ok. Platforms 13/14 have not changed in 40 years. GRIM."*

*"Unfortunately the train I boarded was delayed and I have always felt that there is not enough information provided at platform 13 & 14. There was probably an alternative train from a different platform but I would not be able to find this out without walking..."*

# Experiences can be less positive

Stories and tweets talk about issues with trains from this platform and a lack of comfort or amenities compared to the rest of the station as well as access being more difficult.



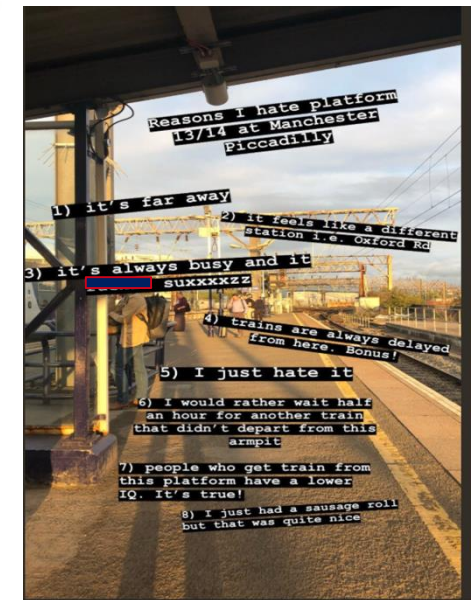
*"I beg Manchester Piccadilly stop making me trek to Platforms 13/14 to catch my train."*



*"Is there anything worse than your train coming into Manchester Piccadilly on platform 13/14? I think not."*



*"Nothing makes my heart sink more than getting to Manchester Piccadilly and finding my train leaves from Platform 13. I'd rather crawl to my destination over broken glass."*





# Changes have been made

Changes were made on the platforms to try to ease congestion and a new information system has been installed in the waiting lounge above the platforms.

## On the platform

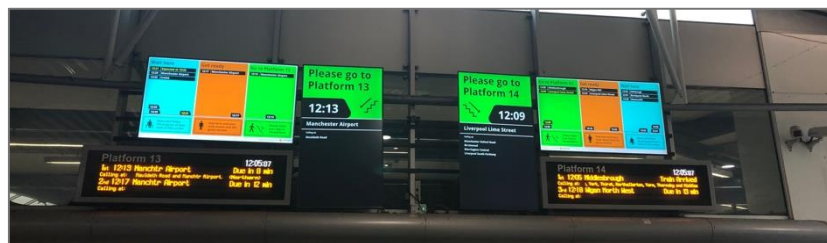


Both on platforms 13 and 14 red lines indicate where passengers should wait when there is no train at the platform. Staff enforce this.

Yellow box at the bottom of the stairs to reduce congestion on platform 14. Removal of seating/waiting area to make more space.



## In the lounge



New information screens which provide information on when to go down to the platform to wait for trains. These have changed since they were first launched...



Previous version of screens



## Experience of platforms 13 and 14

March 2019

# Experience of platforms 13/14

Consensus that they are not particularly pleasant, although this is not always mentioned spontaneously. Issues identified of:

## Overcrowding/ busy



Even at non-peak times there can be a lot of people on platforms. 'You need elbows out to fight your way on'

At peak times and if there are cancellations passengers describe as 'chaos'.

Timing arrival on the platform is considered carefully by regular passengers but with different strategies.

## Lack of seating



Waiting room has been removed from platform 14, and passengers noticed this. Whilst they would prefer seating they think it was probably taken away for good reason.

It does make platforms less comfortable. Less frequent passengers also note the lack of seating.

## Cold/ exposed



Platforms are not in the main station and are exposed to the elements at the sides.

Passengers say they are cold and damp.

"Open, exposed, cold, wet."



"Its not my favourite platform."



## Generally not pleasant



Its difficult for respondents to articulate but *observations* suggest that unlike the main station with its architecture to enjoy these platforms are quite bleak and the red lines and continual announcements (and staff 'shouting' instructions on platform 14) do not add to this experience.

It is quite dark in the evening.

# And what should change?

Passengers would like platforms 13 and 14 to be more comfortable but are not sure that's possible.

## Over-arching issue is that they are busy

Regular users have noticed changes that have been made, such as the red lines and the enforcement of these by staff. They have seen arguments and altercations as a result, but they generally welcome anything which makes them feel safer.

## Need for seating

Although much has been removed, there is seating at 13/14b. Some people just prefer to wait outside, could more seating be added while managing congestion?

## Need for shelter

Could passengers on the platforms be better sheltered from the elements? Many interchange here, could signposting or announcements on arrival tell people there is a waiting area upstairs – not all were aware.

## Generally not pleasant and 'spartan'

All the yellow boxes, red lines, and constant announcements make the platforms have a slightly edgy feel compared to 'usual' station platform. There isn't anything in the way of 'extras', even bins, or advertisements.

Respondents felt it had a different feel to the rest of the station, and more like a smaller station.

The main comment, as well as the lack of seating was that it was 'cold' - as would be expected at the time of year.

Passengers tended to understand why the waiting room had been removed but lamented this.

Their main priority was always boarding their train safely. Improvements were difficult to contemplate as they saw the physical space (being outside) and the high volume of traffic on the platform to be **barriers** to the most obvious improvements needed.



# Waiting lounge above platforms

Warmer than down on the platform itself and has seating but area is more 'acceptable' than 'very good' for passengers.

The lounge is...

Better than the platform

- Warmer
- Somewhere to buy a drink
- Somewhere to sit down
- Often less crowded than the platforms.

But not great

- Not enough of a point of difference for some to waiting on the platform itself
- Can still be cold 'not really a lounge'.

*"The lounge could be warmer, but at least its dry!"*

*"I expected more up here!"*

The waiting lounge might be missed entirely (and therefore also the information screens) by those interchanging at the platforms or entering the area by the back of the station, i.e. not via the traveller.



Lounge area is here.

# Staff are both high and low profile

Lots of staff on the platform, contrasting with almost no one in the lounge

## On the platform

- Staff wearing Northern and TransPennine uniforms
- Staff wearing yellow vests
- Often asked questions by passengers and observed to be helpful and polite
- Respondents are broadly positive about them, sensing they are doing the best they can, but are not hugely enthusiastic
- A couple had noted occasions where they felt that information could be better shared/ they could be more helpful, when there are issues with services, e.g. questions deflected to other members of staff ('its not Northern you'll need to ask someone from TransPennine').
- Passengers often check with staff that they are getting on the right train – based on past experience/ seeing people having got on the incorrect service
- There are fewer staff on the platform which serves the airport.

## In the lounge

- No staff spotted directly in lounge area
- One member of staff sometimes sits in the corridor leading to the platforms, so not in the lounge area directly
  - Few passengers approach (and this may be because there are few questions arising, as everyone spoken to felt they were clear on their arrangements).
  - Those that do engage seem to appear to be tourists/ travelling with luggage and therefore it is likely they are taking services to/ from the airport.
- One commuter observed passengers tended to ask each other in the lounge in lieu of any staff presence.



# Do passengers wait in the lounge?

## Some do and some don't

### Overcrowding/ busy – a reason to go to the platform



Fear of **missing the train** because of being unable to get on means passengers may choose to wait on platform / go straight to platform rather than passing some of the time in the lounge.

As well as congestion on the platform itself it can be to do with getting to the platform through the sea of people who are disembarking from services.

There is a sense you need to stand and get your 'position' in order to be able to board / get a seat. Passengers look at people walking past them in the lounge and wonder if they too are going to board 'their' train.

### Overcrowding/ busy – a reason to wait in the lounge



Some do not feel safe and just want to avoid being there.

*I've just texted my husband to say about this new system [screens], I like it, it makes me feel safer, I hope its safe on the platform*



*Are all these people going to get on my train?*



### Wait in the lounge because platform is not comfortable

*Cold, rainy, blowy*



*Its seedy, dingy and dismal*



Some of those who are aware of what the platforms are like in terms of amenities and comfort prefer to stay upstairs in the waiting lounge for as long as possible before they go down to the platform.

Often, they work the time out themselves – they think that the information screens allow too much time.

*Its telling me to go, but its too early*



However any lack of comfort is trumped for some by wanting to get to the platform in order to be secure of getting on the train. If passengers know it's a busy service they may go to their platform earlier.



## Information and reaction to the new screens

March 2019

# Types of information available

There is a range of different types of train departure information available on the platforms and in the lounge.

On the platform

In the lounge

General departures



Platform specific

Passengers mentioned a lack of information on the platform about where to wait for each coach of trains yet to arrive

Other information includes audio announcements in the lounge and platform. Staff are also available on the platform and during the middle of the day there was a member of staff near the lounge.

Three types of visual information provided  
1. and 2. is information specific to platforms 13 & 14



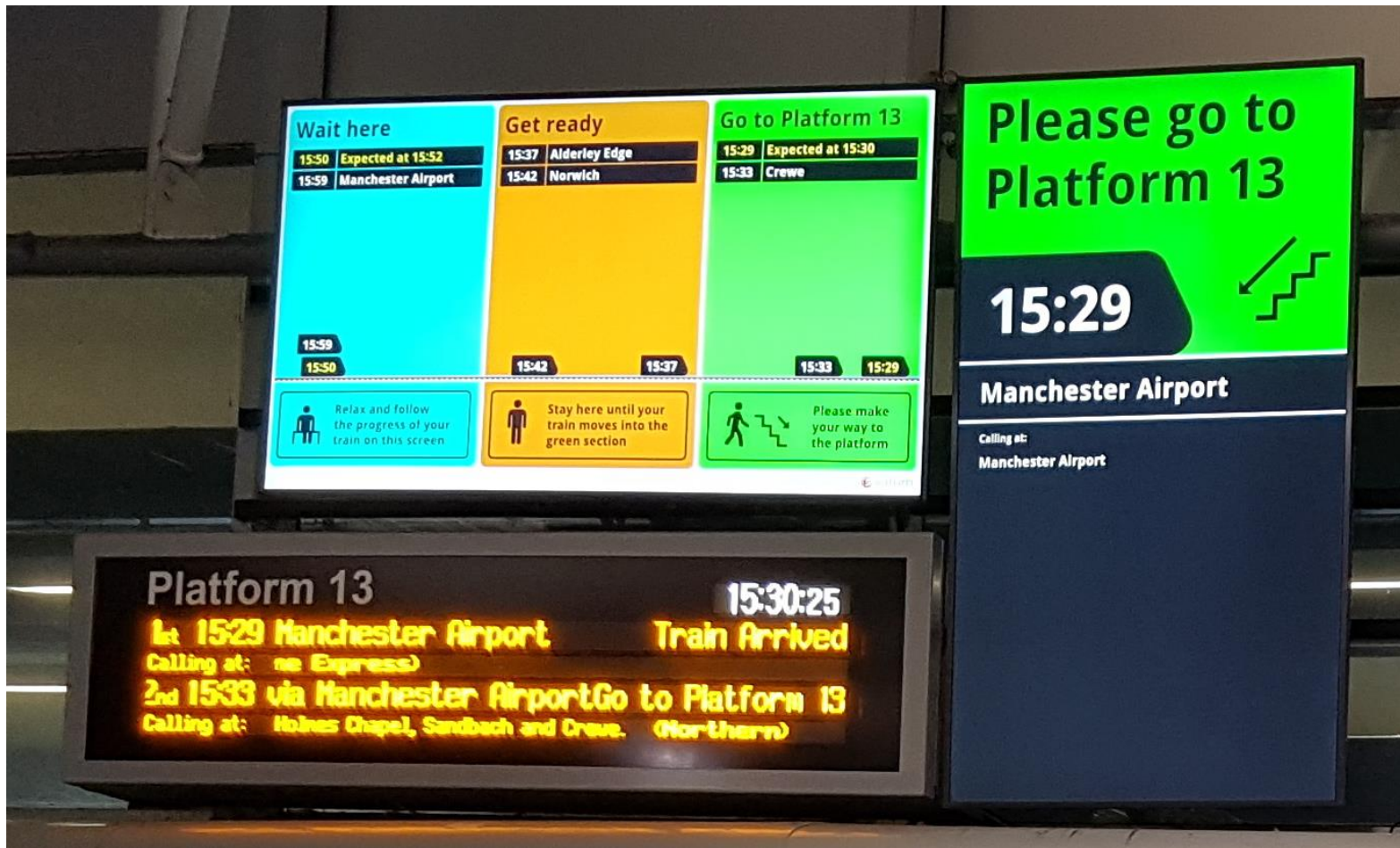
1. New screens

2. Traditional platform 13 and 14 specific boards



3. General departures (all platforms)

# Information in the lounge





# New screens add to range of info



## Traditional platform specific boards

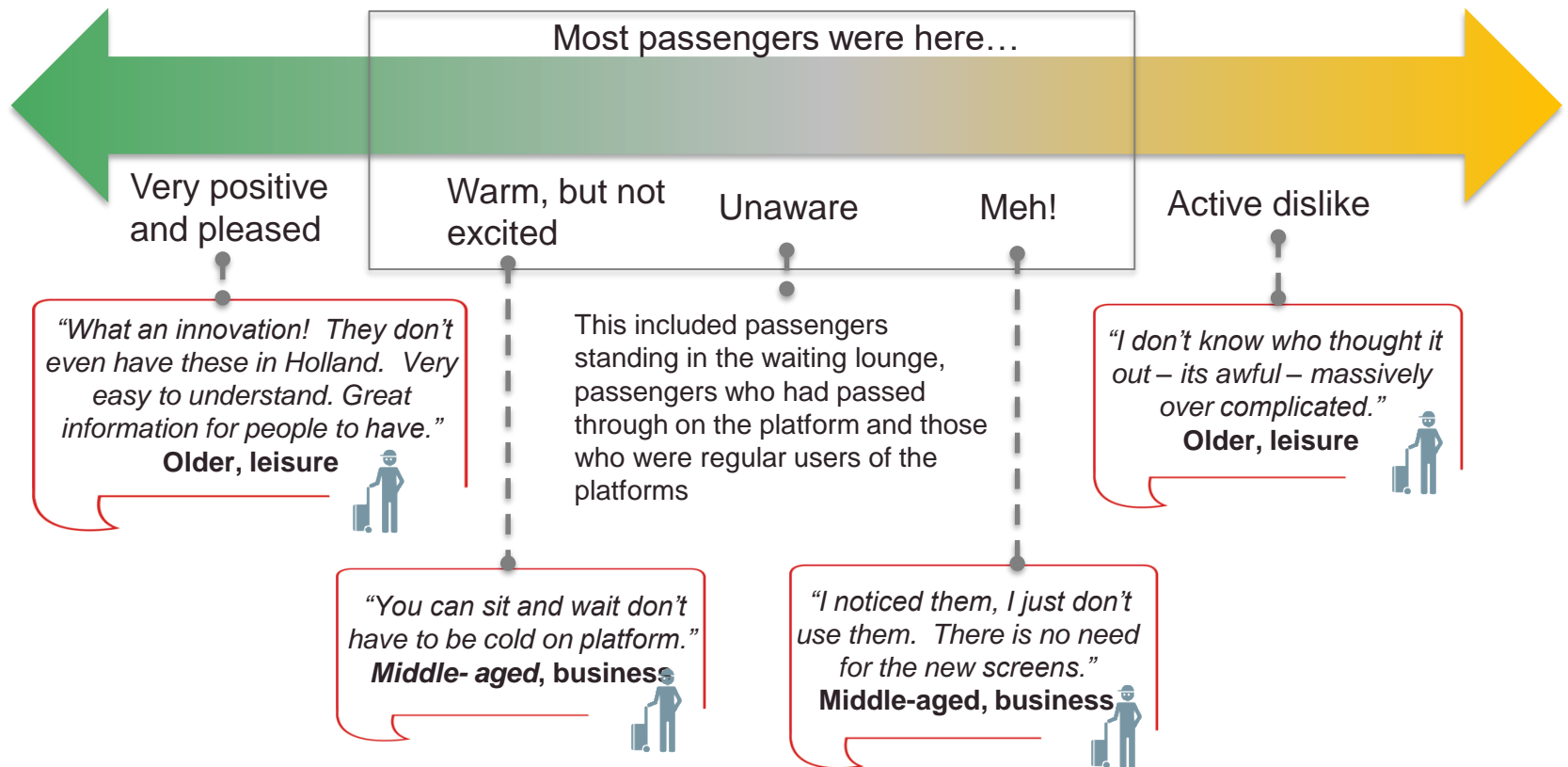
- State the order of departures (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> etc)
- Show how many minutes until a train is **due** into the platform
- Give **some** instructions as to what to do, ie 'wait in lounge' (can conflict with new screens)
- Show all the calling points of a train
- *Scrolling so not all trains and information visible on the display at one time.*

## ← New platform specific screens

- Show more upcoming departures from 13/14
- Show recommended instructions for each
- Show expected time of arrival and if there is a delay (but it's less clear)
- Visually represent the order they are coming into the platform
- *Don't show stopping points, only destination*
- *Less clear how many minutes until a train is arriving.*

# Reactions to the new screens

- There was a mix of reactions to the new screens... from excited to annoyed





# How were they unaware?

Passengers sitting or standing metres away from the new information displays had not always noticed them.

Those on platforms also did not always recall them, despite having passed under them.

Why is that?



*"If you are not familiar with the screens you might think it's a poster."*

**Middle aged, commuter**



**On the face of it, it seems odd – the screens are large and bright and different but...**

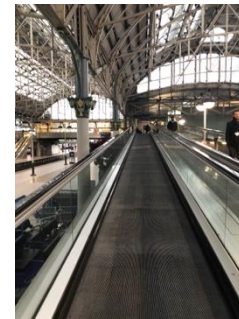
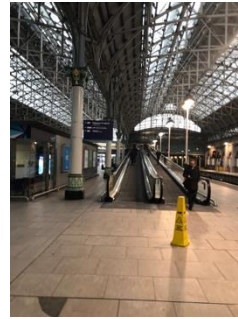
- They are quite static especially compared with the traditional, platform specific boards underneath which scroll with the destinations
- They look very different to the way in which train information is usually conveyed Because the 'traditional' displays remain, passengers find them and look no further. Passengers are looking for black boards with yellow information on them
- The text is smaller compared to the traditional boards
- There is no signposting telling passengers that this is departure information
- Some thought that the screens looked like posters or adverts
- Other observations made were that they lacked the 'stand out' that the yellow text on black boards have
- **Many passengers are not really 'browsing' for information, they just look for exactly what they need to know.**

# How were they unaware? (2)



Illuminated posters next to information screens in main concourse

*These examples show us how passengers in a hurry can miss the screens despite their size and prominence*



Travellator up to waiting lounge

*Perhaps an opportunity here to message on the way 'check the screens in the lounge area'*



Posters on the way – some are simple colours and graphics (like the screens)



View entering lounge



View closer to screens

*Perhaps an opportunity here to signpost 'Departures'*

# Detailed reaction - positive

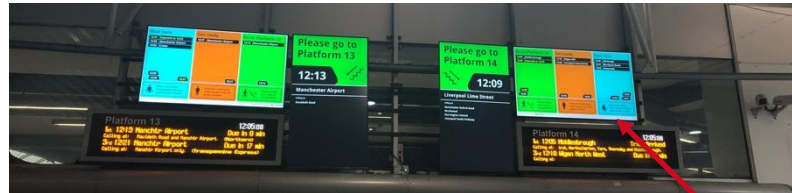
Some passengers liked the new screens because they were thought to be modern, new, visual and different. They liked the symbols.

Observations that that the station was trying something different.

Those aware that there have been issues with overcrowding on the platforms thought they might help have helped ease congestion. *But passengers focused on their own experiences so difficult for them to comment on if it had been a success. Also difficult to separate out as issues always exacerbated when there are cancellations.*

Even if used other information as well as the new screen they were a good 'confirmation' of their decision.

**Those who liked them often thought them self explanatory – they understood the what the colours meant and what it was trying to do. Sometimes they thought they were easier to use than the traditional screens and very clear.**



*"Its telling me to wait, now its on get ready – I'll better think about going."*

**Middle aged, leisure**



Indication of relative position more useful for those really regular users of the platforms

*"I hope it will stop overcrowding, it can be like a scrum."*

**Middle aged, business**



*"You can sit comfortably, it will tell you when to go downstairs."*

**Middle aged, commuter**



*"They are airport style aren't they?"*

**Younger, business**



*"Its self explanatory, they tell you what you need to do."*

**Middle aged, business**



# Detailed reaction - negative

## Ability to read information

**Text felt to be too small.** This comment applied to passengers viewing from the rear of the lounge but also those nearer to it. Contrast and colours not felt to help the stand out of the text.

**This was the most common criticism.** The observation was made by those who were older and younger. They sometimes compared to the size of text (almost twice the size) and stand out of the traditional screens, which passengers are used to.

## Different directions

One left to right, one right to left (although only 2 passengers observed this)

## Colours

Didn't like the colours  
Didn't find them intuitive (e.g. blue for 'stay here')



## Doesn't 'stand out'

Not eye catching, despite the colours

## Too different

Useful if they had a way to build familiarity, or perhaps announcements to look at the screens.

*"Its like some tennis stats screens I saw in the summer, its graphic design gone mad! Its to busy there are too many colours and the space is too small."*

**Younger, leisure**



# Detailed reaction - negative

## Confusing or not intuitive

This could be both in regards to the way the information is displayed and also *what* it is trying to convey.

Dislike of term 'get ready' – what does it mean, generally slightly ambiguous, almost suggesting there will be a rush or race to get to the platform

- No idea how long 'get ready' status is for
- Trains on 'get ready' could also say 'wait in lounge' underneath on the traditional screen which seemed to some to be a contradiction

**It did take some passengers a while to digest what the new screens said** – they had to think about it and even then did not notice all the elements (relative position of trains on the bottom).

**They didn't always understand what the different colours meant.**



## Not adding anything

**A sense that the information provided was not anything *new* or *additional* to that given in other displays, and therefore not useful or needed.**

Some felt that the traditional style boards could do something similar if they were bigger.

*"I understand what its trying to do but its not useful, I don't need it to tell me, I can make my own judgement."*

**Younger, commuter**



## Not made a difference

Issues on the platforms are to do with cancellations/delays.



# Response to the new screens

- **Some passengers understood the idea behind the screens – of helping passengers to avoid going down to platforms before they needed to.**
- Regular passengers that understood how busy they could get were most likely to 'get it'.
- Not everyone would initially trust the information on screen – they would also check the time and make their own judgement as to when to WAIT, GET READY or GO TO PLATFORM.
- One passenger sat in lounge and waited because she felt the instruction suggested she was **not allowed** to access the platform at that time.
- **Ultimately though, some passengers just like go down to platforms and some passengers prefer to wait for as long as possible in the lounge area either for comfort or because of being able to best decide how to make their journey.**

*"I did look, it said 'wait here', but I came straight down."*

**Middle aged, leisure**



*"Before Christmas there were cancellations but some people were still going down to platforms."*

**Younger, leisure**



*And other passengers are aware of this*



# Summary and conclusions

## The platforms

- The platforms are not a very comfortable place to wait for a train, they are often crowded, with little shelter from the elements and limited seating.
- There is some recognition from passengers that the lack of space on the platforms is a constraint, but more shelter is desired.
- Passengers recognise the shouted instructions from staff about where to stand are intended to manage crowding and keep them safe, but some say waiting on the platforms can be an 'edgy' experience.
- Despite this there are some passengers who will find it difficult to break the habit of 'getting their place' on the platform in order to be amongst the first to get on their train.

## The new information screens

- There is something very different about the screens and there is an appreciation by some passengers of trying something new
- Passengers who regularly use the platforms understand why this system has been put in place – to try and encourage passengers to stay in the lounge area
- The screens can get missed – because they are so different to normal railway information.
- Text size is an issue – especially compared to the traditional platform screens underneath.
- In general the suggestions of 'wait', 'get ready' and 'go' are seen as a confirmation rather than adhered to exactly.