LU Customer Language 2 Research Debrief
12038

June 2012

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Transport for London

Contents

Service updates at 11:16

Now Later This weekend

H'smith & City	Severe delays
Bakerloo	Good service
Central	Good service
Circle	Good service
District	Good service
DLR	Good service
Jubilee	Good service
Metropolitan	Good service
Northern	Good service
Overground	Minor delays
Piccadilly	Good service
Victoria	Good service
Waterloo & City	Good service

▸ Buses   ▸ Roads   ▸ River

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Background

- London Underground (LU) is reviewing the impact and effectiveness of language used to inform customers of problems on the system

- Design of the service update naming convention (Good Service, Minor Delays and Severe Delays) focussed on shaping customer behaviour eg stay on system vs reroute
  - However, there is now a need to review the service updates language conventions and whether there is opportunity to update the current conventions

- Six one hour groups were conducted amongst customers to explore response to current naming conventions and viable alternatives
  - Groups included a representation of LU users including Commuter and Leisure; a mix of life-stage; Inner and Outer London

- Research was conducted by 2CV in June 2012

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Service updates in context

Customers are me-centric and journey led when on the Tube

Expected experience

When something goes wrong

- On their journeys customers are prepared for the expected experience:
  - Primarily: how long it will take
  - Secondarily: how it will feel (comfort, crowding, temperature)

- When something goes wrong, they need to re-think their expectations:
  - Primary need: how much longer will it take?
 - Secondary need: what will it feel like?

Customers want to understand personal rather than system impact

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Two customer journey types and experiences

Commuter	**Leisure/Utility**

Commuter

- More time pressured
- Have calculated journey time quite precisely
- Can be quickly frustrated when problems occur
- But, more likely to be confident in travelling
- And more familiar with system and typical problems that can arise on their line – language is conditioned and therefore easier for them to **automatically process**
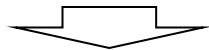
More accustomed to disruptions and system language

Leisure/Utility

- Less time pressured and often have more flexibility built into their journey plan
- Often less familiar with system or that particular route
- Less likely to be aware of the problems that can occur and what the language means
- And therefore less familiar with alternatives and less confident in re-routing
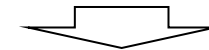
Less certain of what system language means and what to do next

Commuters are more conditioned to the system and language used and respond more automatically

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Alternative naming conventions

Customers are trying to develop heuristics and automatic responses to fit with system language

- Good, Minor and Suspended are all relatively easy to respond to when heard/seen
- Severe requires more effortful thinking and weighing up of options based on a combination of information/factors: service updates, time between trains, behaviour of other customers, level of overcrowding

Commuter	Leisure/Utility

- Commuters have learnt roughly what Severe might mean for them and their journeys:
  - Some don't feel it's a problem/is akin to minor on most days it's used
  - Some experience repeated problems/ overcrowding and have a back-up route
  - Use context of facts (ie PUT, signal failure) and how the system is working to decide if it really is severe

- Leisure users are less confident in managing journeys and more likely to need extra information from staff when on system
  - May be more likely to avoid the system entirely on occasions and can perceive the service to be beset with problems

Current interpretations have taken effort for customers to learn, Commuters in particular are more conditioned to this language

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Customers' preferred service status language

- Commuters preferred the language they were used to (Good, Minor, Severe) but when asked to choose an alternative they were able to consider different options.
- Presented with alternatives customers preferred two key options:
  - Both had three steps – a logical and easy to learn model (like traffic lights)

Good service	**Good service**
Short delays	**Minor delays**
Long delays	**Major delays**

- Time based definitions/impact on customer
- Can describe time taken between trains and/or speed of trains

- In keeping with current conventions
- Delivers emotional descriptor that is easy to respond to:
  - Clearer that they need to do something when hear Major
- Major seems marginally less serious than Severe

Both have potential to be used on system

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Short and Long delays are more time based, less emotive and could describe customer experience

- More time based and could create a clearer solution for customers
  - Short = a few minutes
  - Long = long wait and slow moving

- However, customers less likely to respond behaviourally:
  - Severe/Major prompt a more active response from customers as more emotive

- Cognitive dissonance (psychological distress caused by a difference between expected and actual experienced) could build over time if these don't equate to time based disruptions
  - Is there an opportunity to reconsider classifications in line with customer experience to make language feel more customer-centric – ie, in line with cumulative time added to journeys
  - Needs to align with time displayed- eg 3 minutes between trains means does not mean long delays for most customers
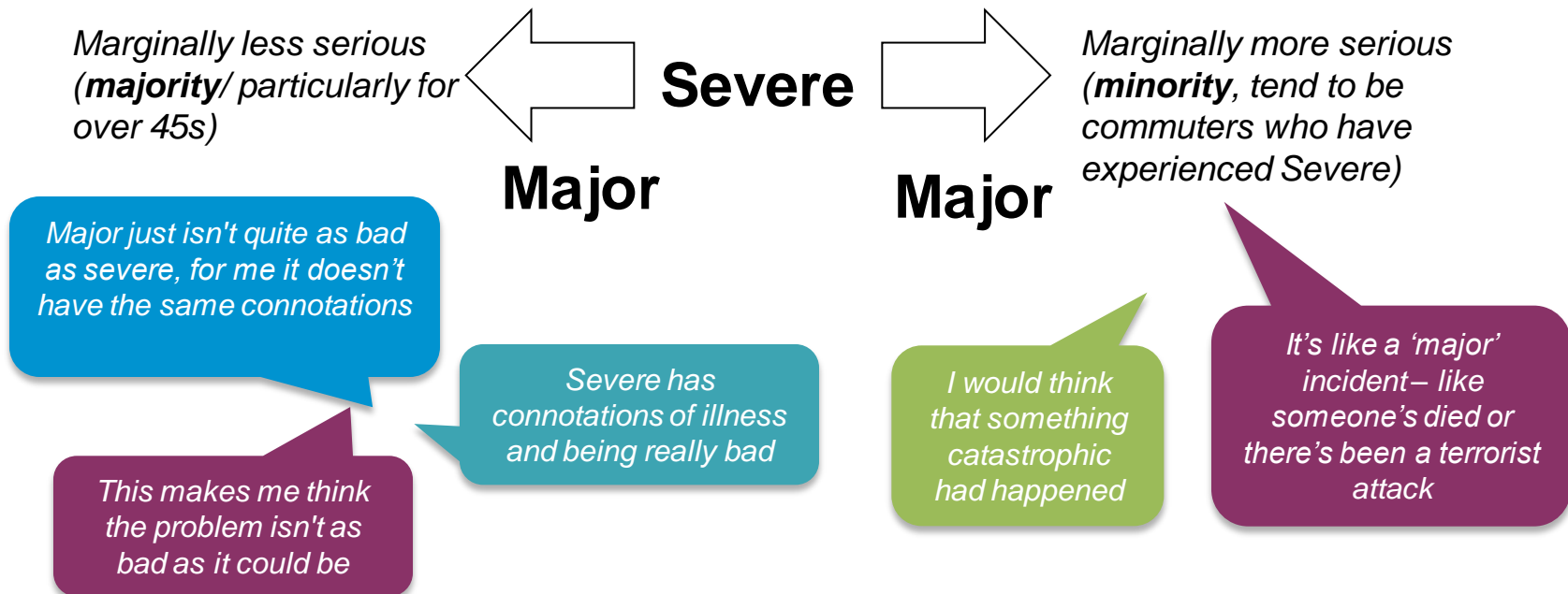
> *If I called my boss and said there would be 'long' delays he'd be like, ok; but if I called and said 'major' he'd think oh god! She's so dramatic about it!*

> *Long and short sound a bit more factual, they could work*

To deliver to customer expectations, these definitions would need to be used more consistently in terms of time impact for different customers

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Major delays more akin to Severe, but with slightly less serious connotations

- Customers agreed these were broadly synonyms of one-another, with minor differences depending on associations, however, on the whole, Major was felt to be marginally less serious than Severe

Marginally less serious (**majority**/ particularly for over 45s)

Severe

Major

Marginally more serious (**minority**, tend to be commuters who have experienced Severe)

Major

Major just isn't quite as bad as severe, for me it doesn't have the same connotations

This makes me think the problem isn't as bad as it could be

Severe has connotations of illness and being really bad

I would think that something catastrophic had happened

It's like a 'major' incident– like someone's died or there's been a terrorist attack

Differences are marginal and over time meaning would come in-line with 'severe' to mean the same as customers become conditioned to system language

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Some alternatives are rejected

Normal service	Extended delays	Delays – please seek alternative routes

Normal service
- Inconclusive
- Could mean minor delays
- Desire for more positivity/confidence in service
- Normal is only one step away from 'bad'

Extended delays
- Inconclusive
- Makes you feel depressed
- Raises uncertainty in customers' minds
- Negative connotations
  - May never get better
  - TfL have Extended the service out of choice not need

Delays – please seek alternative routes
- Incomplete and unhelpful
- Distrust in service updates means customers do not take this advice readily
- Can leave customer in decision paralysis

I don't like normal – I want to hear good and feel that everything is ok, normal would make me wonder

Extended delays doesn't sound good – this sounds like it would last forever!

I would think oh my god take the bus!

I want to be able to make a decision about what to do on my journey and this doesn't help me to do this

Why are TfL 'Extending' the delays, it feels like they've not done something

It sounds like they're doing engineering works and this was extended

Makes customers feel less certain and less positive about the service

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Limited service was preferred to Special service

Limited service	**Special service**

Limited service

- More descriptive
- Less trains running
- Clear for customers what it means

It tells you what is happening, it's to the point
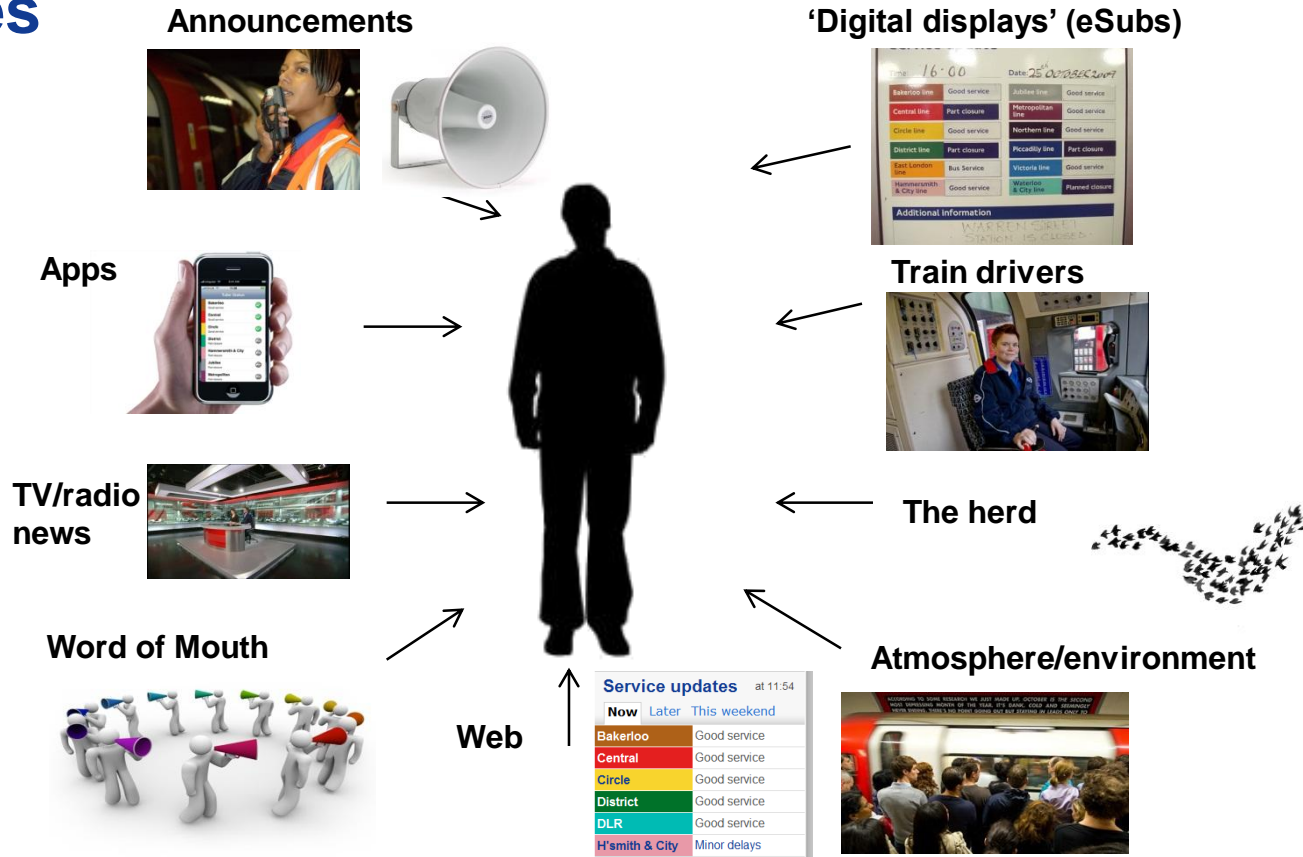
Special service

- Less descriptive
- Unclear – is it better, is it worse?
- Dissonance causes frustration

It is trying to be a bit deceptive isn't it – like it's telling you you're getting something good when actually it's something worse

Limited most in line with customers needs

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Customers' views of service updates – consistency is key

Information on service performance comes from several sources

Announcements

'Digital displays' (eSubs)

Apps

Train drivers

TV/radio news

The herd

Word of Mouth

Web

Atmosphere/environment

Information is pieced together to inform next steps

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Four key time-points for service updates information

Pre-journey	Arrival at station/ pre-barriers	On platform	On train

Pre-journey

- Less committed to journey/mode
- Weighing up options
- More open to change

Arrival at station/ pre-barriers

- Committed to embarking on journey on the Tube
- Have mentally entered into contract with the Tube
- Other options less conscious
- Have to switch from system 1 to system 2 thinking (effortful) if something goes wrong
- But not trapped in system/haven't paid

On platform

- Have paid for journey but haven't gone anywhere yet
- Feel trapped in system/stationary
- Feel less free to change route
- If leave you get charged anyway (or hassle to reimburse)
- Other options may take longer even with delays – getting out of system/onto another mode

On train

- On journey/have made progress
- In care of driver
- More direct/personal information
  - How long your train is being held for

At each stage customers have different choices to make and delays have a different emotional impact

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Some service updates language helps customers feel in the loop and in control

Good service	Minor delays	Suspended/part closure/ line closure
▪ Positive affirmation ▪ Know you can 'relax' and everything is working	▪ There are small problems/disruptions ▪ You'll be a few minutes late/it might be a bit busier but you will get there	▪ Clear and simple: 'it's not working' ▪ Need to reroute if affected

I feel reassured that my journey won't be disrupted and that I will get to my destination on time

It says brace yourself for a bit of discomfort or a few extra minutes but the situation is under control

You know it's not working so you just move on

It's better than 'Normal' it's saying it's performing well. Normal could be slow and congested

Easy to process and decide next steps – no need for customers to make choices

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Severe delays spans a broader range of journey impacts

Severe delays

- A bigger impact than Minor ie 10-20 minutes on your journey
- For some customers LU's definition of Severe isn't '*Severe*' (Leisure users)
- For Commuters time/experience is more significantly impacted (due to increased passenger volumes) but they are more likely to be able to re-route

- The service is not moving and an hour is added to your journey
- You get trapped in a crowd or out with no other options

I've been on a train for an hour before, that's Severe

The next train came 5 minutes later and it went a bit slower but I was only 20 minutes late, it's not really 'Severe' is it?

Makes it harder for customers to decide what to do next – do they hope for the best or abort their journey plan?

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However, from a customer perspective, all language conventions can currently be used inconsistently

- Customers feel service updates are not used consistently or accurately on system at present
  - And therefore Good, Minor, Severe are seen as less factual and more abstract/conceptual than the cause of the delay

> *It says there is a good service but I'm stuck in a tunnel! How does that work?!*

> *When they say there are severe delays and then the Tube comes 2 minutes later obviously I am happy that the Tube is there, but it seems strange that they call it severe when it's pretty much a normal service*
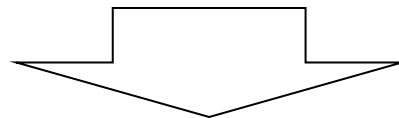
Inhibiting the development of heuristics and ability to trust in service updates

It is dissonance and perceived unreliability of information that affects reputation more so than the language used

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Frustration caused by cognitive dissonance demonstrated in social media

Pie chart values: 0%, 4%, 24%, 12%, 13%, 6%, 26%, 15%
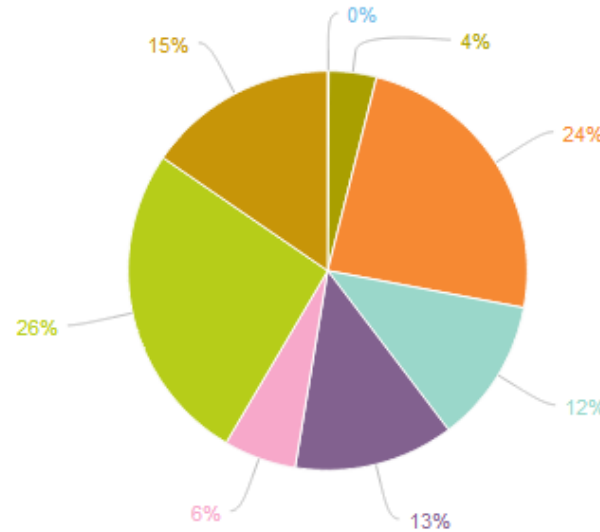
Legend:
- 'customer action'
- 'customer incident'
- 'good service'
- 'minor delay'
- 'no service'
- 'person under train'
- 'severe delay'
- 'signal failure'

Andrew Wingate @czantra — Follow

Interesting description of 'good service' on Picadilly line when it takes four trains to get to Cockfosters from King's Cross. @TfLofficial

G-man @Redbus51 — Follow

Oops some1 has sneezed at North Greenwich & stopped Jubilee line. Not quite good service stated. In fact not any service. #TfL #jubileeline

Stéphane @leschneid — Follow

Waitting 12 min for a tube is not what I call "minor delays" @tfl

Connie @helloimyswaifu — Follow

"minor delays on the central line" more like major delays omg i was stuck underground for nearly an hour

Severe delays and good service are the most reported incidents in social media; 'good service' comments are negative due to cognitive dissonance

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Customers are keen to understand the nature of the problem in decoding what is happening

Nature of problem acts as anchor for customers to understand seriousness and impact and helps them feel in control (knowing what's happening underground allays fears); eg

Person under a train	Person ill on train	Signal failure	Faulty train
▪ Service out of use	▪ Need to get off system but will be resolved quickly	▪ More technical issue ▪ Will probably get resolved quickly/ system can keep running	▪ May take a while to get 'out of service' but not a big issue

I wouldn't hang around if I heard this, I would find another way to get to work

You know there is a problem and it is quite serious but they usually sort this out quite quickly

You hear this quite a lot, the Tube usually keeps running

I would think that they would handle this quite quickly and I wouldn't be impacted too much

Due to inconsistent use of service performance language, the cause of the delay often provides the most concrete and factual information

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In-the-moment decisions are strongly influenced by the herd and environment

You know when the extra staff come onto the platform that it's not going anywhere and they are doing safety and crowd management. You have to assess how easy it is to get out then.

At Stratford everyone was emptying out because it was closed, but then it poured with rain and everyone flooded in again

If everyone else is getting off you get caught up in the moment and follow, you wouldn't want to be the last person on the train

If it's really hot and uncomfortable, I don't like staying down there

You get a sense of how it is going to be by how different it feels to how it is normally – what's the atmosphere, what are other people doing, how much longer is it taking

Customers susceptible to external influences when deciding what to do next

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At present, information relayed is LU-centric rather than customer-centric

London Underground

- Cross-network communications
- Managing holistically
- Focussed on getting people off system/safety
- Engineering focussed

It feels like they're thinking about themselves and what it means for them and their trains, not what it means for me – 10 minutes isn't a severe delay – that's ok for me

Me-centric

- In the moment/localised
- Want to know how long it will take for their journey and how their experience will be affected
- Focussed on specific part of line, not entire line
- Inconsistency means they can't trust LU's description of situation
- Often prepared for some delays

Desire for a more customer-centric solution

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Apps and driver announcements are examples of when information is customer-centric

Apps

- Proactive delivery of information
- Delivered off-system and when customers are prepared to adapt
- Uses 'flagging' system to emotionally alert customers to action required

Driver announcements

- Customer-centric as delivered to them personally
- Localised to that train
- Little dissonance between what driver says and what customer experiences

In-the-moment information that is working well to meet customer needs

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Some problems occur with information delivery

- Audio announcements often criticised as inaudible
  - PA system
  - Announcement
  - Environment/other passengers

- Information not always drawing attention in
  - Desire for information design that is easy to understand at a glance/draws your attention to the relevant information

- Information not always integrated across communication points
  - Journey planner still lets you plan journey when showing disruptions

Making information harder for people to process and work out their next steps

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Summary

Summary

- Customers are me-centric when travelling on the Tube, system performance information is important for understanding if/how their journey will be affected and to stay in control.

- Two three-stage naming conventions were selected as potential options for developing service performance language:
  - Good service, Short delays, Long delays: feels logical and time based; has the potential to bring language more in line with customer experience
  - Good service, Minor delays, Major delays: delivers more emotionally directive information and is in line with existing convention with Major perceived to be slightly less serious than Severe

- Beyond naming conventions, customers called for service performance information that was more consistent and in line with their experience. The current use of language feels more LU-centric (network led) which is in discord with customer needs (me-centric and journey led)

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Appendix

Research objectives

- *To explore the language used by LU to describe delays currently and inform the development of a new naming convention for delays*

- *To understand how various naming conventions impact perceptions of service reliability*

- *To understand the context of how people look for information on delays and how they interact with the information provided*

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Methodology and sample

- 6 x 1 hour focus groups
- Each group contained a mix of SEGs, gender and Tube lines used

Group	Life Stage	Primary use of LU	Location
1	Pre-family (25-35yrs)	Commuter – travels on LU mainly to work	Inner London
2	Family (30-45yrs)	Commuter – travels on LU mainly to work	Outer London
3	Post-family (45+yrs)	Commuter – travels on LU mainly to work	Inner London
4	Pre-family (25-35yrs)	Leisure – travels on LU mainly for leisure	Outer London
5	Family (30-45yrs)	Leisure – travels on LU mainly for leisure	Inner London
6	Post-family (45+yrs)	Leisure – travels on LU mainly for leisure	Outer London

- Research conducted by 2CV in June 2012

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Other audience differences are evident

Inner/Outer

- Inner more flexible in adapting to change:
  - More alternative options of similar time value
- Outer may have less options

Travel mindset

- More flexible and often less time pressured (tend to be Younger/Inner London)
- More organised travel behaviour with hard-wired expectations - feel less open to changing plans

Special journeys

- Some journeys have more at stake emotionally:
  - A flight to catch
  - An important meeting
  - Theatre tickets

Time and alterative options can affect emotional impact of delays

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