Rail Delivery Group
Online Ticket Sales
Mystery Shopping 2017
Report of Findings

December 2017
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Executive Summary</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Objectives</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.1</td>
<td>Websites</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.2</td>
<td>Scenarios</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.3</td>
<td>Weighting</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Detailed Findings</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Length of Transaction</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.1</td>
<td>How Long in Total Did Your Ticket Purchase Take?</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.2</td>
<td>How Many Different Web Pages Did You Access to Complete Your Purchase?</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Satisfaction with Online Ticket Purchase</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.1</td>
<td>How Easy was it to Find Information about Ticket Types &amp; Conditions?</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.2</td>
<td>How Satisfied Were You with the Information about Ticket Types &amp; Conditions?</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.3</td>
<td>How Satisfied were you with the Clarity of Instructions for using the Website?</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>The Ticket Purchased</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.1</td>
<td>Were You Able to Purchase a Ticket?</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.2</td>
<td>How Confident Were You That You Got the Correct Ticket?</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.3</td>
<td>Was the Correct Ticket Purchased?</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Opinions of the Websites</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.1</td>
<td>How Satisfied Were You with the Following Aspects of the Website?</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.2</td>
<td>How Likely Would You Be to Recommend this Website to a Friend?</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.3</td>
<td>How Does this Website Compare with Others Used for Goods &amp; Services?</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Receipt of Tickets</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.1</td>
<td>Was Your Ticket Available to Collect?</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.2</td>
<td>How Many Days Did it Take for Your Ticket to Arrive by Post?</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>Terminology and Suggested Improvements</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6.1</td>
<td>Was there any Terminology you did not understand?</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6.2</td>
<td>What improvement would make the Website more user friendly?</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Appendix – Questionnaire</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Executive Summary

This report summarises the results of RDG’s 2017 online mystery shopping survey. The sample, which included a total of 700 online ticket purchase transactions, encompassed all of the main TOC and third party ticketing websites, covered all the main types of tickets and was designed to be representative of current national online rail ticket purchase patterns.

As in 2016, 100% of mystery shoppers were able to purchase the correct ticket, that is, when marked against the rail fares database, the ticket obtained was the most appropriate for their specific journey and travel scenario.

The result in 2016 was a marked improvement on the 94% accuracy level recorded in 2015, but with two years at 100%, the findings suggest that online ticket purchasers can access the best value and most appropriate ticket for their journey with confidence, regardless of whether they chose to use a TOC or a third party website.

The average time taken for an online ticket purchase fell significantly this year, to 6 minutes, 20 seconds, compared with 7 minutes 54 seconds in 2016. This reduction in transaction time is primarily due to a reduction in time spent on Third Party websites, where the average time taken was 4 minutes 53 seconds in 2017.

This reduction in transaction time occurred despite the fact that the number of web pages viewed by mystery shoppers in undertaking their online purchase was only marginally lower than in 2016, at an average of 6.8 pages.

As in previous years, the large majority of shoppers were satisfied with the ease of finding and the content of information on ticket types and conditions, in addition to the general clarity of the information shown presented on screen.

Almost every mystery shopper commented that the rail websites used were welcoming and appropriate for a rail service, but a significant proportion (17%) of those using third party websites felt the site was old fashioned in appearance. Almost all of these comments referred to thetrainline.com.
2. Introduction

An annual research programme, designed to measure the accuracy of ticket retailing, has been carried out by RDG (formerly ATOC) since 1998. Initially the exercise focused solely on tickets sold at station ticket offices, but telesales and online research was introduced from 2002 and, reflecting changing patterns in purchase behaviour, the telesales channel was replaced by ticket vending machine (TVM) purchases in 2012.

Since 2013 the research has been conducted by ESA Market Research.

This report focuses on the outcomes of the Online Mystery Shopping exercise.

2.1 Objectives

The key objective of the overall mystery shopping programme is to evaluate the accuracy of rail sector retailing; however, in the case of online (as well as TVM) sales, there is no direct personal involvement on the part of the retailer. For this reason, the exercise seeks to determine the ability of the mystery shopper, as a representative of the ticket buying public, to correctly navigate the website in order to purchase the correct and best value ticket for their particular travel scenario.

2.2 Methodology

The mystery shopping elements of the programme were conducted by mystery shoppers who are representative of the general ticket buying population and have no more knowledge of the railway or its fares than the average member of the public.

Mystery shoppers were asked to record whether they felt confident that they had been sold the correct ticket for their given scenario. In addition to this self-evaluation however, the tickets were also ‘marked’ by ESA staff, fully trained in the use of the rail fares database, therefore providing a more accurate assessment as to whether the most appropriate ticket had been sold for that specific journey and travel scenario.

In addition the mystery shoppers were asked to provide feedback on the look and feel of the website, any jargon that they encountered and any improvements that they would suggest.

The online mystery shopping fieldwork took place between 7th July and 10th October, 2017.

The full questionnaire used in the survey is included as an appendix.

Unless otherwise stated, charts included in the report are based on the total sample of 700.
2.3 Sample

Sampling was carried out using proportional simple random sampling with the probability of a record being chosen proportional to the number of issues. LENNON data was collected for Online sales. Scenarios were created for each chosen record based on the ticket type for the record. The sample comprised a total of 700 Online transactions.

2.3.1 Websites

The sample included Operator websites, plus third party retailers as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Retailer Category</th>
<th>Sample size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL TOCS</td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London and South East Operators</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.greateranglia.co.uk">www.greateranglia.co.uk</a></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.c2c-online.co.uk">www.c2c-online.co.uk</a></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.chilternrailways.co.uk">www.chilternrailways.co.uk</a></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.londonmidland.com">www.londonmidland.com</a></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.southeasternrailway.co.uk">www.southeasternrailway.co.uk</a></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.thameslinkrailway.com">www.thameslinkrailway.com</a></td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long Distance Operators</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.crosscountrytrains.co.uk">www.crosscountrytrains.co.uk</a></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.gwr.com">www.gwr.com</a></td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.virgintrains.co.uk">www.virgintrains.co.uk</a></td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.virgintrainseastcoast.com">www.virgintrainseastcoast.com</a></td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional operators</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wwwarrivatrainswales.co.uk</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.northernrail.org">www.northernrail.org</a></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.scotrail.co.uk">www.scotrail.co.uk</a></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.tpexpress.co.uk">www.tpexpress.co.uk</a></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Party retailers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.thetrainline.com">www.thetrainline.com</a></td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.mytrainticket.co.uk">www.mytrainticket.co.uk</a></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.redspottedhanky.com">www.redspottedhanky.com</a></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.3.2 Scenarios

The scenarios used for this Online Mystery Shopping survey were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Scenario Description</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Cheapest, Two Weeks Ahead</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Cheapest, Return Same Day</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Cheapest, Single</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Cheapest, Return 1 week later</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>First Class</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Senior Railcard</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Family Railcard</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>16-25 Railcard</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Network Railcard</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Two Together Railcard</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Travelling with One Other Adult</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Travelling with Two Other Adults</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>700</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mystery shoppers were further instructed regarding the means of ticket delivery/collection, as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ticket Delivery/Collection Method</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collected from ticket machine / ticket office</td>
<td>583</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivered by post</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downloaded to print at home</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>700</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.3.3 Weighting

Weighting was applied to the survey data to ensure the results were representative of actual 2016-17 patterns in respect of online ticket sale transactions by website and ticket type (scenario). The following results are based on the weighted survey data.
3. Detailed Findings

3.1 Length of Transaction

3.1.1 How Long in Total Did Your Ticket Purchase Take?

The average time taken for an online ticket purchase fell significantly this year, to 6 minutes, 20 seconds, compared with 7 minutes 54 seconds in 2016. This reduction in transaction time is primarily due to a reduction in time spent on Third Party websites, where the average time taken was 4 minutes 53 seconds in 2017.

Amongst shoppers using TOC websites, those purchasing via London & South East operator (LSE) websites also saw an improvement this year, with their average transaction time falling from 9 minutes 24 seconds to 7 minutes 20 seconds. Long Distance operator customers saw only a marginal reduction in transaction times, from 8 minutes 30 in 2016 to 8 minutes 20 this year.

![Figure 1 – Mean Transaction Time (Minutes) by Retailer Category](image_url)
Perhaps not surprisingly, the tickets with the shortest average transaction times were the relatively straightforward ‘Cheapest, Single’ tickets, while typically, Railcard ticket purchases took longer to complete. The ‘Travelling with One Other Adult’ scenario produced a very long average transaction time, but care should be taken when interpreting this result, since the base size for this scenario is low and the average time was impacted by a small number of excessively long (20 minutes plus) transactions.

![Figure 2 – Mean Transaction Time (Minutes) by Scenario](image)

As expected, customers who were the least experienced in using rail websites tended to take longer to complete purchases. Those who buy rail tickets online no more than once a quarter took significantly longer to undertake their online transactions than more frequent users.

![Figure 3 – Mean Transaction Time (Minutes) by Frequency of Buying Rail Tickets Online](image)
### 3.1.2 How Many Different Web Pages Did You Access to Complete Your Purchase?

The number of web pages viewed by mystery shoppers in undertaking their online purchase was unchanged from previous years at an average of 6.8 – this compares with 7.0 in 2016, 6.9 in 2015 and 6.8 in 2014.

Although those purchasing from third party retailer websites viewed fewer pages on average than TOC website users overall, those purchasing from London & South East (LSE) operators required the lowest average number of page views.

![Figure 4 – Mean No. of Page Views by Retailer Category](image)

No clear pattern emerged in respect of the type of tickets requiring the fewest page views to complete the transaction. 16-25 Railcard purchases recorded the lowest average no. of page views, whereas Network and Senior Railcard tickets were almost the highest.

![Figure 5 – Mean No. of Page Views by Scenario](image)
Interestingly, mystery shoppers with more experience in buying rail tickets online tended to take a greater number of steps to complete their purchase than those who purchased tickets online less frequently. This suggests there is no clear link between the number of page views and the transaction time.

![Figure 6 – Mean No. of Page Views by Frequency of Buying Rail Tickets Online](image-url)
3.2 Satisfaction with Online Ticket Purchase

3.2.1 How Easy was it to Find Information about Ticket Types & Conditions?

Almost three-quarters (72%) of mystery shoppers found it ‘Easy’ or ‘Very Easy’ to find information about ticket types and conditions, representing no change from the 2016 survey. Only 3% of shoppers (4% in 2016) considered it either ‘Difficult’ or ‘Very Difficult’ to find information related to ticket types and conditions.

As might be expected, those buying rail tickets online more frequently (at least once per month) were more likely to express satisfaction with this topic. 53% replied that it was ‘Very Easy’ to find information on ticket types and conditions, compared with just 20% of those buying less than once per month.

Those using third party websites found it slightly easier to find information on ticket types and conditions. 75% of this group thought it was ‘Easy’ or ‘Very Easy’, compared with 68% of those using TOC websites.

![Figure 7 – Ease of Finding Info. On Ticket Types/Conditions by Retailer Category](image-url)
No clear link emerged between the type of ticket purchased and the ease of finding this information, although those purchasing ‘Cheapest, Single’ tickets included the greatest proportion who found it ‘Very Easy’ to find information on tickets types and conditions.

![Figure 8 – Ease of Finding Info. On Ticket Types/Conditions by Ticket Type](chart)

Shoppers that were dissatisfied largely stated that it was difficult to find information that helped them distinguish between ticket types. Example of comments from those that found it ‘Difficult’ or ‘Very Difficult’ are included below:

"It was rather confusing to find and choose the right ticket. I wanted a same day return, but when I picked a return ticket for £29, it turned out to be an open return ticket for return within one month. This resulted in going back to the home page and starting from scratch. I expected the ticket to be a same day return because I did not select 'open return' on the home page when entering the destination details." (chiternrailways.co.uk)

"The website first gave me an anytime return price and off peak return price. I clicked on the off-peak return and an even cheaper option called super off-peak return became available. It was a bit confusing.” (gwr.com)

"It was not possible to differentiate between the two 'Anytime Return' tickets listed.” (thetrainline.com)
"The cheapest First Class ticket was not highlighted despite all being listed as being the ‘cheapest’, making it difficult to spot this amongst the options.” (virgintrains.co.uk)

"I could not find information about the validity of off-peak tickets.” (virgintrainseastcoast.com)

3.2.2 How Satisfied Were You with the Information about Ticket Types & Conditions?

Just 7% of shoppers were less than satisfied with the information available on the website about ticket types and conditions. This proportion is similar to previous years – 8% in 2016 and 7% in 2015.

Users of Long Distance Operator websites were somewhat less likely to be ‘Very Satisfied’, but this group had a relatively high proportion of satisfied users (95%), so it is unlikely to be an indicator of an issue that needs to be addressed.

![Figure 9 – Satisfaction with Info. on Ticket Types/Conditions by Retailer Category](image-url)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Retailer Category</th>
<th>Very Easy</th>
<th>Easy</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Difficult</th>
<th>Very Difficult</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Long Distance Operators</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSE Operators</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Operators</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Party Retailers</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total TOCs</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As in the case of ‘Ease of Finding’ the information, those purchasing ‘Cheapest, Single’ tickets, were most likely to be ‘Very Satisfied’ with the information available on ticket types and conditions.

The ‘Network Railcard’ and ‘Travelling with One Other Adult’ scenarios appear to indicate relatively high levels of dissatisfaction, but the base sizes for these scenarios are low, hence these findings are not significant.

![Diagram showing satisfaction levels for different scenarios.](image)

**Figure 10 – Satisfaction with Info. on Ticket Types/Conditions by Scenario**

As in previous years, there is no indication that online shopping experience, or specific experience in purchasing rail tickets online, has a bearing on satisfaction with the information available.
3.2.3 How Satisfied were you with the Clarity of Instructions for using the Website?

The overwhelming majority of mystery shoppers expressed satisfaction with the clarity of instructions for using the website, with only 3% not stating they were ‘Very Satisfied’ or ‘Satisfied’.

Overall, third party retailer websites were somewhat more highly rated than TOC websites, although Regional Operator sites had the highest proportion of users stating they were ‘Very Satisfied’.

![Figure 11 – Satisfaction with Clarity of Instructions by Retailer Category](image-url)
3.3 The Ticket Purchased

3.3.1 Were You Able to Purchase a Ticket?
In all instances - 700 mystery shopping transactions - the mystery shopper was able to successfully complete a ticket purchase.

3.3.2 How Confident Were You That You Got the Correct Ticket?
Only 4% of mystery shoppers expressed a lack of confidence in having obtained the correct ticket for their journey, with the overwhelming majority feeling confident, including 61% who said they were ‘Very Confident’ and a further 35% feeling ‘Fairly Confident’ that their ticket was correct.

A greater proportion of those using TOC websites were ‘Very Confident’ than was the case amongst users of third party sites, however TOC website users were also more likely to display a lack of confidence in their purchase, albeit only 6% of those purchasing from TOC websites were less than confident in their ticket purchase.

Figure 12 – Confidence in Getting the Correct Ticket by Retailer Category
Confidence ratings were generally high regardless of scenario, although, as in 2016, the Two Together Railcard ticket scenario saw the least confident group of shoppers, albeit the base size for this scenario was low, so this outcome is not statistically robust.

![Figure 13 – Confidence in Getting the Correct Ticket by Scenario](image)

### 3.3.3 Was the Correct Ticket Purchased?

Mystery shoppers’ high levels of confidence that they had purchased the correct ticket were vindicated in the analysis carried out regarding whether they had indeed obtained the most suitable ticket for their given scenario needs.

When marked as correct or not verses the scenario requirements and specific journey details, all 100% of tickets were deemed to be correct. This is the same result as in 2016.

Purchasing tickets from online retailers appears therefore to be a highly reliable method of transaction for mystery shoppers.
3.4 Opinions of the Websites

3.4.1 How Satisfied Were You with the Following Aspects of the Website?

The overwhelming majority of mystery shoppers were satisfied with all aspects of the website they used for ticket purchase - speed, security and ease of use. Indeed, in relation to all three aspects, satisfaction ratings improved from the scores attributed in 2016.

![Figure 14 – Satisfaction with Aspects of the Website (Mean Score) – Total Sample](image)

Mean score calculation: Very Satisfied +2, Satisfied +1, Neither 0, Dissatisfied -1, Very Dissatisfied -2

As illustrated below, in the case of Speed and Ease of Use, satisfaction levels were somewhat lower amongst those using Long Distance operator websites.

![Figure 15 – Satisfaction with Aspects of the Website (Mean Score) – By Operator](image)

Mean score calculation: Very Satisfied +2, Satisfied +1, Neither 0, Dissatisfied -1, Very Dissatisfied -2
In addition to the three measures of usability referred to above, mystery shoppers were also asked to provide feedback on whether they felt the website was:

- Welcoming?
- Had a contemporary layout?
- Appropriate for a Rail Service?

Almost every mystery shopper commented that the websites were welcoming and appropriate for a rail service, but a significant proportion (17%) of those using third party websites felt the site was Old Fashioned in appearance. Almost all of these comments referred to thetrainline.com. Examples of comments on this topic are provided below:

"I think some more colour would improve the layout." (thetrainline.com)

"They need to brighten the site up." (thetrainline.com)

"It needs to be freshened up, with colour and a new design." (thetrainline.com)

"The font of text was quite old fashioned." (mytrainticket.co.uk)

"From a designer's point of view it is very grey." (thameslinkrailway.com)
3.4.2 How Likely Would You Be to Recommend this Website to a Friend?

The likelihood of recommending the website to a friend increased this year for the TOC websites, with both Regional and LSE Operator sites performing strongly on this measure. Third party retailer sites remained at approximately the same level as in 2016 and fell below TOC sites, having scored higher on this measure last year.

![Bar chart](chart.png)

*Figure 16 – Likelihood of Recommending Website (Mean Score) – By Retailer Category*

Mean score calculation: 0-10 scale, from Extremely Unlikely (0) to Extremely Likely (10)
No particular link emerged between the likelihood to recommend the website and the type of ticket purchased, with Railcard users featuring as both those most likely to endorse the website used (16-25 and Two Together railcards) and amongst the least likely (Network railcards).

![Bar chart showing the likelihood of recommending the website by Railcard type and scenario.](image)

**Figure 17 – Likelihood of Recommending Website (Mean Score) – By Scenario**

Mean score calculation: 0-10 scale, from Extremely Unlikely (0) to Extremely Likely (10)
3.4.3 How Does this Website Compare with Others Used for Goods & Services?

When comparing the rail ticketing websites with others they had experience of, the mystery shoppers were largely positive. More than half (59%) of mystery shoppers responded positively (saying their chosen website was “the best”, “better than most” or “better than some”), while a further 37% said the website was about the same as others.

Only 4% felt the website used was worse than other websites they used for purchasing goods and services, representing an improvement on the results for 2016, when 12% gave a negative response, and for 2015 (10%).

As the chart below illustrates, all websites fared equally well on this measure, with users of all sites similarly likely to regard it positively in comparison with others used.

![Figure 18 – How Website Compares with Others (Mean Score) - By Retailer Category](image)

Mean score calculation: This Website is... The Best +3, Better than Most +2, Better than Some +1, About the Same 0, Worse than Some -1, Worse than Most -2, The Worst -3

Encouragingly, mystery shoppers who shopped most regularly online (more than 3 times per week) and are therefore most likely to be exposed to a wide variety of online shopping sites, were more positive about the websites, with 13% of this group stating that this website was ‘the best’ and a further 66% commenting that the site was ‘better than most’.

![Figure 19 – How Website Compares with Others (Mean Score) - By Frequency of Online Shopping](image)

Mean score calculation: This Website is... The Best +3, Better than Most +2, Better than Some +1, About the Same 0, Worse than Some -1, Worse than Most -2, The Worst -3
3.5 Receipt of Tickets

3.5.1 Was Your Ticket Available to Collect?

As in 2016, there were only two cases where mystery shoppers who opted to collect their ticket from a ticket machine or ticket office (a total of 583 mystery shoppers) had problems in obtaining their tickets.

These two shoppers commented as follows:

"I had to go to the ticket office and ask for help, after the ticket machine repeatedly showed a "no tickets available" message." (thameslinkrailway.com)

"The machine at the designated station was out of service initially and when in service would not give out tickets. The explanation was that the machine is temperamental. The tickets were collected from another station, in fact, the information from the train company customer service office was that, tickets can be collected from any station vending machine, regardless of having designated a station when ordering and paying online." (gwr.com)

3.5.2 How Many Days Did it Take for Your Ticket to Arrive by Post?

Of the 44 cases in which shoppers requested that their ticket be posted to their home address, 80% of these were delivered in 1 or 2 days.

Amongst the remainder, there were 3 cases of delivery taking 3 days, 2 cases of 4 days and 3 of 5 days.

Only two shoppers felt the delivery time was not within their expectations.
3.6 Terminology and Suggested Improvements

3.6.1 Was there any Terminology you did not understand?

There were only 13 instances where mystery shoppers felt there were aspects of the terminology presented to them on the website that they did not fully understand. In all cases, the feedback related to the lack of clarity regarding the meaning of different ticket types, for example:

"Some of the ticket options were a little confusing, such as 'Scottish Executive Package' and also, I couldn't find the difference between '1st Class Advance Single' and 'Advance 1st':.” (gwr.com)

"There were multiple options for Anytime Return tickets with differing prices but similar descriptions, which was confusing.” (thetrainline.com)

"I did not fully understand the difference between Super Off Peak Return and Off Peak Return.” (gwr.com)
3.6.2 What improvement would make the Website more user friendly?

Mystery shoppers suggested a range of possible improvements to the websites. The main themes to emerge are shown below, along with example comments for each of these topics.

**Booking fees/credit card charges too high or unclear**

"I would be more inclined to use this service if there were no booking or card fees.”  
(thetrainline.com)

"Earlier and clear notification on booking fees and credit card charges would have been appreciated.”  
(thetrainline.com)

**Highlight the cheapest fares**

"It would help if they highlighted the cheapest fare so that customers do not need to trawl through the options available.”  
(virgintrains.co.uk)

**Offer printing of tickets at home**

"The online process was great but there was a big queue at the station to collect the tickets so it would have been good if I could have printed them off at home.”  
(thetrainline.com)

"It would be much better if the purchased ticket could be downloaded instead of having to go to a station to collect it.”  
(thetrainline.com)

**Improve registration/log in process**

"It took longer to register in order to pay for the tickets than it did to actually search for and select them. It would be nice if there was an option to buy tickets without having to register first.”  
(greateranglia.co.uk)

"You have to create an account to purchase a ticket, which is fine if you are regular user but an inconvenience for a one off ticket purchase.”  
(scotrail.co.uk)

**Simplify the ticket options**

"They could simplify the number of options as it seems a little daunting at first as to which ticket type to choose as a lot seemed similar.”  
(mytrainticket.co.uk)

"There could be a reduction in the different types of ticket, for a simpler choice.”  
(gwr.com)

"There were 3 off peak returns which seemed identical times, except they each had a different price. Could these be simplified or better explained?”  
(thetrainline.com)
Improve visibility of ticket options / journey information

"I would like the restrictions to be flagged up more clearly, e.g. ‘Please note you will only be able to use this ticket on Southern Trains’.” (thameslinkrailway.com)

"My only issue was having to click each individual info button to get the fare conditions.” (gwr.com)

"Purchasing a ticket was quick and straightforward, but the ticket restrictions could have been highlighted or made easily available. The default is to display cheapest tickets. There could be an option on the initial screen to display other options.” (thetrainline.com)
## 4. Appendix – Questionnaire

**Train Ticket Mystery Shopping 2017 - Online**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date of Assessment:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time of Assessment:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit Information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Q3. Please confirm the website address you used to purchase your ticket?**

**Q4a. What time did you start your online transaction?**

**Q4b. What time did you complete your ticket purchase?**

**Q5. How long in total did your ticket purchase take (Including queuing)?**

**Using Online Shop**

**Q6. In total, how many different web pages (screens) did you need to click on/view in order to complete your ticket purchase?**

**Q7. How many times did you have to go back to a previous screen or correct an entry?**

**Satisfaction with the WEBSITE**

**Q8. How easy was it to find information on the website about ticket types and conditions?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>( ) Very Easy</th>
<th>( ) Easy</th>
<th>( ) Neither Easy or Difficult</th>
<th>( ) Difficult</th>
<th>( ) Very Difficult</th>
<th>( ) I was unaware there was any information about ticket types and conditions on the ticket machine</th>
<th>( ) I was aware but I did not need this information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Q9. How satisfied were you with the information about ticket types and conditions on the Website?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>( ) Very satisfied</th>
<th>( ) Satisfied</th>
<th>( ) Neither</th>
<th>( ) Dissatisfied</th>
<th>( ) Very Dissatisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Q10. Why were you not satisfied with the information about ticket types and conditions?**

**Q11. How satisfied were you with the clarity of instructions for using the website?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>( ) Very satisfied</th>
<th>( ) Satisfied</th>
<th>( ) Neither</th>
<th>( ) Dissatisfied</th>
<th>( ) Very Dissatisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Q12. Why were you not satisfied with the clarity of instructions for using the Website?**

**Q13a. Were you able to purchase a ticket?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>( ) Yes</th>
<th>( ) No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Q13b. If you were unable to purchase a ticket, please explain why this was.**

**Q14a. How confident were you that you got the correct ticket?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>( ) Very confident</th>
<th>( ) Fairly confident</th>
<th>( ) Neither</th>
<th>( ) Fairly unsure</th>
<th>( ) Very unsure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Q14b. Why were you not confident that you got the correct ticket?**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>How satisfied were you with the following aspects of the website and your ticket purchasing transaction?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Q15a. Ease of use                                                      | ( ) Very satisfied  
( ) Satisfied  
( ) Neither  
( ) Dissatisfied  
( ) Very Dissatisfied                                                   |
| Q15c. Security                                                         | ( ) Very satisfied  
( ) Satisfied  
( ) Neither  
( ) Dissatisfied  
( ) Very Dissatisfied                                                   |
| Q15d. Speed of site                                                    | ( ) Very satisfied  
( ) Satisfied  
( ) Neither  
( ) Dissatisfied  
( ) Very Dissatisfied                                                   |
| **Please indicate what you thought of the website in terms of design and style** |                                                                         |
| 15ei) Was the website welcoming?                                      | ( ) Welcoming  
( ) Off putting                                                             |
| 15eii) Did the website have a contemporary layout?                    | ( ) Modern  
( ) Old Fashioned                                                             |
| 15eiii) Was the website design appropriate for a Rail Service?        | ( ) Appropriate for a Rail site  
( ) Inappropriate for a Rail site                                         |
| Q16. Based on this transaction, how likely would you be to recommend this website to a friend? | ( ) 1  
( ) 2  
( ) 3  
( ) 4  
( ) 5  
( ) 6  
( ) 7  
( ) 8  
( ) 9  
( ) 10                                                                  |
| Q17. Please provide any other information you would like to give about your transaction that has not been covered in the questionnaire in the space below. |                                                                         |
| Q18. How often do you personally shop online for goods and services?  | ( ) More than 3 times a week  
( ) 1 to 3 times per week  
( ) 1 to 3 times per month  
( ) 5 to 11 times per year  
( ) 1 to 4 times per year  
( ) Less than once per year  
( ) Never                                                               |
| Q19. How often do you personally buy rail tickets online?             | ( ) More than 3 times a week  
( ) 1 to 3 times per week  
( ) 1 to 3 times per month  
( ) 5 to 11 times per year  
( ) 1 to 4 times per year  
( ) Less than once per year  
( ) Never                                                               |
Q20. How does this website compare with other websites you have used which sell goods and services? ( ) This website is the best
( ) This website is better than most
( ) This website is better than some
( ) This website is about the same as other websites
( ) This website is worse than some
( ) This website is worse than most
( ) This website is the worst
( ) Don't know

Your Ticket Choice
21a) What ticket did you ask for? Please enter the times and date of travel you requested on the website.

21b) Please state what ticket choices you were asked to choose from on screen and attach a screenshot of these to this survey.

1. 21c) Please state what ticket/s you chose from this list.

21d) Ticket type purchased online

Ticket Details
Q21. Ticket Type
Q22. Ticket number of first ticket (outward journey)
Q23. Ticket number of second ticket (return journey)
Q24. Ticket price
Q25. Second ticket price
Q26. Station leaving from
Q27. Station going to
Q28. Via which station(s)/route
Q29. How did you receive your ticket? ( ) Collected from ticket machine
( ) Collected from ticket office
( ) Delivered by post
( ) Downloaded to print at home
Q30. Was your ticket available to collect? ( ) Yes
( ) No

Q31. If no, please explain what happened.

Q32. How many days did your ticket take to arrive by post? [ ] N/A

Q33. Was this in line with your expectation, based on the information on the website? ( ) Yes
( ) No

Q34. If no, why not?

Q35. Did you have any problems downloading the ticket to print at home? ( ) Yes
( ) No

Q36. If yes, what problems did you have?
Please enter the amount spent on Postage sending this ticket back
If valid, please enter the amount of any credit charge expense incurred [ ] N/A

Overall Comments
Q37. Was there any terminology you did not understand? ( ) Yes ( ) No

Q38. What was the main improvement that could make ticket buying on the website more user friendly, efficient and clear?