

I came by train

supported by  **trainline**

Tactics & Teamwork

towards greener football fan travel

Pragmatic opportunities to encourage more fans to travel by train across the next football season and beyond. Grounded in research and insights from key experts in UK football and rail.



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A 30% increase in rail travel is needed by 2035 to stay on track to hit the UK's 2050 net zero goals.¹

Simply put, we need to inspire and motivate more people to choose rail if we're going to meet this. Creating a mass movement from car and air to rail must be a national mission.

Trainline believes in and supports that mission. In October 2022 it launched **I came by train**: a collaborative network of corporations, industry leaders, policymakers, NGOs and community groups united by an ambition to inspire and facilitate the public to actively choose more sustainable travel options.

“Working together, those involved in **I came by train** achieve far more than they could individually, using their collective voice to put a megaphone to the barriers preventing modal shift.”

Blue Earth Summit

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David Rose
The Football Supporters' Association



Hassard Stacpoole & Matt Wynn
Network Rail



Gary Steele
Rail Delivery Group



Premier League
Various

¹ The UK Climate Change Committee's Sixth Carbon Budget, Surface Sector policy report lays out the need for a 58% increase in passenger rail by 2050, vs a 2019 baseline year. Modelled as a linear increase, as per recommendations, this equates to a 30% increase by 2035.

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Summary

I came by train is a movement with a mission to inspire and help the public choose more sustainable travel options.

The UK's ambitious 2050 net zero goals mean we need to be fighting on multiple fronts, encouraging people out of their cars - and onto the train.

So why football?

Simply put, it's a numbers game. Nearly 1 in 5 UK adults travel over an hour to a major football game at least once a year, adding up to 34 million round trips.² Meanwhile, for fans, climate change is quite literally coming home - with extreme weather impacting the game they love with every greater frequency.

This is especially noticeable at grassroots level with the number of waterlogged pitches and cancelled matches growing bigger every season. 83% of travelling fans are interested in switching from car to train more often. 77% want to be more environmentally friendly. Yet more than half still choose to drive to the match.²

This is a habit worth disrupting for an audience that is sizeable, reachable and persuadable. We believe that with a compelling vision and an actionable plan, football fans can lead a mass modal shift from cars to trains.

The big ambition is ~10 million annual switchable journeys across all big games by 2035. Even if we just focus on Premier League clubs located along our rail 'Super Routes', we estimate there are 1.4 million round trips worth switching per season.³

There are of course challenges

Capacity is one. But as big games increasingly take place throughout the week, new opportunities are emerging, to incentivise travel on key routes and direct non-fan travellers to alternative services.

Anti-social behaviour is another. While it remains an issue both with football and public transport, encouraging more fans to travel by rail needn't exacerbate the problem.

Labelling fans as a homogeneous group is outdated thinking and today's supporters are more diverse than ever. And alongside the traditional fanbase, the rise of the Women's Super League has also created more female and family supporter groups.



The tactical strategy for modal shift

Consulting with experts across football and rail has surfaced new opportunities to support fan travel with more collaborative systems and data flows - and we are more confident than ever that we can affect real and lasting behaviour change.

In this paper, we're proposing 7 ambitious but achievable tactics, organised under **two equally important themes**:

1. Preparing the Pitch

Tactics to ensure rail is ready to welcome more fans

- Maximised Saturday afternoon rail capacity
- Peak football train signposting for other travellers
- Club/rail collaboration around 'responsible on rail' behaviour



2. Give and Go

Tactics to incentivise fans to make the switch

- Game-specific rail discounts
- Flexible fan tickets
- Integrated 'last mile' public transport options
- Dedicated modal shift comms programme



Some tactics are already being successfully piloted. Others have already been validated by specific club initiatives - mostly UK based, but in European markets as well. By conducting controlled trials, targeted to specific fan groups, we believe we can achieve incremental gains that add up to a significant difference.

For the longer term, there are three bigger ideas to raise our game - some of which are already in discussion among key contributors.

- Combining multiple fan incentives in a '**Big Game Railcard**'
- Pre-approved '**Q-Paths**' that would support extra trains at shorter notice
- A more seamless **exchange of data** across football & rail planners

As we look towards major UK football milestones such as Euro 2028, we have a genuine opportunity to turn ambition into action, and tactics into trials. We can achieve positive environmental impact, improve the fan travel experience, deliver commercial benefit for the rail industry and drive lasting behaviour change.

A modal shift opportunity in football

“The climate crisis presents one of the most significant challenges of our lifetime, and we are determined to play our part in inspiring positive and meaningful change.”

FA CEO, Mark Bullingham

Every year in the UK, there are an estimated **34 million** round trips to big football games over an hour away.

83% of these travelling fans are interested in getting onto the train more often.

77% want to be more environmentally friendly.

Yet today, over **50%** of these trips are still behind the wheel.⁴

This presents a key audience for modal shift to rail that is **sizable, reachable and persuadable**.

Sizable

Nearly 1 in 5 UK adults travel over an hour to a football game at least once a year. Over half of them choose to drive.

This presents an opportunity to shift up to 10 million annual round trips from road to rail by 2035. Starting with nearly half a million in Year 1 with the right incentives in place.⁵

Reachable

Premier League fans can be efficiently engaged at high speed and in high volumes, via close club relationships.

We also already know exactly when and where they'll be travelling.

Persuadable

Football fans, especially younger ones, have the desire to be more environmentally friendly.

With good reason, as tens of thousands of UK matches at all levels are being affected by extreme weather.

59% say they've already switched to rail at least once for environmental reasons and 83% are open to switching in future.⁴



⁴ Pride in Rail Travel Survey of UK travel habits and attitudes, Wave 4, July 2024

⁵ EdenLab / Trainline fan modal shift opportunity analysis, September 2024

Football fan's increasing propensity to switch

While the challenges of getting fans to switch from car to rail are big, the **opportunity to win** is even bigger.



Fan travel is the largest contributing percentage to the football industry's domestic CO₂e emissions.

This means a **massive impact** can be made here.

For example, taking ~**300k** cars off the road on match days next season would result in an estimated reduction of **>5 million kg CO₂e**. This is equivalent to all 20 Premier League clubs flying their teams nearly twice around the world.⁶

In addition to the CO₂e savings made on match days, the first act of switching can also help establish new rail habits well beyond the game. Multiple European urban mobility projects have shown that when people start using public transport for events like sports matches, they're more likely to continue using it for commuting or leisure travel.

We believe that through a tactical, **fan-first approach** - combining education, incentives and rewards - we can establish more climate-friendly behaviour that will help protect football's future for generations of fans to come.

⁶ Assumes a PL team travels with 40 people and a RTW flight of 40,000 km emits approx 3,590kg CO₂e per passenger

E.g. ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/system/files/ged/promoting_behaviour_change.pdf

Tactical play

The **I came by train** team have deep-dived into the available data and consulted a wealth of experts across football and rail.

From this work, we've defined key challenges and surfaced ideas that a motivated coalition could put into play.

We anticipate a two-pronged tactical strategy:

1. Preparing the Pitch

...to ensure rail is ready for more fans. There's no point risking an own goal of negative travel experiences for fans and other rail passengers.

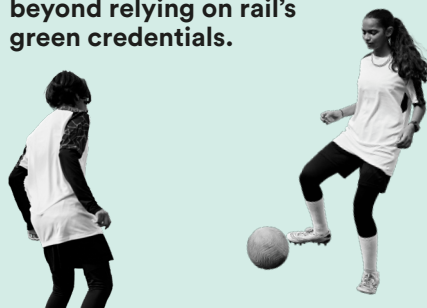


“It's no use pushing people towards rail, if rail can't take the shift.”

Gary Steele,
Football on Rail lead, RDG

2. Give and Go

...to motivate behaviour change among fans, going beyond relying on rail's green credentials.



“Get the basics right. A price that I and most people, can afford. And get me to the game and back on time.”

Arsenal fan,
EdenLab research, 2024

We recommend choosing optimal moments to apply each strategy, testing a range of tactics that support manageable but meaningful behaviour change - **then scale the ones that show promise.**

Our tactical toolbox on a page:

1

Maximise Saturday capacity

Trial starting Saturday overnight engineering works 1-2 hours later on a selected route and weekend.

2

Football rail alerts

Booking platforms flag the 'football-friendly' trains likely to be busier on a route, encouraging non-fans to travel at other times.

3

Behaviours on rail

Cross-industry collaboration building on in-stadium efforts to deter behavioural issues, e.g. club-issued, traceable railcards.

4

Game-specific rail discounts

Club-promoted % discounts on rail travel for ticket holders to specific games.

5

Fan-Flex

If a match is rescheduled with over 2 weeks' notice, your booked rail journey is transferable to the new date.

6

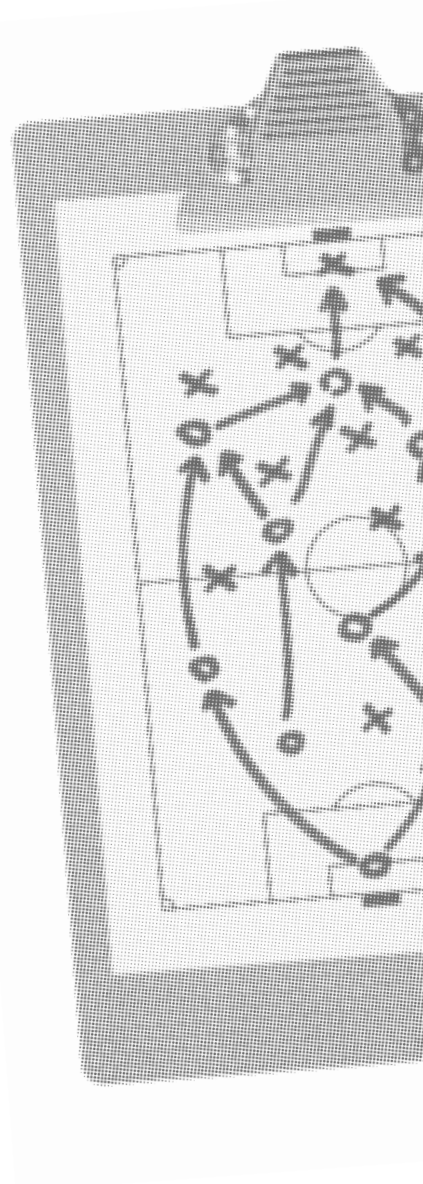
Fan Travel comms

Clubs pull TOC and Trainline data into automated comms flagging discounts and convenient trains to ticketed fans.

7

Match day travelcard

Match day ticket holders are entitled to discounted or free public transport on specified journeys between station and stadium.



1. Preparing the Pitch

Ensuring rail is ready



“ There’s a better way to do this and get the wins. The rail industry has to change, but the more we can involve the clubs, the better. ”

Gary Steele,
Football on Rail lead,
RDG

Before encouraging more fans onto rail, we need to ensure that rail is match-ready. This means taking potential capacity and safety issues into account from the outset.

On big match days, we already see demand increasing between 70-113% on ‘switchable journeys’.⁸ This is compounded when routes overlap for multiple big games on the same day.

In many cases this means trains are already at capacity (especially if fans have limited timetabled options), with Saturday afternoon Kick Offs proving a particular challenge.

From a safety perspective, things like club rivalries, game timing and other local factors generate a risk grade for every game through the season. High risk games, demanding significant British Transport Police (BTP) resources, are likely to be exacerbated by incentivising more fans to switch to rail.

Cross-industry partnership will be key here to determine what tactics we can collectively explore to mitigate capacity and safety concerns.

“ We’re in the business of trying to fill trains and on those (big game) days, they’re already full. ”

Tom McFall,
Head of Commercial Development,
Hull Trains & Lumo

“ What would be really helpful between BTP and the TOCs would be to have more information sharing, such as around how many fans are travelling to an individual fixture. All intel is good for us. ”

Mark Ashley,
National Football Officer,
British Transport Police

“ The key is to align and bring in the clubs. The rail industry wants to encourage football users, but the clubs must be part of the conversation. ”

Hassard Stacpoole
Programme Manager for Passenger
and Customer Handling,
North West & Central, Network Rail

“ We at Brentford are ready and willing to help ensure railways can move fans safely, on time and for the right price, and we know other clubs will be the same. ”

James Beale,
Sustainability Manager,
Brentford FC

#1 Maximise Saturday capacity

Rail Truth

Routine engineering is traditionally scheduled overnight on Saturdays, starting at 10pm, impacting overall evening schedules.

This regularly leaves fans unable to travel home by train after late afternoon Saturday games.



Tactic

In partnership with a key club, relevant TOCs and Network Rail, we could select 2-3 relevant late afternoon Saturday games in the 25/26 season.

We recommend trialling pushing back Saturday 'possession shift' start times by 1-2 hours on associated train route(s) to allow through 1-2 extra late trains for returning fans.

Return rail travel from the QPR vs Norwich City football match Wednesday 19 April

Share Post

Greater Anglia is to run a special train from London to Norwich on Wednesday evening (19 April) for fans returning from the QPR v Norwich game.

The 23:12 London Liverpool Street to Norwich service, which will also call at Diss, will operate to ensure those going to the game can get a return train through to Norwich, as overnight pre-planned engineering works are taking place.

#2 Football rail alerts

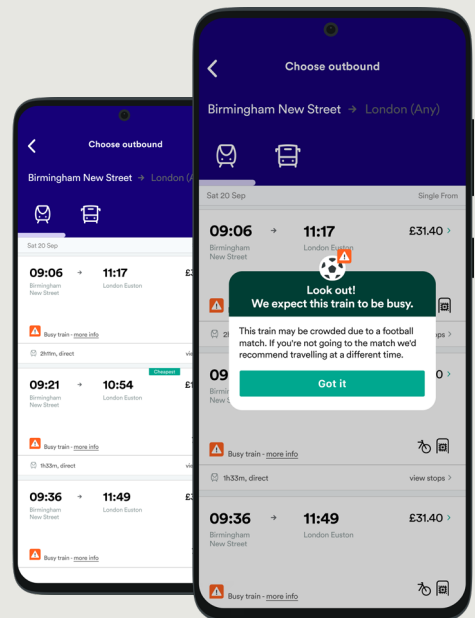
Rail Truth

Non-fan travellers have little visibility of peak fan travel times.

But unlike fans, they often have greater flexibility on when they can travel - and may well choose to travel outside those peak windows if they know they will be busy.

Tactic

Booking platforms will flag specific trains as likely to be football-friendly and therefore busier, encouraging non-fans towards other trains.



#3 Behaviours on rail

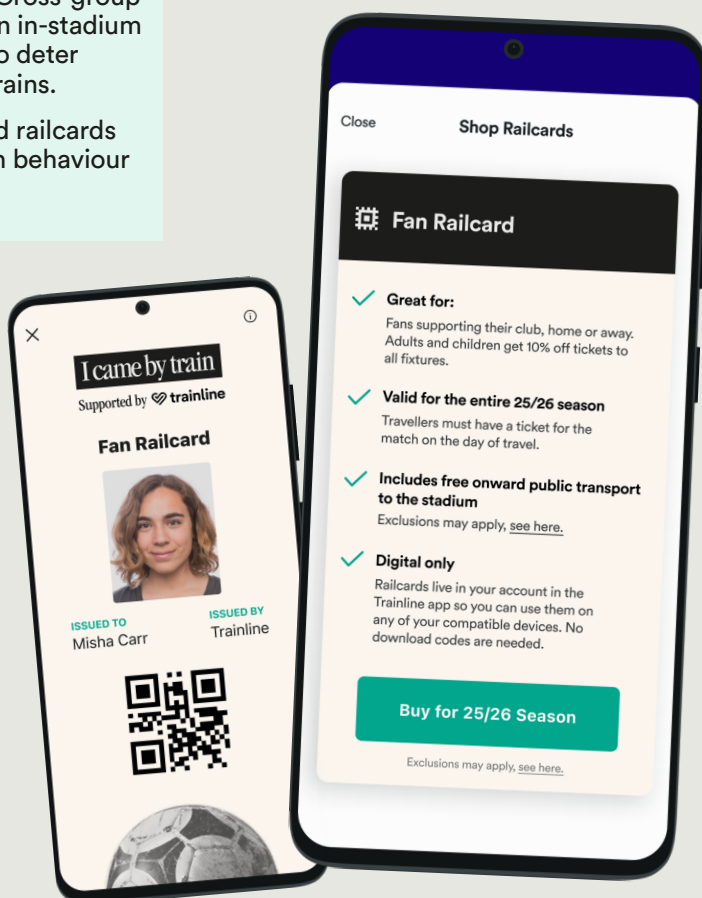
Rail Truth

Love Football Protect the Game is a campaign implemented by the FA, Premier League and EFL since the 2022/23 season to tackle anti-social behaviour within football grounds and underline the importance of a safe match day environment.

Tactic

The vast majority of fans are capable of responsible train travel. Cross-group collaboration could build on in-stadium efforts, finding new ways to deter behavioural issues on the trains.

For example, Club-affiliated railcards could help connect on-train behaviour to fans' club membership.



2. Give and go

Motivating the fans



We need a fan-first approach - one that starts with their end point in mind. They have games to get to. Unsurprisingly, our research confirms that price, reliability and flexibility concerns are the greatest barriers to leaving the car at home.⁹

The average driver brings at least 1 passenger with them, splitting the cost and guaranteeing a door-door solution that gives them options and control.

In order to be an attractive alternative, rail needs to be on a par with this level of ease and reliability.

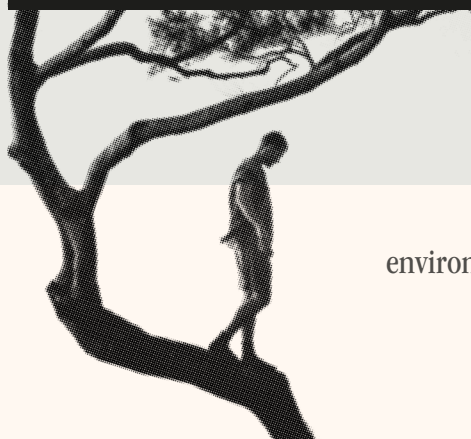
So, what tactics can we explore to overcome key concerns and prompt action from our fans?

77%

of UK football fans want to make more environmentally friendly lifestyle changes (vs 67% gen pop)⁹

59%

expect help from brands and organisations to make more sustainable choices (vs 45% gen pop)⁹



“It’s about habit breaking through environmental conscience - but flexibility, scheduling, convenience must also come into play.”

David Rose,
Deputy CEO,
The Football Supporters’ Association

#4 Game-specific rail discounts

Rail Truth

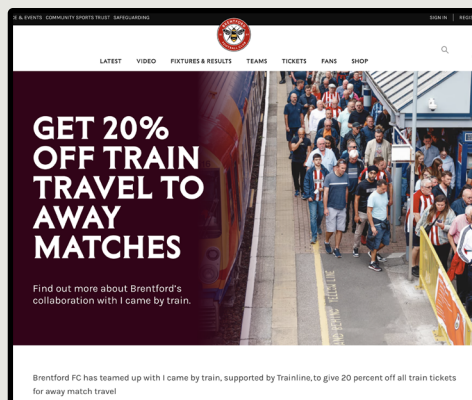
86% of fans agree they're more likely to take the train with a discounted fare to the game.¹⁰

Tactic

Club-promoted % discounts on rail travel for away-ticket holders to specific games.

This has been successfully trialed. In a league first, Brentford (followed by others) partnered with **I came by train** to pilot a 20% discount to selected away fixtures, supported by a multi-channel education program.

37% of match-going fans surveyed claimed a switch from car-rail, saving an estimated 17 tonnes of CO2e emissions (equivalent to 30 flights London to New York).



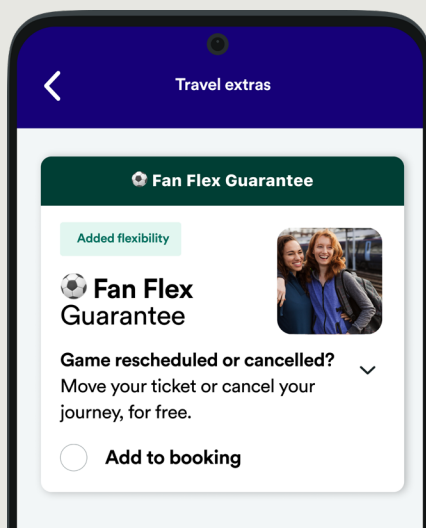
#5 Fan-Flex

Rail Truth

64% of driving fans said they would travel to more away games by train if they had greater flexibility around ticket use.¹⁰

Tactic

If a match is rescheduled with over 2 weeks' notice, your booked rail journey is transferable to the new date.



“Flexibility would be the single biggest motivator for fans - the big win”

David Rose,

Deputy CEO, The Football Supporters' Association

#6 Fan travel comms

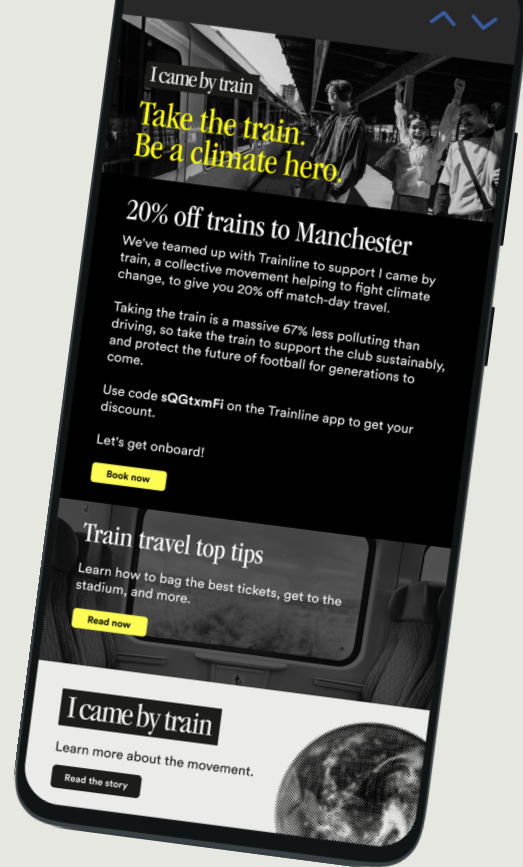
Rail Truth

61% of fans are looking for support from their clubs to adopt more sustainable behaviour.¹¹

Tactic



Encouraging sustainable behaviour change habits should feel positive, simple and rewarding. We recommend a standardised, well tested League-level email programme that clubs can adopt which incorporates Train Operating Companies and the latest rail data to flag cheapest tickets, tips and best trains to ticketed fans. This can incorporate a templated approach to comms, with **I came by train** assets that can be tailored to the needs of each club.



#7 Match day travelcard

Rail Truth

82% of fans claim that they're more likely to switch to rail with a door-door integrated ticket.¹¹

Tactic



Integrated 'last mile' travel. A coordinated partnership across the relevant Premier League clubs and national/local public transport providers and enablers.

Any match day ticket entitles the holder to discounted or free travel on specified journeys between the station and stadium.

Germany's KombiTickets

Valid across 10 of Germany's major football clubs, a KombiTicket is usable on match days until 3 a.m. the following morning, covering one journey to and from the stadium via public transport.

Redeemed with a barcode on the match ticket and on season tickets.

Brighton & Hove Albion FC

Brighton & Hove Albion works in partnership with the Brighton & Hove Bus Company and Govia Thameslink Railway to provide free match day travel to home and away supporters as well as providing an enhanced match day train service.

It was implemented in 2011 when the stadium was first opened and is communicated on the club's website and match day informational emails. Take-up has been consistently good and the club has higher than average numbers of fans travelling to the stadium by public transport.

The collaboration opportunity

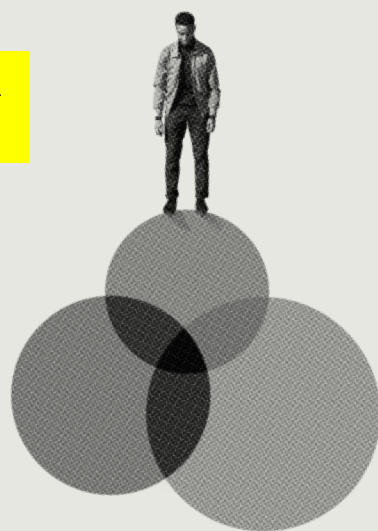
Switchable sweet spots

Our **'Give and Go'** tactics will be effective only when applied to journeys that can work for fans on the day. This means straightforward, helpfully-scheduled rail options, to stations with decent connectivity to the stadium, on trains that run reliably and have space.

Our **'Preparing the Pitch'** tactics are about helping rail feel like the new normal for match day travel, with minimal disruption to other passengers.

With the right support, many of these tactics could be implemented and/or trialled in some form within a relatively short timeline. And with an enthusiastic team on board, there will be **bigger and better ideas to come**.

To start, let's pinpoint the most promising switchable journeys: **Our switchable sweet spots**.



What criteria are we looking for across the 25/26 season?

Sweet spot criteria	Why?
Sufficient capacity for anticipated demand uplift	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Fans can't switch if they can't board the trainOverloaded trains will harm the perception of railMinimising negative impact on non-fan travellers is key
Premier League or EFL Championship games (and equivalent women's leagues)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Targetable, high volumes of travelling, driving fansLong distance journeys are worth the switchClubs typically in cities / towns with good connectionsSchedules move less than FA Cup or Europe fixtures
Feasible 'there and back' trains given kick off time	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Fans can be confident they'll make the game and get home safely by rail
Convenient / public-transport-friendly 'last mile' to stadium	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Removes hesitation by addressing parking challenges
Car & train journeys broadly comparable	<ul style="list-style-type: none">No need to incentivise rail travel where it would happen anywayLow chance of switching from the car to a notably more challenging or much longer rail journey
Low-medium British Transport Police graded risk game	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Minimises any additional pressure on BTP resourcing from expected uplift in volumes

Data exchange

“ It’s not so much (knowing) who’s travelling, it’s the loading, the numbers, to see that comparative spike in sales, what that looks like on a Saturday. So, a train that’s coming into Middlesbrough or into London, we won’t know whether it’s all football fans but what we know is it’s 30% busier than it normally is. ”

Mark Ashley,
British Transport Police

A common theme running through all the interviews was the opportunity to better utilise data. Everyone holds a valuable ‘**piece of the puzzle**’.



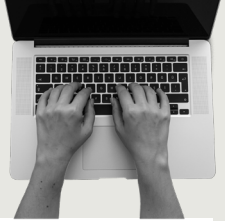
Trainline data shows **demand increasing** in the weeks leading up to a journey, but has less specific insight into which train people actually take - especially on the return journey.

TOCs can be more definitive about travellers vs capacity before and after a game. This can be analysed historically for insight around a particular club combination or kick-off time. And finally, clubs know who is going to away games, how far fans travel to home games - and how to reach both audiences.

To show how data can better inform collective planning, Trainline conducted a top line analysis of four games in the 24/25 season where London clubs travelled down to Brighton.

Comparing outbound London-Brighton trains to a non-match day, they looked at how demand shifted in the hours leading up to kick-off. Data like this can be used to help all parties plan smarter, better enabling modal shift amongst fans and non fans.

Data exchange

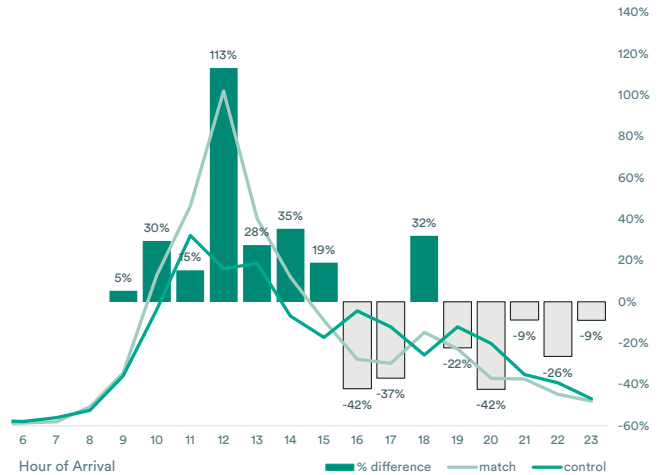


This graph shows London to Brighton demand for a typical Sunday game, Brighton-Crystal Palace, 14:00 KO.

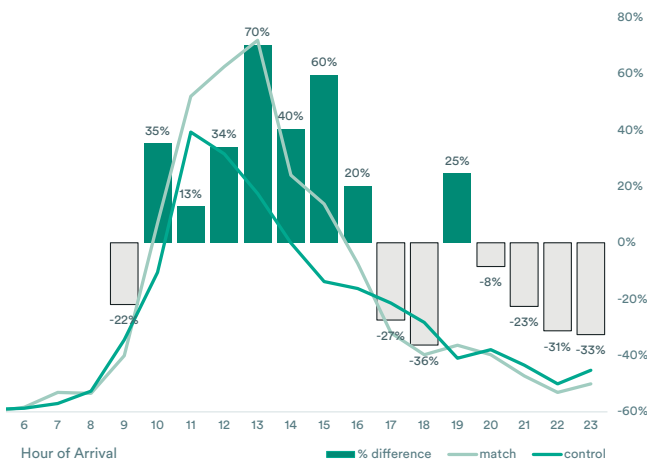
We see arrivals start to ramp up from 10am, sharply peaking at midday as fans arrive with 1-2 hrs spare to grab a quick lunch or pint in town and travel across to the stadium.

In future this midday train could be highlighted as likely to be busier than normal, so non-fan Brighton visitors know to travel at another time.

Passengers travelling to the match location per arrival hour of the ticket compared to the control which is the average of the week prior and post match day



Passengers travelling to the match location per arrival hour of the ticket compared to the control which is the average of the week prior and post match day.

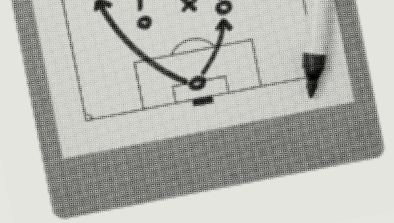


This Brighton-Arsenal game was a Saturday 17:30 KO.

On a Saturday, we see fans booking to arrive more steadily through the day, from 10am-4pm. This means loading on the peak trains (arriving 1-2pm) is likely to be less severe than the Sunday peak - but more trains are busier throughout the day.

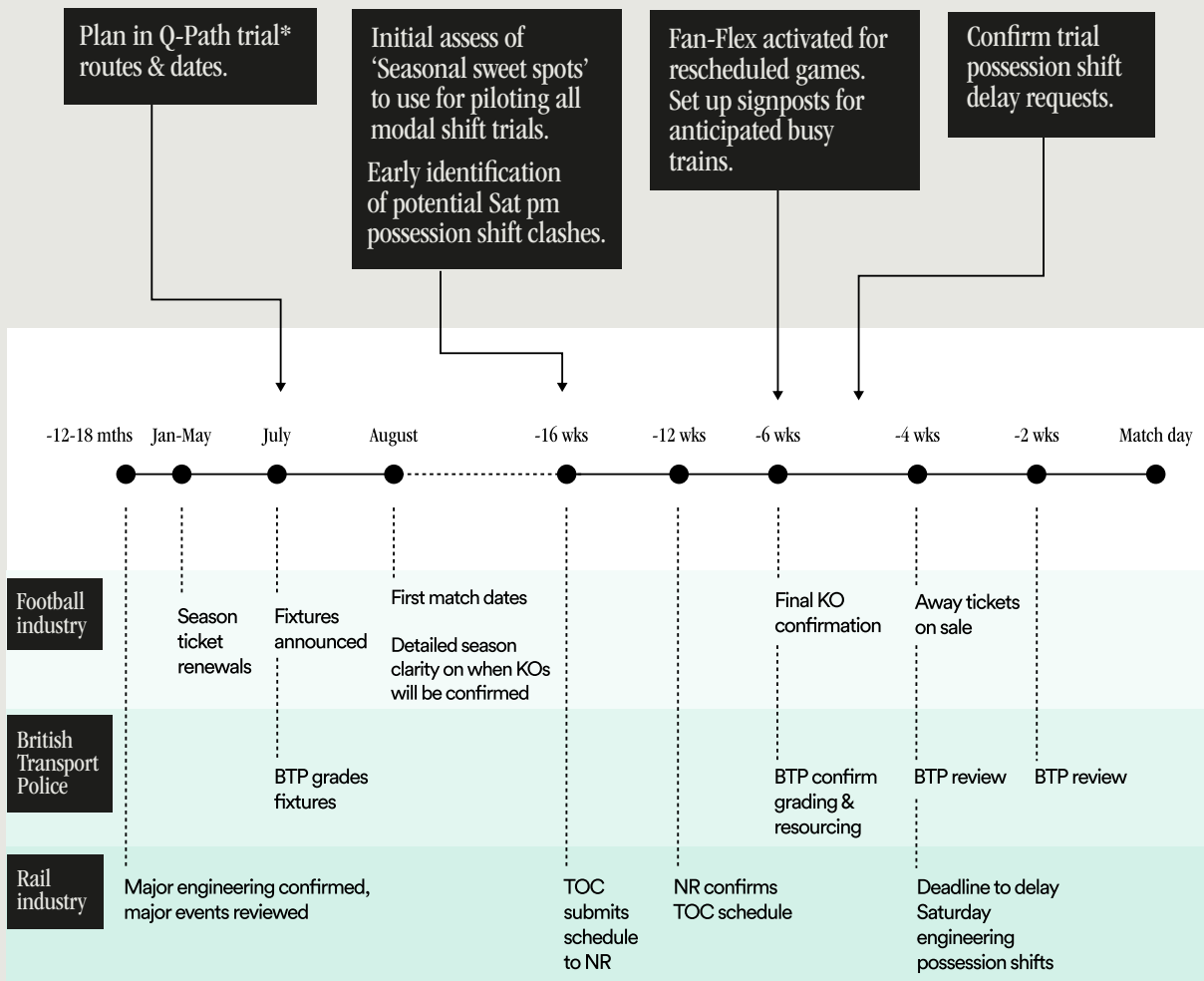
In future, discounts could incentivise fans to aim for trains either side of an anticipated peak, to smooth that peak even more - and help mitigate any problematic impact of modal shift efforts on capacity.

Tactics and timing



Both the football season and the rail industry have their own cadence. There are certain events that will have an impact on the strategy.

Below, we have mapped the tactics to a timeline, highlighting where a collaborative industry team may be best placed to put them into play.



Longer term

Let's raise our game

From across the industry, we have heard ideas for more ambitious initiatives that, with the right collective support, could drive even greater modal shifts in the long term, bringing tangible benefits to the fan experience as well as environmental impact.

The Big Game Railcard

A dedicated railcard for travelling fans, valid alongside home or away match tickets.

- Saves fans money
- Increases rail volumes
- Reduces emissions
- Encourages loyalty
- Disincentivises anti-social behaviour

How this could look:

- Discounted travel for groups and families
- Flexibility for rescheduled games
- Free public transport between station and stadium
- Holders traceable by their clubs (e.g. in event of ASB)
- Club rewards for taking the train



Saturday Game Q-Paths

Strategically selected, pre-approved Network Rail pathways created along key, multi-club football routes.

- Gives fans real rail options
- Increases rail volumes
- Sensitive to TOC resource
- Offers clubs flexibility
- Positive first discussions via Football on Rail

How this could look:

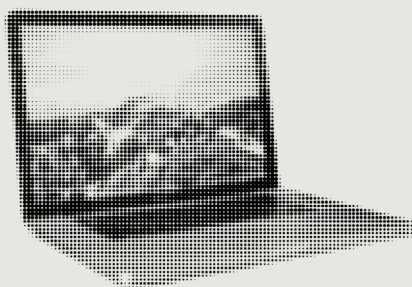
- NR identify likely path requirements when schedule released in June
- TOCs confirm resourcing to run each option nearer the date
- Relevant clubs 'bid for' pathway once game & train confirmed
- Minimal stops; truly a fan train
- Promoted by clubs direct to fans
- Available but flagged as a fan train on all sales platforms



Data-led Agile Planning

More seamless, automated exchanges of data & insight across football and rail planners throughout the season.

- Fans & travellers informed
- Mitigates capacity issues
- Better informs ASB risks
- Adapts to the season



How this could look:

- Earlier big game schedules & changes from PL to NR Timetable/ Engineering/ Event planners
- Early peak demand warnings from sales platforms to BTP
- Known rail capacity issues from TOCs to clubs & flagged on sales platforms
- Evolving season 'nuance' (critical games, etc.) from clubs to TOCs and sales platforms
- More informed comms to fans and other rail users
- More in-depth fan surveys & models to identify further barriers

What comes next?

It will take all of us to make this work, employing tactics and teamwork to help football fans make the switch.

As we look towards key milestones like Euro 2028, we have a real opportunity to make rail the default travel option for the tournament's biggest games.

By turning the tactical ideas we have highlighted here into practical action that will have a positive environmental impact, improve the match day experience for fans and drive commercial benefits for the whole rail industry.



Appendix

Pride in Rail Travel Wave 4, July 2024

15-minute online survey carried out for Trainline via GlobeScan Incorporated. Nationally representative sample of 2,000 UK adults plus a boost for a deep dive into 250 UK 'Travelling football fans' (respondents who have travelled over an hour to a football match with thousands of people in the past 12 months). Ran between 29th May - 11th June using established online research panels.

Objectives of the survey were to:

- Explore public perceptions and appetite for train travel and switching to train
- How these have changed since Wave 1 of the survey
- Identify new and interesting data points / areas of opportunity for rail, alongside interesting and provocative angles to potentially be used in communications

EdenLab / Trainline Opportunity Analysis, September 2024

A top line analysis of the switchable opportunity among 'travelling football fans' according to the numbers estimated to be travelling by car across a season for over an hour, to home or away games. Adjusted for factors such as (1) likelihood to share cars, (2) openness to switching to train, (3) quality of train route between clubs (e.g. availability of a fast or Super Route) and (4) estimated proximity to stations. Used the 23/24 season as a proxy for future opportunity

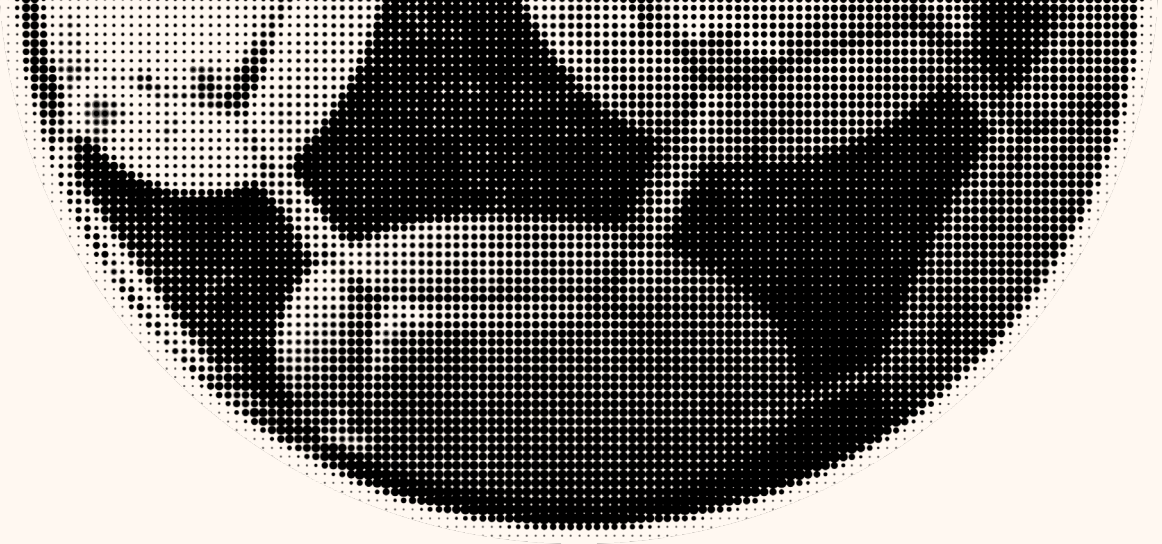
Analysis made use of PIRT data and other recent Trainline surveys, alongside publicly available information from clubs and fan surveys.

* Note: opportunity estimations did not take account of rail industry capacity, scheduling or resources - they are purely an estimation of the switchable football fanbase, as a target audience for modal shift efforts.



List of abbreviations

BTP	British Transport Police
TOC	Train Operating Company
PL	Premier League
FSA	The Football Supporters' Association
NR	Network Rail
ASB	Anti Social Behaviour
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
TOV	Tone of Voice
KO	Kick-off
Q-Path	Pre-approved Network Rail pathways



Get in touch

I came by train is a movement with a mission to inspire and enable the public to choose more sustainable travel options.

To find out how to get involved, email icamebytrain@trainline.com

I came by train

supported by  **trainline**