

Independent national passenger watchdog

Passenger Voice



Rail, bus, coach and tram

Winter 2012

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Anthony's Editorial



Many rail passengers buying tickets after January 2 are facing rises which will, in some places, feel steep. Years of above-inflation fare rises have pushed fares up. This is despite the Government's welcome decision to restrict regulated fares rises to the RPI+1 per cent overall level rather than the planned +3 per cent rise. Also train companies seem to have exercised

a degree of restraint in the amount they have altered fares on individual routes. The Government is aiming for inflation-only rises,

so the rail industry must work hard to deliver it.

Meanwhile a quiet revolution is taking place. Transport for London is starting to roll out the successor to Oyster – using bank cards with spending caps built in. The technology adopted in London is bound to influence the debate elsewhere. We are doing consumer research to make sure the passenger voice is heard in these debates. We are also planning a tram passenger pilot survey. If this gets rolled out across the country it will open up new discussion – not only the ability to compare tram and light rail systems but also bus and tram networks. For the first time we will be able to do area-wide passenger surveys covering bus, rail and tram which reflects the whole passenger experience.

Passenger views on the Northern and TransPennine rail franchises

Passenger Focus has published its research into what passengers want from the Northern and TransPennine rail services – whether they remain separate or are combined into a single franchise.

Although government has halted work on new franchises until the outcome of the independent review into the franchise process, the research will kick-start the debate, particularly on the key questions of merging the two franchises into one and the potential devolution of responsibility from central government to local level.

The research includes data from the National Passenger Survey (NPS) and qualitative research with passengers on the Northern and TransPennine Express (TPE) services to examine their views of the current operations and to identify the issues that the new franchise should address.

Passenger Focus found that passengers value the mix of local and longer-distance services provided by the two operators.

Services are regarded generally as suitable for passenger needs. However, there are several issues regarded as particularly important for improvement:

- better quality (age, practicality and cleanliness) of trains on the Northern franchise
- more carriages to reduce overcrowding, especially at peak times, and with improved luggage space
- enhanced airport services.

There were also other concerns including access, security and staffing at smaller stations, availability of information, the adequacy of timetables for modern lifestyles, and confusion about fare structures and rules, with notable unease about levels of fare evasion.

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55,000 rail and bus passengers have their say

Passengers from across the country have given their views as part of the twice-yearly National Passenger Survey (NPS) and annual Bus Passenger Survey (BPS). Passenger Focus has received over 30,000 completed questionnaires from rail passengers who were making journeys from around 700 stations across the country, and is expecting 25,000 questionnaires from bus passengers.

The surveys will be analysed carefully by Passenger Focus who will be publishing the results of the NPS on 29 January 2013 and the BPS in spring 2013.



Bus cuts toolkit

Bus services can be a crucial part of the local community – especially (but not exclusively) for young, elderly, and disabled passengers who often have no alternative transport options.

Passenger Focus has put together a toolkit to help make sure that, when cuts to services are unavoidable, they cause the least misery for those who rely on them. This was a recommendation of the Transport Select Committee in its 2011 report *Bus services after the comprehensive spending review*.

A good way of keeping passengers informed during changes and reductions is to make sure they are consulted on the planning. The guide to better consultations is informed by case studies of when it has gone well, keeping local people involved throughout and making genuine savings for the council.

In September, Passenger Focus published some research into the impact of bus cuts on passengers' lives. They told us that it could lead them to be more dependent on lifts from family and friends, cost them more to use alternatives like taxis, stop them being spontaneous or prevent them from going out at all.

But with the Comprehensive Spending Review reducing the budgets available for local councils and local transport authorities, some tough decisions have had to be made. This toolkit is not a campaign for more funds (however welcome that might be), but an attempt to help local authorities and bus companies with the task.

Putting passengers at the heart of rail services

Much of the debate about the future of rail franchises centres on structures and financing – now Passenger Focus is calling for the debate to consider the passenger's point of view.

The recent stalling of the rail franchise replacement process, the granting of an extension to Virgin, the Department for Transport enquiry into the West Coast franchise process and the forthcoming Brown review all shine a light on this process. This is important but looking at process alone risks ignoring the most important piece in the jigsaw – passengers.

It is passengers who use services and pay fares and who have a fundamental interest in any new franchise; and yet those same passengers probably have the least say in what is provided or proposed on their behalf.

Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief executive, said:

"Passengers' immediate needs are for value for money, punctual, clean trains where they have a reasonable chance of getting a seat. However, the franchise replacement process should put passengers at the heart of the railway. Passengers now pay nearly £8bn a year in fares. They should be given a clear and powerful voice at the centre of what can sometimes seem impenetrable processes."

Passenger Focus's own submission to the Brown review looks at franchising from a passenger perspective and asks how the passenger voice can be better heard within the debate. This letter is available online:

<http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/research/publications/brown-review-of-franchising-passenger-focus-response>

Key arguments include:

- Stability is a key need for passengers – change breeds uncertainty
- The needs of passengers and the type of services on particular routes should dictate franchise length, who lets the contract and the degree of specification
- Clearly securing passenger benefits at the start of a franchise remains important
- Boosting transparency and consultation during the replacement process and franchises can help secure passenger confidence. Passengers need to know how to feed their views in, what the options are and what is potentially being bought on their behalf. Passengers also need some confidence that their views will be sought and acted on during franchises
- The need for both hard and soft targets in franchises remains to both incentivise train companies and ensure passengers know certain minimum standards will be met.

Engineering works: more than half of passengers wouldn't travel by train if part of journey is by replacement bus

Passenger Focus is calling on the rail industry to make further concerted efforts to use replacement buses only as a last resort when engineering works take place.

The message from passengers in new research published recently is clear: keep us on the train, even if the re-routed journey is longer than using a replacement bus; let us know before we buy our tickets if our journey will be partly by bus; and when transferring us to and from a bus make sure you have signposted where we need to go and what we need to do, and have plenty of well-briefed staff on hand to help.

Passengers are also unhappy at paying a train fare and getting a bus journey – 85 per cent of passengers felt that using replacement buses warranted a discount on the normal train fare.

Key findings from the report include:

- 42 per cent of passengers buying tickets online for a journey affected by engineering works did not see a warning to that effect
- 55 per cent of passengers would not travel by train if part of the journey is to be by bus
- 75 per cent of passengers will tolerate an extended journey time of up to half an hour on a normally one hour journey if the train is diverted around engineering works.



Rail passengers' experiences and priorities during engineering works

September 2012

Passengerfocus
putting passengers first

Better bus access

Around five per cent of rail and more than 20 per cent of bus journeys are made by people with a disability or long-term illness. As the independent passenger watchdog, Passenger Focus works to support improved accessibility on transport, and to ensure that the views of passengers with disabilities are driving change.

Chief executive Anthony Smith said:

"Passengers with disabilities tell us that accessibility is about more than handrails and ramps. It can be simple changes, like providing information in both audio and visual form, or long-term improvements such as training staff to help those with less-obvious disabilities."

We analysed our rail and bus passenger surveys, and found there are a number of ways to support passengers with disabilities, in particular:

- training staff to be aware of specific issues disabled passengers face
- delivering (or maintaining) reliability and punctuality
- giving clear information, both pre-journey for those disabled people who don't currently travel, and during the journey, as can be seen in the RNIB report *Stop for me, speak to me*.



To share the results of our research and find out how we can continue to develop our work in this area, Passenger Focus recently held an accessibility forum. Attendees included the Association of Train Operating Companies, Age UK, the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee, RNIB and Leonard Cheshire. You can visit the online forum to continue the conversation:

<http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/forum/>

Go-Ahead and Passenger Focus launch new research on the future of transport

Go-Ahead

Personalised travel, sustainable choices and broader social changes including an ageing population are just some of the themes explored in innovative research carried out by the Go-Ahead Group, with Passenger Focus, into the future of transport.

This work was carried out to establish how our everyday patterns of living and working might change and what the consequences of those changes could be over the next 10 to 15 years. The work also provides an insight into what today's passenger might require from their bus and rail services in future.

The research identified seven large-scale factors of social, economic and technological change known as The World Around Me. Those large-scale factors include the end of assumed affluence as well as five trends in how we will live

(known as My Future Life). Those trends include seamless, always-on living and the desire for filtering and customisation of information.

From these factors and themes, the research went on to identify nine future stories of travel, including useful mobility – passengers' ability to remain switched on, tuned in and productive while using public transport – and collaborative travel – where online travel advice from other passengers is key.

The research is outlined in detail at <http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/key-issues/future-of-transport/>

Users are invited to join the debate around the research findings and add comments of their own on the forum <http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/forum/>

In brief

Nexus bus strategy consultation

Passenger Focus has responded to Nexus Tyne and Wear's draft bus strategy consultation. The submission included a summary of research setting out passengers' priorities and expectations from bus services. The submission then explored the draft strategy from the perspective of how well it aligns with and delivers passengers' aspirations. The submission is available in the publications section of the website.

London Midland driver shortages

From mid-October a number of train services have been cancelled in the West Midlands due to a driver shortage at London Midland. Passenger Focus met with the company to make sure that everything possible was done to reduce disruption and inconvenience to passengers. We urged them to be flexible with the way they compensated passengers by offering a more fair and reasonable interpretation of the rules and to go beyond the minimum specified in the delay repay compensation scheme.

We also encouraged them to work very closely with National Express Bus to ensure that passengers had an alternative means of travelling during significant disruption.

West Coast update

The Department for Transport (DfT) announced that it had reached an agreement with Virgin Trains to run the West Coast franchise for up to 23 months while a new franchise is let. Passenger Focus welcomed the stability this deal will bring and looked forward to working with Virgin and DfT to secure extra passenger improvements in this period, on top of what is already promised.



Smart ticketing progress

Our smart ticketing research programme is underway. The results of the first project, which looks at passenger views and needs around smart tickets in the South East should be published on the Passenger Focus website in January. The next stage is to evaluate some existing local smart ticketing schemes around the country – and fieldwork will be started on these early in the New Year. Passenger Focus is working with the Department for Transport (DfT) to design the other elements of the research programme.