

## **The Government's White Paper 'Delivering a Sustainable Railway'**

The Government has now announced its White Paper setting out plans for the growth and development of the railways up to 2035 which also includes costed plans for 2009-2014 in the form of a High Level Output Specification (HLOS). (Links to <http://www.dft.gov.uk/about/strategy/whitepapers/whitepapercm7176/>). Scottish HLOS was published on 13 July 2007 [<http://www.transportscotland.gov.uk/uploads/documents/high-level-output-specification-July-2007.pdf>].

These plans should make a big difference to millions of rail passengers in the future. We asked 4,000 rail travellers what they wanted to see in the Government's plans. They told us their top priorities are getting value for money, more trains and trains arriving on time. Our full research is available to download here [<http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/news-and-publications/document-search/document.asp?dsid=1132>]. The Department for Transport has listened to passengers and the White Paper states that more trains will now arrive within five or ten minutes of their scheduled arrival, from 88% punctuality to 92.6%. A big investment to deal with crowding problems has also been promised, with 1300 new carriages to be brought onto the network and three major schemes have been given the funding they need. The challenge now is for the Government to get on with it and put these plans into action.

The £3.55billion investment in Thameslink and £425million to redevelop will be welcomed by passengers as these projects will help to ease crowding problems by relieving serious bottlenecks. Passengers will also be delighted that Birmingham New Street has finally got the funding it so that passenger facilities can be improved and the crowding problems can be dealt with. £150million is also being invested for the development of 150 stations.

The White Paper states that regulated fares, such as season tickets and 'Saver' fares, will be capped at the rate of inflation plus 1%. We are pleased that in the absence of an alternative the Government has decided not to deregulate 'Saver' tickets, something we have fought hard for along with the simplification of the fares structure. It has been made clear in recently announced franchises that unregulated fares will increase each year by an average of 3% or 4% above inflation. We are concerned that increases at this level suggest unregulated fares are bearing the brunt of new investment. We want to see greater consumer protection for such fares. But we were glad to see at least ballpark figures being published in the new franchises, something we have called for.