

Roadmap

Developing and promoting our policies: priorities and tactics

Introduction

Passenger Focus is a consumer watchdog – an independent public body set up by the Government to protect the interests of Britain's rail, bus coach and tram passengers.

One way in which we carry out our role is to develop and promote policies which benefit passengers. These policies are brought together in 'policy manuals', which represent the corporate knowledge and positions of the organisation in respect for each transport mode and offer a handy source of reference for staff and members. The bus policy manual is thus part of a suite of policy manuals.

Our policies are based on consumer principles – from which we are able to articulate broad passenger interests – and evidence of passengers' experience and opinions – made up of three main elements: levels of passenger satisfaction, key drivers of passenger satisfaction and passengers' priorities. The consumer principles are access, choice, information, safety, redress, representation and equity.

Finding out what passengers think

We use independently commissioned benchmarked comparative opinion research not only to help us to determine our priorities but also to inform our detailed policies. In 2009/10, while operating in 'shadow' form, we ran bus passenger satisfaction surveys in 20 different parts of the country; we also conducted mystery traveller surveys in some of England's major cities; and we carried out specific investigations into passengers' experience of the national concessionary fares scheme and complaints handling. We will continue to use opinion research in this way.

Our resources are limited. In order to make the best use of them we will cooperate with key stakeholders, for example PTEs, to share existing research findings; where appropriate, we will consider joining forces to commission research of mutual benefit.

Whilst independently commissioned opinion research is the cornerstone of our operation, we will also supplement this with our own desk research, for example when comparing procedures or entitlements across the industry or amongst local authorities and when exploring best practice.

We will also seek to gather intelligence about passengers' experiences and views through analysing enquiries, complaints and representations which come to us and by working with other bodies which hold relevant data, such as local authorities, operators, Bus Users UK (BUUK) and the Bus Appeals Body. We will also support local bus surgery events.

Promoting their interests and views

We will use this evidence alongside our consumer principles to develop policies reflecting passengers' interests. We will promote these policies nationally and locally, and argue the case for them, by:

- Writing them up and disseminating them to those whom we are seeking to influence and those who can help us to do so, including the media
- Presenting them at meetings, conferences and other events
- Joint lobbying with stakeholders, for example those representing youth, older people, disabled people and women
- Responding to consultation documents, e.g. from the DfT, OFT and the Senior Traffic Commissioner, as well as individual operators and local authorities
- Following up representations from individual bus users
- Working with national stakeholders, e.g. by participating in DfT and industry working groups
- Working with local stakeholders, e.g. helping PTEs to consult effectively on network management reviews

What are our priorities?

In developing our choices for work priorities we ask:

- Is the issue of direct concern to passengers?
- How many passengers are affected and how serious is the actual or potential impact?
- Will addressing the issue improve the service and/or deliver significant improvements to the passenger experience?
- Do we have the resources to deal with the issue?
- Are we best placed to focus on the subject?
- Is the issue within our remit?

At the end of 2009 Passenger Focus commissioned opinion research into the priorities of bus passengers. This indicated that punctuality is the issue of most concern; other issues in the top 5 are more routes, more frequent services, getting a seat and helpful drivers. Bus shelters, integrated tickets, and information at stops and on the front of buses made up the rest of the 'top ten'.

Our ongoing survey work provides us with valuable information about passenger satisfaction levels and the factors driving them. Combined with our passenger priorities work, this provides a powerful foundation for promoting passengers' interests.

We also have responsibility for people not currently using buses: our duties under the Rail Passengers' Council (Non-Railway Functions) Order 2010 explicitly include 'potential users' of road passenger transport services or facilities as well as 'users'. We have started to conduct research exploring barriers to use and may consider commissioning further work on the back of this.

Work plan 2010/11

As our first full year of operation as a statutory body, 2010/11 will not be typical: the emphasis will be on putting in place the team which will take the bus work forward, and

disseminating and explaining the findings of our passenger priorities and satisfaction research to key stakeholders. Existing policy commitments include:

- Complaints & appeals: drawing on our research and policy reports, and at the explicit request of the Government, we will start working with the main bus operators, local authorities, Bus Users UK and the Bus Appeals Body to review the way in which they handle complaints and appeals and how this can be improved
- Passenger rights: as part of the above complaints review, and informed by our response to the Government's consultation on the proposed EC Regulation on bus and coach passenger rights, we will discuss opportunities and mechanisms for extending passengers' rights with the main operators
- Concessionary fares: we will use our research to make an input into any developing political debate

We may wish to identify at least one new area for specific research in 2010/11, e.g. concerning punctuality, information or fares & ticketing, while recognising the need for flexibility in the light of unforeseen events to which we need to react. *See attached note on 'bus policy and research ideas'.*

Bus work 2011/15

We need to be realistic about what can be achieved and how quickly. Bus patronage has fallen from 42% of all trips in the early 1950s to just 6% today; the vast majority of journeys are today made by car, a fact well understood by most politicians, nationally and locally. This limits the resources available for investing in improvements and may constrain some attempts to address poor bus punctuality by introducing bus priority measures.

There are over 5 billion bus and coach passenger journeys made every year, operated by over one thousand bus companies in almost one hundred local transport authority areas. Passenger Focus is a relatively small organisation, with a team of less than a dozen people working locally on the ground dedicated to bus issues. Wherever possible we will achieve more when we are pushing against an open door, bringing compelling new evidence of passenger interests and views to the table.

We will develop a rolling programme of work, including 1-2 discretionary pieces of new research every year, but with sufficient flexibility to enable us to adapt to significant 'events' where there is a need to respond.

Possible areas of research and policy development include: tackling poor punctuality, management of tendered services, network and service planning, integrated ticketing, desk research into availability of concessions, fare levels, bus maps, timetables, real-time information, bus shelters, getting on the bus, seating, cleaning and personal security.

In 2011/12 we would also hope to be in a position to report to the DfT on the conclusions of our review into the handling of complaints and appeals.

Coach and tram

Separate documents will be produced to identify our work priorities on behalf of coach and tram passengers.