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Passenger Focus 2010-2011 work plan

1. INTRODUCTION

Passenger Focus is the independent consumer watchdog for Britain's rail passengers and, taking on a new and exciting role, England's bus, coach and tram passengers (apart from London). This plan sets out the second year of activity under the umbrella of Passenger Focus's 2009-12 corporate plan. Passenger Focus's approach of making a difference for all passengers, driven by research, will remain. This year we hope to seek the views of over 120,000 passengers. Change is secured on the ground by our nationwide team of staff and effective national lobbying. If you want to see how we have made a difference in the last twelve months see www.xxx.

Rail passenger issues

Our passenger research points to some clear trends that are driving our work – we are focusing on the issues where passengers tell us they want to see improvement. While overall passenger numbers and satisfaction are rising, there remain many issues that need attention. Getting more trains on time remains the key driver of passenger satisfaction, dwarfing all other factors. How disruption is handled remains the key driver of passenger dissatisfaction. Passenger priorities for improvement are clear: value for money - a compound of views on ticket prices, timekeeping, crowding and disruption management, remains the number one improvement passengers want to see. These are the issues we will continue to focus on.

Passenger Focus is tackling the following rail passenger campaign objectives this year:

- We persuaded Government to limit the range of rises on regulated fares, avoiding the repeat of double digit fare rises on regulated tickets seen in previous years. We want to keep this change in place or at least restrict the range of fare rises to a lower level
- After securing a pledge from Network Rail and train operators to keep passengers on trains during engineering works, wherever practical, we will actively probe how improvement works are planned and question why replacement buses are used
- Get train companies to clearly put ticket restrictions on ticket machines, websites and tickets themselves. Passengers need to know the deal before they buy. We will also monitor ticket queue times
- Seek a funded commitment that free, accurate and consistent real-time information will be made available at every rail station in Great Britain

Passenger Focus will also:

- push train companies and Network Rail to improve the handling of disruption – industry progress will be measured using the National Passenger Survey
- continue to focus on performance. We want to see train performance published including punctuality at intermediate points on routes, not just at the end of the train's journey. Having this information broken down by route will help focus on problem areas. We will explore a gradual move towards a 'right time' railway measured by the timetable, not just within five or ten minutes of arrival as is the case at the moment
- provide a continued passenger focus in franchising. We will feed original passenger priorities work into the various franchise specifications put out by the Department for Transport during the year. We anticipate this will cover work on the East Coast, Essex Thameside, East Anglia, West Coast and TransPennine franchises
- continue to argue for improvements through the industry's train service planning processes – the 'route utilisation strategies'. We anticipate working on ten strategies
- develop proposals for rail ticketing reforms – due to its complexity the fares system has fallen into disrepute as passengers do not understand or trust the current system
- help to ensure sustained, high levels of investment in the railway on the issues that passengers tell us are important to them.

Bus passenger issues

Passenger Focus will, by April 2010, take up its new responsibilities for representing England's (outside of London) bus, coach and tram passengers. During 2009 we have been piloting how we can make a difference for bus passengers through the combination of benchmarked passenger satisfaction research and staff on the ground. One issue is already clear. As with rail passengers the key issue both driving the satisfaction and priorities for improvement of bus passengers is getting the buses on time.

We will soon be fully staffed and funded to take on this exciting new role. So this year Passenger Focus will concentrate on:

- building Passenger Focus's knowledge, experience, capacity and skills in bus, coach and tram passenger issues. This will include building links with regional and local public transport and passenger groups
- identifying areas of low passenger satisfaction with bus services and working with local authorities and bus operators on improvement plans

- ensuring that central and local government and industry are clear about the findings of our research *Bus and Coach Passenger Priorities for Improvement*. These priorities should help focus investment, planning and operational decisions to the benefit of passengers
- developing research programmes to understand the experience and needs of coach and tram passengers
- starting work with bus companies on improving complaints handling procedures.

A common thread running through all this work will be our efforts to ensure, in what is likely to be a tight financial period, we continue to offer value for money as an organisation and are, fundamentally, fit for purpose. The scrutiny of the organisation's performance and effort by the board and the assessment and mitigation of risk by the management team are essential to this.

Anthony Smith
Chief Executive

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2. About Passenger Focus

2.1 Vision

That operators, funders, and regulators of transport systems put passengers first.

2.2 Mission

Getting the best deal for passengers.

2.3 Values

In order to make a difference for passengers, we need to ensure that we are recognised as being forward-thinking, proactive and clearly helping passengers to have a voice. This will be realised through our four core values, which we try to demonstrate throughout our work:

- independence – we will be impartial, objective and fair in all our activities
- credibility – our work will be evidence based
- inclusiveness – we seek to represent all the passengers covered by our remit
- influence – in order to deliver change, we will constructively and energetically engage with public bodies and private operators on behalf of passengers and other stakeholders.

2.4 Priorities

Passenger Focus is a relatively small organisation. We make work priority choices based on passengers' priorities and resources. In developing our choices for work priorities we ask:

- Is the issue of direct concern to passengers?
- How many passengers will be 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?

This plan lays out our objectives for the coming year. These objectives are underpinned by team and project plans which detail the activities that we intend to undertake in order to achieve the business plan objectives. Our management team will have responsibility for managing these plans and ensuring that the business plan objectives are being met. We will formally report our progress again to our Board at their public meeting every two months; the exception to this will be our financial reporting which will be reported upon quarterly.

In addition to reporting progress every two months at each meeting of our Board, we will use the results of our annual stakeholder benchmarking survey as a measure of how successful we have been during the year.

3. Making a difference for all rail passengers

3.1 Boosting satisfaction with rail services

What do passengers want?

Passenger Focus works to find out what passengers think about their current services, why they are saying they are satisfied or dissatisfied and what their longer-term priorities for improvement are. This research has enabled Passenger Focus to build up a sophisticated picture of rail passenger needs. The evidence coming back from all this research is clear: getting more trains on time remains the key passenger priority alongside improving how disruption is dealt with. More and longer trains enabling more passengers to get seats and the price of tickets are also longer-term priorities for improvement.

Driving short - and longer-term improvements

- In spring and autumn we will carry out the National Passenger Survey, the world's largest piece of published passenger research building on ten years' data. We will talk to over 55,000 rail passengers about the journeys they have just done. This comparative benchmarking survey is used to monitor overall satisfaction with rail travel; helps identify where train companies are doing well and not so well and improvements to scores form part of some train companies contracts and executive bonus schemes. We take this information and use it to drive improvements for passengers, with our passenger link

team working with train companies on improvement plans – for more details of work with individual train companies see www.xxx.

- We will continue to ensure that the passenger interest in safety and security priorities are understood and heard. In particular, we will argue for more visible staff on trains and stations.
- We will ensure that the results of all our research but in particular *Rail Passenger Priorities for Improvement* and the national implications arising from *Rail Passengers, Performance and Satisfaction in East Anglia* are built into the industry's long term planning processes. We will focus in particular on the planning and funding processes from 2014 onwards as government sets out how much it wants to spend on the railways and what it wants to buy – the 'high level output specification.' This will include fresh research on the mismatch between industry performance figures and the passenger perception of timekeeping.
- The industry's medium term planning processes are done through Network Rail's 'route utilisation strategies'. These important documents plan and set out how to make the best use of track space. They are also, following Passenger Focus prompting, starting to look at how passengers get to the station including, in particular, issues with car parking. This year we will work on some 10 strategies, commissioning original research.
- Data is crucial to helping hold the industry to account. This year we will press for three major improvements we think would really help passengers understand what the performance on their route or even regular train really is. First, we will push for train performance data published by routes, not just at train company level. Second, we will argue for data to be published about timekeeping at intermediate points on routes, not just the end point – our research shows significant issues with timekeeping during journeys. Third, we will also lobby to get more detailed and up to date crowding data published. To help all these processes we will explore the publication of National Passenger Survey data by route.

Improving the handling of disruption

- We will continue work to help the industry drive up the handling of disruption as measured by the National Passenger Survey. This will be done through a number of channels: using our 'disruption panel' – passengers who have volunteered to log their experiences of disruption, trying to ensure all passenger information comes from one source, making sure train companies deliver the promises made in the *ATOC Good Practice Guide to Passenger Information During Disruption* and ensuring that planned disruption is done in a way that least inconveniences passengers.

- After securing a pledge from Network Rail and the train operators to keep passengers on trains during engineering works, wherever practical, we will question why replacement buses are used and monitor the level of their use. To push up the quality of bus replacement services when they are used we will research the passenger experience.
- **We will** seek a funded commitment that accurate, consistent real time information will be made available at every rail station in Great Britain. Incredibly, there are still stations where there is no access to live information whatsoever.

Fares and ticketing

Research we carried out last year indicated some serious issues with fares and ticketing. These issues not only cover the price of tickets but the complexity of fares structures, the length of ticket queues and the ease of using ticket machines. So, this year we will:

- work to limit the range of rises on regulated fares, avoiding a repeat of double digit rises on regulated tickets seen in previous years. We will work to keep this change in place for future years or at least restrict the range of fare rises to a lower level in order to persuade the Government.
- get train companies to clearly state off peak tickets' start and finish times on ticket machines, websites and tickets themselves. Passengers need to know the deal before they buy
- again, monitor ticket queue times to ensure the industry sticks to its guidelines that passengers should not have to wait more than three minutes off peak or five minutes in the peak to buy a ticket. This should help make rail easier to use
- develop proposals for a simplification of ticketing. The fares system has grown out of control and has fallen into disrepute as passengers do not understand or trust the system. This will include exploring single leg pricing (ie only selling single tickets rather than the more usual return) for regulated off peak tickets. At present off peak singles are only marginally cheaper than returns.

Franchise replacement

The refranchising process offers great opportunities to get all sorts of passenger improvements built into train company contracts. More trains, longer trains, more information, more visible staff and better station access are just some of the issues covered in franchises. We will build on the successful work with the DfT on the 2009 South Central franchise re-letting. Using original passenger priorities research, we played a significant role in shaping the franchise specification, helping to really boost the quality of both the specification and bids made by train companies. So this year we will:

- work with the DfT on the research already done for the East Coast, Essex Thameside and East Anglia franchise specifications to help bring about more passenger focused franchises
- commission original passenger priorities work on upcoming franchises – probably West Coast and TransPennine.

3.2 Improving access to the railway

In 2008 Passenger Focus carried out a pioneering piece of research - *Assisted Passenger Reservation Service: Mystery Shop*. This tested the industry's pre-booked assistance service for passengers who need extra help. The results were mixed – in nearly one out of three cases the pre-booked help did not materialise. The industry and government took these results seriously and have reviewed the system. So this year we will:

- ensure the industry implements these changes and set up a fresh mystery shop in 2010 to test the impact of the changes

In addition we will:

- review up to 24 industry Disabled People's Protection Policies. These are designed to ensure a consistent service is offered to passengers with reduced mobility
- publish a reference document pulling together all the work we have done on getting to rail stations
- work closely with London TravelWatch on issues that affect passengers travelling in and out of London
- research which websites really help passengers find what they want. Passengers are increasingly using the internet to find out information about timetables, fares and disruption. We plan to test out what works for passengers and what does not. This should make the railway easier to access and possibly boost value for money.

3.3 Promote good practice in rail complaints handling and provide advice and advocacy to complainants

The number of complaints made to the rail industry is dropping. However, Passenger Focus continues to have a statutory duty to deal with 'representations' from passengers. We have achieved considerable successes in doing this, mediating when train companies and passengers cannot agree. However, in the long term, the best strategy for passengers is for us to work with train companies to improve complaints handling procedures. This work will, this year, cover:

- working on improving complaint handling with individual train companies
- dealing with some 20,000 passenger questions, comments and complaints
- mediating in some 3000 complaints, ensuring that at least two-thirds of passengers are satisfied with the way we dealt with their issue.
- exceeding, wherever possible, our internal targets on timescales for dealing with complaints. For more detail of these targets see www.xxx

Box

Scotland and Wales each have their own dedicated passenger link manager and board member. The national passenger survey results are used to benchmark the passenger experience in the two countries with the rest of Great Britain – a powerful tool to drive change. Poor service issues are picked up and pursued with train companies and Network Rail. Complaints from Scottish and Welsh passengers are also dealt with. However, there are a number of specific activities relating to Scotland and Wales.

Working for rail passengers in Scotland

- Using the results of our research 'Scottish Passenger Priorities for Improvement' (check title) to inform the Scottish Government as it decides on spending and specifying the railway in Scotland from 2014 onwards
- Using research to influence the development of cross border timetables
- Research into passenger needs for new trains and existing trains within Scotland and to and from Scotland
- Using the National Passenger Survey and Scottish Passenger Priorities for Improvement to inform Network Rail, Transport Scotland, ScotRail and other stakeholders as options are developed for Scotland's Route Utilisation Strategy
- Dealing with enquiries and appeals complaints from passengers in Scotland.

End Box

Box

Working for rail passengers in Wales

- Use our research, *Passengers' Experiences of Unstaffed Stations in Wales*, to inform the Welsh Assembly Government, Arriva Trains Wales and other stakeholders as they specify station development schemes, particularly the National Stations Improvement Programme.
- Monitor the implementation of the rail schemes outlined in the National Transport Plan and the Regional Transport Plans using the National Passenger Survey and our other passenger research
- Contribute to the development of the TrawsCambria long-distance bus network, sustainable travel cities/towns and other initiatives that advance integrated travel opportunities for rail passengers in Wales
- Dealing with enquires and appeals complaints from passengers in Wales

End box

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4. Making a difference for bus, coach and tram passengers

4.1 Boosting satisfaction with bus services

What do passengers want?

Passenger Focus works to find out what passengers think about their current services, why they are saying they are satisfied or dissatisfied and what their longer-term priorities for improvement are. By using this feedback, Passenger Focus **is** beginning to build up a sophisticated picture of bus passenger needs. The evidence coming back from all our research is clear: getting more buses on time is **the** key passenger priority. This will improve satisfaction amongst current bus passengers and probably encourage more people to start using buses, so it is a priority that this is understood and vigorously pursued by industry and government.

This year we will carry out the following work to identify problem areas and our passenger link team, based around England, will drive change with bus companies and local authorities, and build effective links with the Traffic Commissioner:

- Carry out and publish passenger satisfaction research in a further 20 areas, building on the 20 areas covered last year. These will cover a mixture of bus services in cities, towns and rural areas. This mosaic of research will help to build a picture of comparative passenger satisfaction across England highlighting where passenger satisfaction is good and not so good. We will then work with bus operators and government on action plans to address areas of low passenger satisfaction.
- Carry out and publish four waves of the Bus Mystery Traveller Survey we inherited from the DfT last year. This will add much detail to our understanding of the passenger experience.
- Carry out and publish the first waves of the Bus Passenger Satisfaction Survey which we again inherited from DfT.
- Pursue with local and central government, stakeholders and the bus industry the results of our *Bus Passenger Priorities for Improvement* research making sure passenger needs are clearly articulated to inform policy and planning.
- Develop research programmes to understand the experience and needs of coach and tram passengers.
- Start working with bus companies and transport authorities on improving complaints handling procedures and work with Bus Users UK and the Bus Appeals Body to bring about improvements in the complaints and appeals process for bus passengers

- Passenger Focus will work with tram operators and promoters to ensure that existing complaint handling arrangements are working well, and identify areas where improvements are needed
- Aim to get bus companies, local authorities, regional bodies and stakeholders to use a common methodology for bus passenger satisfaction research. Over time this will allow the build up of a much more comprehensive, comparable picture of bus passenger needs across England and will facilitate the use of larger sample sizes in research.

5. Increase awareness of Passenger Focus and our influence with stakeholders in both the bus and rail industries

We make a difference by influencing government and the rail industry to make more passenger-friendly decisions. Passenger Focus has few powers. A key part of that influencing is the research we do to back up our arguments – anecdotes will not persuade anyone. If Passenger Focus is clearly seen and heard then our ability to influence on behalf of passengers is boosted.

To make sure we are heard we will:

- increase the access of passengers, passenger groups and stakeholders to decision-makers. One of the ways we will do this is by organising rail and bus focused public meetings and ‘surgeries’
- promote passengers interests at the European Parliament and Commission
- maintain and improve our website and other communication tools including more use of social networking sites, blogs and video clips
- service a 24 hour, all year round press office
- publish rail and bus national and regional stakeholder bulletins four times a year
- hold major bus and a rail passenger conferences
- hold fringe events raising passenger issues at the main political party conferences, including those in Scotland and Wales.

6. Boost Passenger Focus's capacity and capability to get the best deal for passengers

Board and Governance

Ensure that Passenger Focus's board sets the organisation's overall strategic direction, monitors financial and other performance and takes major policy decisions in a transparent and evidence based way. We will:

- hold six board meetings held in public, which will decide and review policy, performance and finance issues
- publish the Annual Report and Accounts with no qualifications
- manage within the budget allocation and ensuring value for money in purchasing
- identifying mitigating and managing risks to the organisation, including developing a culture of awareness in respect of information risk.

People

- We will aim to achieve the Investors in People standard as part of helping us underpin our commitment to supporting and developing our staff.
- Recruit train and induct new staff to cover bus responsibilities whilst ensuring that our rail function is sufficiently well staffed and that we maintain the diversity of our people.
- Develop and deliver a training and development plan that helps ensure staff can deliver this business plan
- As we take on more responsibilities, manage the change process to ensure Passenger Focus is configured to deliver our new and potential remits. This will be done without compromising the level and quality of our rail passenger work
- Involve and engage with staff through the Passenger Focus staff forum, regular staff meetings and briefings

Offices and information technology

A third of Passenger Focus's staff are peripatetic covering the whole of Great Britain. However, in this year we will have to move both our Manchester and London offices. The lease in our London office is expiring and we are moving back into refurbished premises we previously occupied in Manchester. Both moves will take us into properties on the Government Estate and will be managed with minimal disruption to our work. We will maintain and develop our information technology systems.

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7. How are we doing?

Passenger Focus will:

Seek feedback

- Every year ask service providers, central and local government, Network Rail and other stakeholders:

“How influential has Passenger Focus been in helping you to understand, prioritise and act on passenger experiences and needs?”

“How much impact has Passenger Focus had in making a difference for passengers?”

This stakeholder survey will probe how Passenger Focus’s values of independence, credibility, inclusiveness and influence are being demonstrated in practice by carrying out a number of in-depth interviews with key industry and government figures and stakeholders. Each respondee will be able to reply anonymously ensuring a high degree of objectivity in the responses. The survey will be carried out in April 2010 and published in July

Report

- Report six times a year in public at Board meetings on our plan delivery, including reports on our work with individual train companies
- Publish an annual report on performance, activities and expenditure

Track

- The number of passengers that we engage with thorough research and consultation.
- Major policy decisions within the rail, bus and coach industries and across local and central government that we have influenced
- Number of wins for passengers secured by Passenger Focus.