

The South Eastern franchise – A consultation response from Passenger Focus

September 2012



Table of Contents

Table of Contents	1
1. Passenger Focus	3
2. Introduction and key considerations for the franchise	4
3. Summary of key points and recommendations	7
4. Research, evidence and publications relevant to this refranchising process	14
4.1 The Passenger Focus evidence base.....	14
4.2 Route based passenger research and priorities for improvement.....	14
4.3 National Passenger Survey data.....	15
5. The consultation questions and approach to response	18
6. Schemes, stakeholders, other initiatives	18
7. The franchise specification	20
7.1 Question 5: Which aspects of the specification, in addition to those services operating on the HS1 network, would stakeholders wish to see mandated and which aspects of the specification could be left to the discretion of the operator?.....	20
7.2 Capacity and crowding and train service proposals for South Eastern	21
High Speed.....	21
7.3 Changes and improvements to services.....	25
7.4 Performance.....	27
7.5 Improvements to frequency of service	28
7.6 Speed of journey	29
7.7 Implications of changes to the combined franchise	30
7.8 Folkestone Harbour branch line and station	30
7.9 Dealing with disruption and provision of information.....	30
7.10 Compensation policies	32
7.11 Management of engineering works.....	32
8 Improving customer experience	35
8.1 Train and journey improvements.....	35
8.2 Station improvements	36
8.3 The importance of staffing and information.....	36
8.3.1 Passenger information	36
8.3.2 Staffing	37
8.4 Security and safety.....	37
8.5 Improving station access.....	38
8.6 Service quality, targets and transparency.....	39
8.6.1 National Passenger Survey.....	39
8.6.2 Key Performance Indicators.....	39
8.6.3 Performance targets.....	40
8.6.4 Stakeholder communication and engagement, passenger panels and advisory boards	41
8.6.5 Complaints handling.....	42

8.7	Fares, retailing and smartcards.....	43
8.7.1	Thameslink and London Terminals fares.....	45
8.8	Revenue protection and penalty fares	45
8.9	Equality Act 2010	46
8.10	Improving the environmental performance of the railway	48
9	Contact for further information.....	48
10	Acknowledgements	48
Appendix 1	50
	Table A1 Southeastern passenger priorities by sub-route.....	50
Appendix 2	51
	Passenger requirements for frequency of service at peak times.....	51
Appendix 3	52
	Passenger Focus response to the fares and ticketing review: Appendix A.....	52

1. Passenger Focus

Passenger Focus is the independent public body set up by the Government to protect the interests of Britain's rail passengers, England's bus and tram passengers outside London and coach passengers in England on scheduled domestic services. We are funded by the Department for Transport (DfT) but operate independently.

Our mission is to get the best deal for passengers. With a strong emphasis on evidence-based campaigning and research, we ensure that we know what is happening on the ground. We use our knowledge to influence decisions on behalf of passengers and we work with the industry, passenger groups and government to secure journey improvements.

Passenger Focus is pleased to have engaged with the Department for Transport from an early stage in this franchise replacement process. We have used discussions to highlight key passenger issues and the findings of our research on Southeastern routes and a range of topical issues.

Passenger Focus now welcomes the opportunity to provide further input from a rail passenger's perspective as the specification for the South Eastern franchise is developed.

2. Introduction and key considerations for the franchise

Passenger Focus believes that when the requirements of the South Eastern franchise are established it is vital that the needs of passengers who use and pay for rail services are placed squarely at the heart of the contract. This document sets out many important issues that should be addressed in the franchise specification, and by bidders before the contract is let.

This consultation response develops and expands upon the themes set out earlier this year in our initial submission to the Department of Transport (DfT) on the Thameslink franchise¹. It is informed by research with over 2400 passengers travelling across seven Southeastern routes:

- High Speed
- Mainline
 - Hastings/ Tonbridge to London
 - Rochester/Ramsgate to London
 - Ashford London via Maidstone East to London
 - Other Mainline services
- Metro
 - Gravesend/ Dartford to London
 - Sevenoaks to London.

We have also examined the National Passenger Survey (NPS) results from respondents using Southeastern services. A comparison of these scores with other London and South East (LSE) operators, and the LSE sector overall², shows that, with the exception of High Speed services, Southeastern has consistently been one of the lower performers over recent years, with notably poor scores for the Metro services, especially in relation to train factors. There are historic reasons for this, including decisions about investment, but low scores illustrate the challenge of, and the need for, raising passenger satisfaction to higher levels during the new franchise.

The route research and NPS results are combined with outputs from our wide-ranging studies of passenger needs and perceptions to inform this independent submission to the franchise consultation. A more detailed overview of the evidence base we are using is provided in section 4.

Feedback received from passenger and stakeholder groups has also provided information about local issues and challenges and has aided our understanding of the context in which the franchise will operate.

¹ *Thameslink franchise 2013 onwards: an initial submission from Passenger Focus, May 2012*
<http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/research/publications/thameslink-franchise-2013-onwards-an-initial-submission-from-passenger-focus-may-2012>

² See Tables 1 and 2 for comparative figures

Hallmarks of the new franchise

It is evident that the next South Eastern franchise will face change, and potentially be quite different to the existing model. However, the nature, scope and timing of all the modifications that may impact on the franchise are not yet certain.

The delivery of the Thameslink programme will inevitably have a significant impact on the franchise structure and operations. There will be several years of disruption whilst London Bridge station is redeveloped and services are altered to accommodate the works. It has also been decided that existing Thameslink services, jointly operated with First Capital Connect (FCC), will transfer to the new 'combined franchise' incorporating Thameslink, Southern and Great Northern services.

The transfer of other South Eastern services to the combined franchise is also possible and the current consultation seeks views on this question. There is a further prospect of routing changes to services following the completion of the Thameslink programme.

Other uncertainties relate to potential extensions of the High Speed service and how passenger aspirations for faster journey times are balanced with the London destination and premium fares. There is also the potential for devolution of inner suburban services following proposals from the Mayor and Transport for London (TfL).

The new South Eastern franchise thus faces the prospect of evolution throughout the term. This will require excellent skills in planning, project and change management, and in motivating and focusing staff on the delivery of core activities and high levels of customer service during periods of significant challenge.

The strategic context

Passenger Focus recognises the importance of delivering value for money for taxpayers and passengers and the need to increase the efficiency of the rail industry. We made a detailed response³ to Sir Roy McNulty's rail value for money study, highlighting the important issues from a passenger perspective. This includes a number of relevant points on asset management, programme and project management and supply chain management.

The recently published Rail Command Paper⁴ and High Level Output Specification (HLOS)⁵ mark a further evolution of the rail agenda and the context in which the combined franchise will be let. We note the significant themes addressed, particularly of

³ *The Rail Value for Money Study A Passenger Perspective: Comments by Passenger Focus*, July 2011:

<http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/research/publications/the-rail-value-for-money-study-a-passenger-perspective-comments-by-passenger-focus>

⁴ *Reforming our railways: putting the customer first (command paper)*: <http://www.dft.gov.uk/publications/reforming-our-railways/>

⁵ *High Level Output Specification 2012 (HLOS)*: <http://www.dft.gov.uk/publications/hlos-2012/>

capacity, performance, information and disruption, all of which are of core significance to passengers and on which we comment further in later sections of this response.

We note the Command Paper measures to implement rail reform and reduce the cost of the industry and are supportive of those strategies which enhance efficiency and create closer collaboration, reduce duplication and overlap, and generate further income by increasing the attractiveness of rail. However, we are concerned at some of the proposals regarding demand management. Commuters' journeys are tied into choices on where to work or live – both of which can be difficult to change in the short-term. In addition, many commuters will simply not have the flexibility to negotiate new working patterns or hours in response to fare increases. Some may be able to change aspects of their journey – e.g. shift from first class to standard or from a 'travelcard' to a point-to-point season ticket but they will, at least in the short-term, still have to make the journey.

There are also some legitimate anxieties expressed by passengers surrounding cost-cutting. These are particularly around the availability of staff and ensuring that station facilities are available whilst trains are in service. Reducing costs through genuine improvements to efficiency will largely be welcomed but there will be negative impacts if this simply results in wholesale cutbacks that impact on reasonable passenger expectations and a quality of experience that makes the railway a viable and safe environment in which to travel.

We believe it is essential that the 'post-McNulty' debate does not get lost in too narrow an assessment of cost. Efficiency and cost are important as they clearly have a direct impact on the range of services offered to passengers and the fares charged but cost savings must also be set alongside the value of rail to the economy and the country as a whole. Demand for rail has soared in the last 15 years with passenger numbers now being at levels last seen during the 1920s. If this growth is to be sustained then it will be essential that the benefits of rail are taken into account in any debate as well as the cost of provision.

3. Summary of key points and recommendations

This section provides a summary of the key points and main recommendations for the South Eastern franchise.

Evidence base and passenger priorities for the franchise

The Passenger Focus response to the South Eastern franchise consultation draws on bespoke research with 2420 passengers, National Passenger Survey (NPS) findings and other themed research. It builds on ongoing discussions with the DfT regarding the new franchise and an initial submission made in April 2012.

The top passenger priorities for improvement in the franchise are:

- value for money for price of ticket
- punctuality/reliability of the train
- frequency of trains on the route
- being able to get a seat on the train
- length of time the journey was scheduled to take.

These top priorities are followed by improvements to provision of information during disruption and upkeep/repair and cleanliness of the train.

The franchise specification

Passenger Focus considers the South Eastern franchise should have a strong and sufficiently detailed specification to protect both Government and passenger interests.

Passenger Focus strongly recommends that a detailed specification should be set out for the London Bridge construction works to maximise available capacity to enable people to travel to and from central London.

Passenger Focus believes that the train services to operate should be structured around the journeys that passengers wish to make. Specification should therefore focus on journey opportunities rather than defining train services. The key issue is whether passengers at each station have the required level of service to and from the places they want or need to travel at the times they wish to do so.

There will undoubtedly be changes to train service provision during the franchise and there must be a requirement for a timely, transparent, meaningful and robust consultation process that allows all stakeholders views to be listened to and responded to, prior to changes being finalised or implemented.

Capacity and crowding and train service proposals for South Eastern

Passenger Focus believes that it is only through an integrated approach to train service planning and delivery across the entire network that maximum efficiency and passenger benefit will be achieved.

Passengers regard provision of capacity as a fundamental requirement of the rail service. It is influenced by frequency of trains (thus increasing the overall total of seats available by running more services) and the ability to get a seat on the train used. Both these factors rank highly in passenger priorities for improvement, generally below only punctuality and reliability and value for money in significance. Importantly, capacity also has a strong influence on passenger perceptions of value for money so has a further role in passenger satisfaction.

It is imperative that provision of an effective response to capacity needs throughout the term of the contract is made a core requirement of the new franchise.

The prevailing standard that no passengers should have to stand, other than by choice, for over 20 minutes on a journey, should remain the benchmark.

Passenger Focus is strongly opposed to any move towards pricing passengers off peak services.

Changes and improvements to services

We recommend the following factors should govern the final decisions about the destinations on the current South Eastern network to be served by Thameslink core services and should also underpin other service changes on the franchise:

- The key principle should be to provide services that go where the majority of passengers want them to. This may not always be operationally possible but it should be the starting point for service planning.
- Consideration should be given to passenger preferences for specific London terminals, implications for connectivity at the local level, as well as further afield, and whether stations will also retain other services, particularly to alternative destinations.
- There must be clear evidence of passenger benefit to justify the proposals brought forward and it is imperative that there is wide and meaningful consultation on the eventual timetable proposition. The implications of any proposed service changes on the core passenger priorities of punctuality/reliability, value for money, frequency of trains and getting a seat should also be assessed. Journey length and comfort will also be material considerations for passengers.
- The most appropriate distribution of the combined franchise's services across the overall network should also be considered.
- Should services to any destinations transfer, in whole or in part, there must be a requirement for effective liaison between operators, particularly in relation to information, service disruption, connections and the management of station facilities.

Passenger Focus firmly believes that changes and improvements to services should prioritise the factors that are most important to passengers. In this response we focus primarily on high-level issues but there is substantial additional detail available about passenger views and aspirations at a far more granular level from both the route-research and NPS, and bidders should demonstrate how they have used this evidence in developing their proposals for the franchise. Consultation with passengers and stakeholders at the local level should also inform service plans.

The route based research highlighted identifies passengers' top priorities for improvement as:

- value for money
- punctuality and reliability
- frequency of service
- being able to get a seat
- length of time of journey.

Performance

The overwhelming driver of passenger satisfaction on Southeastern, as it is nationally, is the punctuality and reliability of trains.

We recommend that operational focus on 'right-time' arrival at all stops is made a core requirement of the new franchise, together with a requirement for publication of detailed performance information which will inevitably act as a catalyst to improvement.

Passenger Focus reiterates the previous recommendations⁶ to drive improved performance in the franchise:

- Challenging but achievable PPM targets for the franchise as a whole and key service groups.
- Punctuality should be disaggregated to the maximum extent possible to be meaningful to passengers. This should include (as a minimum) reporting on all identifiable routes and service groups; ultimately we see no reason why passengers ought not to be able to identify performance of individual trains.
- Challenging but achievable targets for reductions in the number of trains reaching their destination more than 20 minutes late, but without resorting to extended journey times.
- Moves towards a 'right-time' railway possibly involving the reduction of the current five minutes allowance and/or publication of right-time performance.
- A requirement to report performance of trains arriving at key intermediate stations which for simplicity could also function as stations against which 'right-time' performance is published.

⁶ *Thameslink franchise 2013 onwards: an initial submission from Passenger Focus, May 2012*
<http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/research/publications/thameslink-franchise-2013-onwards-an-initial-submission-from-passenger-focus-may-2012>

Implications of changes to the combined franchise

The process to let the combined Thameslink, Southern and Great Northern franchise is also underway and changes to the service provision on this network, or the transfer of services from Southeastern, will potentially impact on the overall availability of journey opportunities on the new franchise. It is important that the specifications require liaison between bidders for the combined franchise and South Eastern.

Dealing with disruption and provision of information

Beyond the management of everyday performance requirements, bidders need to demonstrate how they will effectively manage disruption and ensure provision of information to passengers. This will be particularly important in the new franchise as the Thameslink programme moves into the key phase at London Bridge with the ramifications expected to extend across many services.

'How the train company deals with delays' is, by far and away, the biggest driver of passenger dissatisfaction. Passenger satisfaction with the way Southeastern has dealt with delays over the last five years has been consistently low and is broadly unchanged despite an increased focus on this issue across the industry.

Passenger Focus recommends the following requirements be incorporated into the key objectives for the combined franchise to improve the management of service disruption and provision of information to passengers:

- Contractual targets to improve NPS satisfaction with the provision of information during the journey and a strategy developed and implemented to improve NPS scores for "how well the train company dealt with delay" and "usefulness of information during a delay."
- A facility for passengers to receive email or SMS text alerts free of charge warning them if disruption will, or is likely to, affect their journey with an associated requirement to achieve a strong level of uptake through marketing of the service.
- Full adoption of the Association of Train Operating Companies' (ATOC) *Approved Code of Practice: passenger information during disruption* and compliance with the Good Practice Guides on provision of passenger information, together with a programme of audit and mystery shopping to assess delivery on the ground.
- Active co-operation to be required with the programme to feed station customer information systems directly from Darwin, the national real time train running database.
- Ensuring that information systems are equipped to explain causes of delay from the current list of industry-wide "agreed reasons" for delays and cancellations.

In addition, bidders must also be required to show and be assessed against the practical steps they will take to improve how passengers are looked after during service disruption, particularly demonstrating their focus on people rather than processes.

Management of engineering works

Passenger Focus is calling on the rail industry to make a simple pledge to keep passengers on trains wherever possible and use buses only as a last resort. It is important that the new operator is incentivised to embrace this approach.

Passenger Focus recommends that improved management of service disruption, whether planned or unplanned, is incorporated into the key objectives for the combined franchise. The specification should include the following requirements:

- A requirement to reduce the impact on passengers of Network Rail maintenance, renewal and upgrade of the railway and, in particular, to demonstrate efforts to minimise total blockades and the use of bus replacement where options exist to divert or operate single line working etc. The operator should be incentivised against accepting Schedule 4 compensation payments for lack of track access in preference to taking any available opportunity to retain some level of rail service.
- The operator to be required to allocate resource specifically to provide dedicated staff at key sites charged with managing the impact of major engineering activity on passengers and ensuring the highest possible quality of information.
- The operator to develop, monitor and regularly review procedures for managing both planned and unplanned disruption and assess the adequacy of plans and actual delivery on the ground with reference to the issues identified in Passenger Focus research into passenger experiences and needs during disruption.
- The operator to contribute to industry work to improve responses to service disruption and make a commitment to rapid adoption of further good practice as it emerges.

The franchise specification should make specific provision for passenger information requirements relating to planned disruption. These should be based on the passenger preferences identified by our route based research.

Improving customer experience

Passengers will undoubtedly expect that a new franchise will include proposals to improve the overall quality of service delivered to passengers. Passenger Focus recommends that the specification sets out clear requirements for delivering improved passenger satisfaction across a range of areas.

Passenger Focus research on stations consistently demonstrates that, in addition to station facilities, there are two key factors that operators need to consider when thinking about how to improve passenger satisfaction with stations: information and staff.

Real-time information provision at all stations should be a core requirement of the franchise.

The pressure on the industry to reduce costs inevitably places a focus on the overheads associated with staff. However, Passenger Focus is concerned that bidders for the franchise do not overlook the very significant roles that staff play and the value that passengers attach to a visible staff presence, especially at stations.

To improve security and safety Passenger Focus recommends that the franchise specification should include CCTV and linked help-point provision at all stations that do not currently have these facilities. Passenger Focus also supports accreditation of stations and car parks through the established industry schemes.

The passenger growth forecasts for the combined franchise mean increased attention will need to be given to how passengers are going to access and pass through stations throughout the life of the franchise.

Service quality, targets and transparency

Passenger Focus strongly supports the principle of monitoring and improving service quality through a combination of NPS results and periodic reviews of Train Operating Company (TOC) Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

Disaggregated targets for all measures should be set and performance against them published widely. There should be a requirement for the franchise operator to commit to high levels of transparency about all aspects of the franchise, including operational performance and service quality.

Given the very high significance of these factors to passengers the specification must include traditional 'hard' performance targets covering punctuality, reliability and crowding.

Fares, ticketing and 'smart' technology

Whilst 'smart' technology will enable an enhanced offer of ticketing products and services, there is a wider agenda about fares, retailing and revenue protection that must be considered for the new franchise.

Passenger Focus has conducted extensive research with passengers on fares, ticketing and value for money and has identified many issues that remain to be adequately addressed. We set out a number of key issues for the franchise within the response and in a detailed appendix.

Revenue protection and penalty fares

An effective strategy for revenue protection is important for the new franchise. However, the revenue protection strategy must provide safeguards for those who make an innocent mistake and whose intention was never to defraud the system.

Accessibility

Passenger Focus recommends that the franchise specification should include a requirement for the operator to audit the accessibility of stations and establish a minor works fund.

In addition to the provisions set out in Disabled People's Protection Policy (DPPP) guidance, Passenger Focus believes the franchise specification should also require a number of specific provisions, which are set out in the response.

4. Research, evidence and publications relevant to this refranchising process

4.1 The Passenger Focus evidence base

Passenger Focus is an evidence-based organisation and has produced research and reports on a wide range of topics relevant to this refranchising process, and to future operations under the new contract. We have provided the Department for Transport (DfT) and prospective bidders with a comprehensive listing of our research publications. We have also directly provided these organisations with particularly important reports and discussed with them, in some detail, our research into subjects most salient to this refranchise. Reference to relevant reports is made in specific sections of this consultation response.

4.2 Route based passenger research and priorities for improvement

Route-based research with 2420 passengers on Southeastern services was conducted specifically to inform our input to this and the allied Thameslink, Southern and Great Northern refranchise. The surveys were undertaken across seven Southeastern sub-routes to provide a detailed picture of passenger views, needs and aspirations across the different service groupings. The high level findings demonstrate that the top passenger priorities for improvement are:

- value for money for price of ticket
- punctuality/reliability of the train
- the frequency of trains on the route
- being able to get a seat on the train
- length of time the journey was scheduled to take.

These top priorities are followed by improvements to provision of information during disruption and upkeep/repair and cleanliness of the train. Further detail about passenger priorities is provided in Appendix 1. Tables showing the responses to all questions covered by the research and providing a breakdown by route/service group and for commuter, business and leisure passenger sectors are available on the Passenger Focus website⁷. These findings inform our response to the consultation.

The full Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) data set is available to DfT and potential bidders for their detailed analysis.

⁷ Southeastern: <http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/research/publications/southeastern-franchise-excel-summary-may-2012>
<http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/research/publications/southeastern-franchise-stated-preference-report-may-2012>

4.3 National Passenger Survey data

The National Passenger Survey (NPS) results for spring 2012 have recently been published and Tables 1 and 2 provide the most recent information about passenger views on key elements of the Southeastern franchise, broken down into the main service groupings. NPS data is also used to calculate the key drivers of satisfaction (see Figure 1) and dissatisfaction (Figure 2). Where relevant we draw on NPS data in our response to the consultation questions.

Table 1 NPS satisfaction scores – overall and station factors

Station Factors (%satisfied)	LSE Sector score	High Speed	Mainline	Metro	SER
NPS Spring 2012					
Overall satisfaction	82	93	82	80	81
Overall satisfaction with station	75	91	73	72	73
Ticket buying facilities	71	79	72	67	69
Information provision on train times/platforms	80	84	78	76	77
Upkeep/repair of station buildings/platforms	66	85	66	62	64
Cleanliness of station	70	85	70	69	70
Facilities and services	48	70	54	46	50
Attitudes/helpfulness of staff	69	80	71	63	67
Connections with other public transport	74	76	72	73	73
Facilities for car parking	46	67	56	31	41
Overall environment	66	84	65	63	65
Your personal security whilst using	66	74	66	59	62
Availability of staff	57	71	60	54	57
How request to station staff was handled	82	81	77	75	76
More than 5% points higher than sector average					
More than 5% points lower than sector average					

Table 2 NPS satisfaction scores – train factors

Train Factors (%satisfied)	LSE Sector score	High Speed	Mainline	Metro	SER
NPS Spring 2012					
Frequency of the trains on route	77	84	79	74	76
Punctuality/reliability (arriving/departing on time)	79	90	81	78	79
Time journey scheduled to take (speed)	83	93	74	80	79
Connections with other train services	77	86	70	72	72
Value for money for price of your ticket	38	34	34	31	32
Cleanliness of the train	74	96	77	67	71
Upkeep and repair of the train	74	97	77	68	72
Information provision during journey	70	91	74	63	68
Helpfulness/attitude of staff on train	57	89	70	36	56
Space for luggage	53	73	45	47	48
Toilet facilities	35	73	37	18	28
Room for all passengers to sit/stand	68	88	66	57	61
The comfort of the seating area	71	92	69	65	67
Ease of being able to get on/off	79	92	84	75	79
Personal security on board	75	89	79	65	70
The cleanliness of inside	74	95	76	67	71
The cleanliness of outside	72	87	68	67	68
Availability of staff	39	72	54	16	33
How well train company deals with delays	35	55	45	24	31
More than 5% points higher than sector average					
More than 5% points lower than sector average					

Figure 1 Drivers of satisfaction NPS by building block, Spring 2012⁸

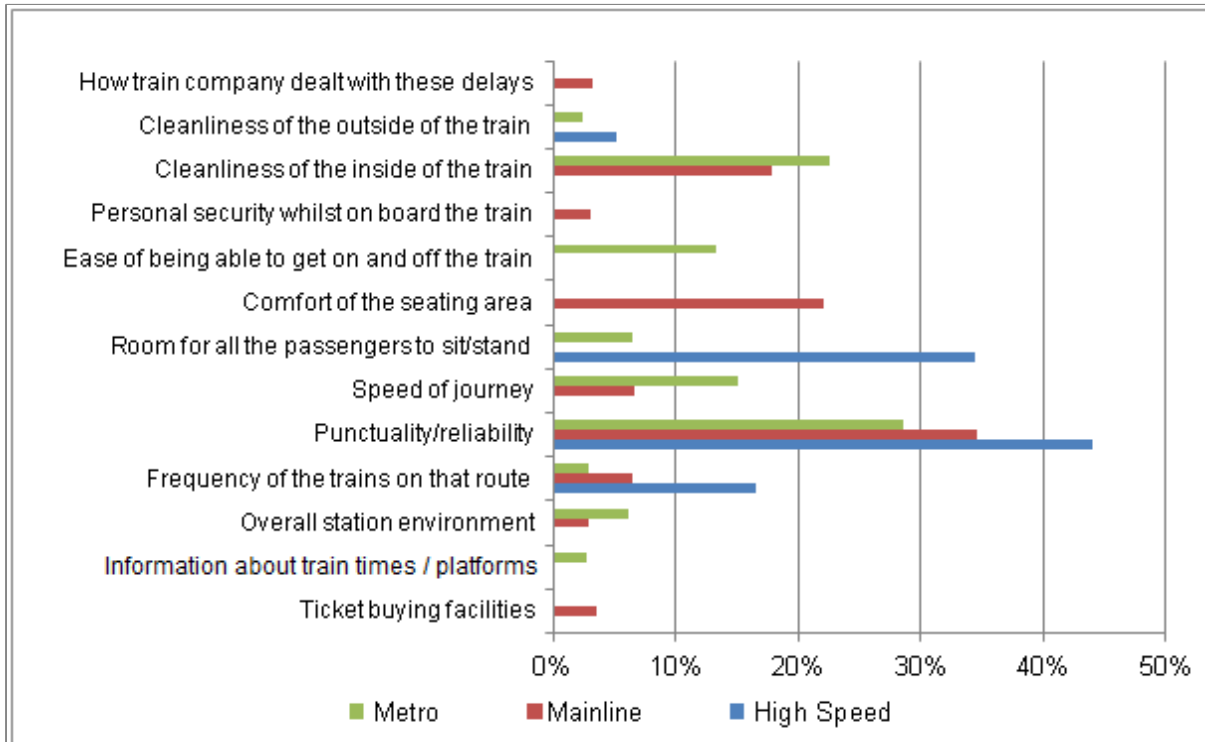
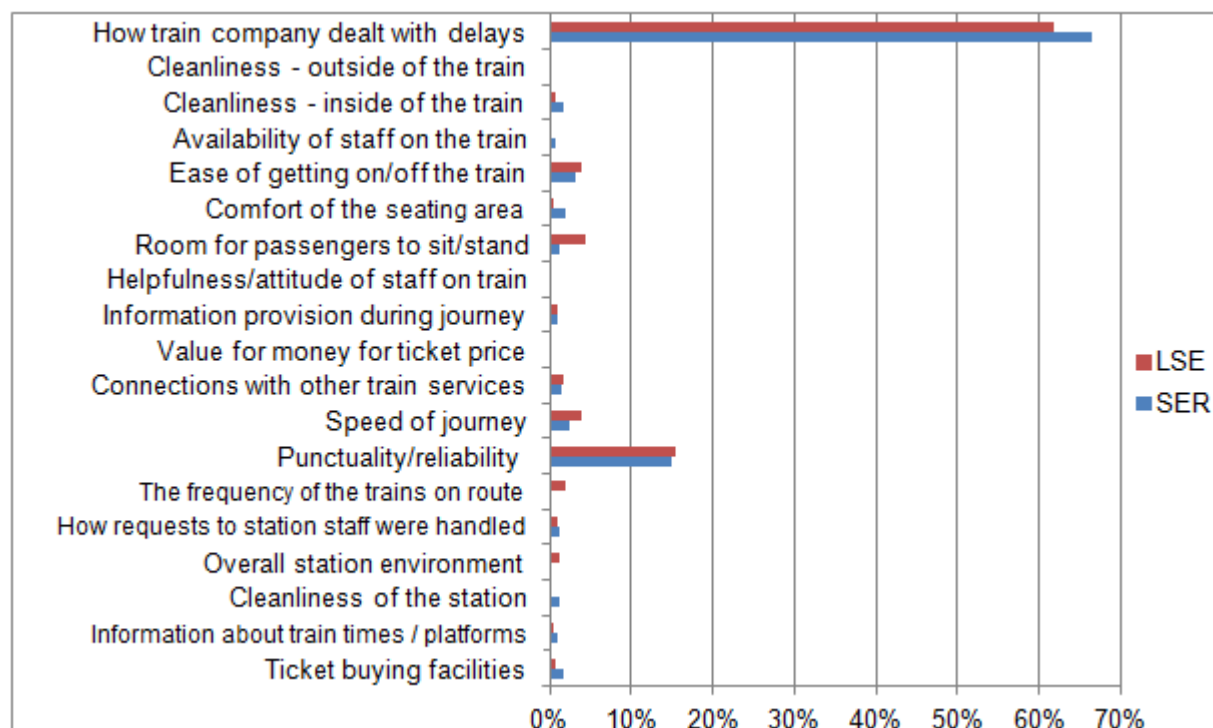


Figure 2 Drivers of dissatisfaction NPS spring 2012⁹



⁸ Based on autumn 2011 and spring 2012 NPS data.

⁹ Based on autumn 2011 and spring 2012 NPS data.

LSE = London and South East sector, SER = Southeastern

5. The consultation questions and approach to response

Many of the consultation questions are inter-linked or are influenced by common themes. In the following sections we have grouped various questions together where we believe topics are related or we wish to make a number of similar points in our responses.

Additionally, we provide further comment on a number of issues that we believe are pertinent to the next franchise and which we wish to see considered in the specification and addressed by bidders in their proposals.

6. Schemes, stakeholders, other initiatives

Question 1: What improvements do stakeholders believe could be made on the combined franchise through partnership working between Network Rail and the new operator?

Partnership working between Network Rail (NR) and the new operator should form part of the arrangements for the combined franchise.

Aligning incentives and working more closely together can certainly help improve efficiency. We know from our research that passengers want a sense of someone being in charge when it comes to the delivery of services, especially during times of disruption. But it cannot just be a case of aligning NR and train company processes to achieve cost-savings; such processes must also be aligned with passengers' priorities. If the end-game is better services for passengers then internal processes and systems must work towards this, rather than vice versa. Two particular areas stand out: increasing punctuality and reducing service disruption.

Closer working may provide the opportunity to revisit previously successful practice and have the operator's staff, especially those on stations, trained as first responders to minor local operational incidents (e.g. signal and point failures, road vehicles hitting bridges etc) to get trains moving without having to wait for the arrival of a NR staff member who may be located some distance away.

A further opportunity presented by closer partnership would be the achievement of a step-change in transparency. The open data agenda is driving the industry towards higher levels of information being in the public domain. We know from our research with the Office of Rail Regulation¹⁰ that passengers want access to more tailored information (i.e. data that is relevant to their route/journey). A new, more responsive alliance could make a very public commitment towards accountability by promising greater transparency from the outset.

Question 2: What, if any, changes to South Eastern services need to be made given the likely changes in demand that could result from Crossrail?

Question 3: Are consultees aware of any other rail or non-rail development schemes that might affect the new franchise?

¹⁰ *Putting rail information in the public domain*, Passenger Focus and Office of Rail Regulation, May 2011

Question 7: Do respondents feel that there are other destinations that domestic high speed services could serve that would support regional and national economic growth?

Transport authorities/consortia, Local Enterprise Partnerships and local groups will have knowledge of their areas and be well placed to detail specific factors that might influence future levels of passenger demand, including the potential passenger response to the introduction of Crossrail and aspirations for the extension of high speed services to support economic growth. However, given that the natures of both Crossrail and high speed are quite distinct from other Southeastern services, the principle should be that new provision should be additional to, rather than a replacement for, the existing offer.

Liaison and joint working with the Mayor and Transport for London (TfL) will be particularly important in relation to the Metro routes within the combined franchise and future Crossrail services. The TfL proposal for devolution of Southeastern Metro services warrants further consideration. The experience on London Overground demonstrates how increased investment and service improvements have produced benefits for passengers. If similar results can be delivered on the inner-suburban Southeastern services there may be much to recommend this approach, subject to appropriate protection for passengers on other routes.

All opportunities to create synergy between rail and other development projects, and any potential to seek partnership funding and align delivery mechanisms with other organisations, should be seized.

Question 4: What increments or decrements to the specification would stakeholders wish to see and how would these be funded?

The Passenger Focus remit does not extend to proposing either increments or decrements for the franchise. However, experience shows that those who lose services can encounter a number of difficulties unless there are well-planned and effective mitigations, including clear passenger information, put in place from the outset. This must be a requirement should any proposed decrements be given consideration.

7. The franchise specification

7.1 Question 5: Which aspects of the specification, in addition to those services operating on the HS1 network¹¹, would stakeholders wish to see mandated and which aspects of the specification could be left to the discretion of the operator?

Passenger Focus believes that the specification is the key to the entire franchising process. We note the DfT's intention to provide greater flexibility for operators to respond to demographic and market changes and commercial opportunities. However, it is only against a sufficiently detailed specification that a train operator's performance can be effectively monitored. And, in the worst case, it would be the standards set out in the specification that would provide the framework for determining if an operator should be removed for poor performance. For the Government to ensure it gets what it pays for with taxpayers' money there must be specification to set out what is required of the new franchisee.

Passenger Focus considers there is a need, therefore, for the South Eastern franchise to have a strong and sufficiently detailed specification to protect both Government and passenger interests. This should allow intervention when required to ensure improvement and, as a final sanction, the removal of an operator that consistently fails to deliver the necessary levels of service.

The consultation document rightly highlights the impact of the London Bridge construction works and the importance of maximising available capacity to enable people to travel to and from central London. Passenger Focus strongly recommends that a detailed specification should be set out for these stages of the franchise and that this must balance the needs of all passengers on the services of all operators into central London.

The franchise specification should take a holistic view of the needs of all passengers: commuter, business and leisure, across High Speed, Mainline and Metro services. It should provide a framework to ensure that service provision is based on passenger needs and priorities and that is linked to key measures of passenger satisfaction. This should require the operator to plan, resource and deliver, throughout the franchise, a service pattern that provides optimised passenger journey opportunities within the overall industry processes for track access and timetabling. With the acknowledged capacity constraints of the franchise there must be an equitable distribution of train services appropriate to passenger demand.

Passenger Focus believes that the train services should be structured around the journeys that passengers wish to make. Specification should therefore focus on journey opportunities rather than defining train services. The key issue is whether passengers at each station have the required level of service to and from the places they want or need to travel at the times they wish to do so. The starting point should be the available opportunities provided by

¹¹ As set out in paragraph 7.7 of the consultation document, these services will continue to be mandated in the franchise. The HS1 network covers the route from St Pancras International, through Stratford, Ebbsfleet and Ashford through to the Channel Tunnel. Southeastern operate high speed domestic services, using this infrastructure, between Ashford, Ebbsfleet and St Pancras International

existing services and the aim should be to optimise these based on passenger demand. A minimum requirement should be established in situations where compromises are required to make an overall improvement for passengers. The provision of sufficient capacity must be addressed, particularly for the morning peak.

There will undoubtedly be changes to train service provision during the franchise and there must be a requirement for a timely, transparent, meaningful and robust consultation process that allows all stakeholders views to be listened to and responded to prior to changes being finalised or implemented.

Engagement with local communities should be regarded as a starting point for service developments.

7.2 Capacity and crowding and train service proposals for South Eastern

Capacity and crowding (whether on High Speed or other Southeastern routes) will intrinsically be linked to the overall train service proposals, which should be based around passenger needs and their aspirations for change and improvement. Passenger Focus believes that it is only through an integrated approach to train service planning and delivery across the entire network that maximum efficiency and passenger benefit will be achieved.

Our responses below address a range of factors that must be considered in establishing the overall train service proposals for the franchise.

The table below illustrates the importance passengers place on improvements to core elements of the train service. The factors are ranked with the most important scored at 100 and other priorities shown relative to that. Punctuality and reliability is the most significant requirement for improvement in the service (and is considered further in section 7.4), followed by frequency of service and being able to get a seat. The speed of journey also features, in particular for Mainline services, which is echoed by passenger comments we have received.

Table 3 Southeastern passenger priorities for improvement by service group

Factor	Overall rank	High Speed	Mainline	Metro
Value for money for price of ticket	1	100	100	81
Punctuality / reliability of the train	2	71	87	100
Frequency of trains for this route	3	48	53	71
Being able to get a seat on the train	4	45	52	59
Length of time the journey was scheduled to take (speed)	5	38	47	31
Provision of information during times of disruption	6	27	29	29

Question 8: How might better use be made of the capacity currently available?

Question 9: What steps might bidders be expected to take to meet passenger demand and what might be the most appropriate mechanisms for managing demand?

The significance of capacity to passengers

Passengers regard provision of capacity as a fundamental requirement of the rail service. It is influenced by frequency of trains (thus increasing the overall total of seats available by running more services) and the ability to get a seat on the train used. Both these factors rank highly in passenger priorities for improvement, generally below only punctuality and reliability and value for money in significance. Importantly, capacity also has a strong influence on passenger perceptions of value for money so has a further role in passenger satisfaction.¹²

Quotes from some recent qualitative research undertaken to inform our input to another franchise consultation are reflective of many passengers' feelings:

You shouldn't have passengers standing on a train...why should you pay the same amount to stand
(Manchester Airport - Leisure)

It's 'down-time', you can't get your laptop out if you haven't got a lap
(Manchester/Leeds-Glasgow – Business)

The other galling thing is that it's more expensive to travel at busy times, when they are ram jam full
(Manchester Airport - Leisure)

The severe crowding on certain London commuter services is well-documented and, even with the planned interventions on infrastructure and enhancements to the train fleet, provision of sufficient capacity will remain an ongoing challenge. Findings from the route based research indicate that 23 per cent of commuters surveyed on Metro services report that on their journeys 'I usually stand and it is very crowded.'

Table 4 shows how current passenger satisfaction with the capacity-related factors of 'frequency of service' and 'room for passengers to sit and stand' varies across the three different service groups and in the peak/off-peak. The notably low level of peak passenger satisfaction with sufficient room to sit and stand on Mainline and Metro services illustrates the scale of the capacity challenge.

¹² Passenger Focus response to the Government's rail fares and ticketing review, June 2012

<http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/research/publications/passenger-focus-response-to-the-governments-rail-fares-and-ticketing-review>

Table 4 NPS Peak and off-peak satisfaction with frequency and capacity by building block¹³

Factor % satisfied	SER		
	High Speed	Mainline	Metro
The frequency of the trains on that route PEAK	82	65	73
The frequency of the trains on that route OFF-PEAK	85	79	76
Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand PEAK	82	40	36
Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand OFF-PEAK	93	78	71

Making better use of capacity

Passenger Focus believes that the franchise contract should require the operator to take all possible steps to provide sufficient capacity across all services throughout the life of the franchise. We recognise this will present some significant challenges, especially whilst infrastructure works are underway. However, this issue is too important to passengers to be ignored.

It is imperative that provision of an effective response to capacity needs throughout the term of the contract is made a core requirement of the new franchise.

To effectively manage crowding, a train company needs high quality loadings data, with the ability to analyse individual trains, different days of the week and seasonal impacts. The available capacity must then be allocated to provide the greatest benefit for the maximum amount of people.

We welcome the Government's procurement of a rail passenger counts database which is intended to provide accurate data on train loadings and crowding levels. The future operator must be required to adopt and publish appropriate crowding measures across the range of routes and services to make it more representative of an individual passenger's experience and use this information to improve capacity where it is inadequate. Published data should make the crowding levels on different services easily comparable so that decisions about allocation of resources can be scrutinised. NPS satisfaction measures for relevant factors, including overall satisfaction and room to sit and stand, should be published alongside capacity data to demonstrate the impact this has on passengers.

A careful review of timetables must be undertaken to explore how services can best be matched to passenger needs. There may well be opportunities to adapt frequencies and stopping patterns to provide a better match of capacity with demand, whilst still ensuring the needs of all passengers are balanced appropriately. Where this is the case, Passenger Focus

¹³ Autumn 2011 and spring 2012 data combined.

would expect clear evidence to be produced and comprehensive consultation with passengers prior to any changes being made.

The prevailing standard (that no passengers should have to stand, other than by choice, for over 20 minutes on a journey) should remain the benchmark. At no point should stock available for use be sitting in sidings when there is evidence of need for additional capacity on services where it could be deployed. In addition, the franchise specification should require that the particular needs for additional capacity for special events must also be planned for and managed.

Other approaches to management of capacity should also be implemented. Transparent information about the loadings of specific trains provides passengers with the knowledge that may enable them to make an informed decision. Recent research¹⁴ found that over two thirds of passengers who had seen information about the levels of crowding on specific train services had found it useful and just over a fifth of these people had made a regular or occasional change to the trains they used as a result of the information. Similarly, incentivising passengers to sometimes swap peak journeys with travel in the shoulder or off-peak, or perhaps work closer to home on some days, may also make a contribution to capacity pressures. See response to Question 20 for further detail on this latter point.

Passenger Focus is strongly opposed to any move towards pricing passengers off peak services. Commuters' journeys are tied into choices on where to work or live, both of which can be difficult to change in the short-term. In addition, many commuters will simply not have the flexibility to negotiate new working patterns or hours in response to fare increases. Some may be able to change aspects of their journey – e.g. shift from first class to standard or from a 'travelcard' to a point-to-point season ticket but they will, at least in the short-term, still have to make the journey.

Where investment in additional rolling stock would provide the necessary capacity to meet identified requirements, the onus should be on the operator to build a business case to enable this to happen. If there is a commercial case then there should be prompt action to deliver the necessary vehicles. Where additional subsidy may be required, Passenger Focus expects the operator and the DfT to work together to seek an affordable solution. Where required, assessments should look beyond the immediate franchise into the longer term to create a viable mechanism to respond to identified demand.

Over the lifetime of the franchise the operator must be required to work with Network Rail and within the wider industry processes to develop proposals to further increase capacity to meet the expected rise in demand, and to ensure this information is available to inform future High Level Output Specification (HLOS) plans and investment cycles.

Additional efforts should be made to respond to passengers who have physical difficulties in standing for any length of time. Initiatives such as priority seating and cards that the holder can show to identify a proven need should be part of the overall plan for improving accessibility within the franchise.

¹⁴ *The impact of publishing more information on seat availability: South West Trains case study*, ORR July 2012

Off-peak capacity

There are two distinct issues relating to making better use of capacity in the off-peak. On certain routes at various times of day there can be insufficient capacity for the off-peak demand meaning that passengers experience crowding. Bidders should be required to adapt service provision and train availability to meet off-peak capacity shortfalls where these are identified.

Secondly, to improve the financial performance of the franchise and maximise use of the rolling stock, bidders should have clear proposals for promoting usage in the off-peak. Marketing strategies and ticket offers will have a role to play here, as will the delivery of high quality services that passengers will find an attractive travel option, especially if their journey or modal choice is discretionary. There are parts of the combined franchise where joint initiatives with Community Rail Partnerships should be further developed, or established, to extend the reach into wider communities and promote off-peak travel.

7.3 Changes and improvements to services

Question 10: What destinations on the current South Eastern network do respondents think should be served by Thameslink core services and what is the rationale for them?

Transfer of the FCC and Southeastern jointly operated services into the combined franchise in April 2014, as proposed in the consultation document, makes sense. The current division between operators is artificial and based only on service patterns that existed prior to implementation of earlier phases of the Thameslink programme. A single operator for a specific service is most effective operationally and this is also more comprehensible to passengers.

Consideration of which other destinations on the current South Eastern network should be served by Thameslink core services should start with the travel patterns of existing passengers and local aspirations for services to new destinations.

Origin and destination data should be used as the basis for understanding travel requirements. This data is available to the industry, but not generally to stakeholders. Without access to this key data and other relevant information, particularly about network capacity, timetabling options and comprehensive assessments of stakeholder views, it is not possible for Passenger Focus to derive a properly balanced judgement and we will therefore refrain from making presumptions about the other South Eastern destinations to be served by Thameslink core services.

We recommend the following factors should govern the final decisions about the destinations on the current South Eastern network to be served by Thameslink core services and which should also underpin other service changes on the franchise:

- The key principle should be to provide services that go where the majority of passengers want them to. This may not always be operationally possible but it should be the starting point for service planning.
- Consideration should be given to passenger preferences for specific London terminals, implications for connectivity at the local level, as well as further afield, and whether

stations will also retain other services, particularly to alternative destinations.

- There must be clear evidence of passenger benefit to justify the proposals brought forward and it is imperative that there is wide and meaningful consultation on the eventual timetable proposition. The implications of any proposed service changes on the core passenger priorities of punctuality/reliability, value for money, frequency of trains and getting a seat should be assessed. Journey length and comfort will also be material considerations for passengers.
- The most appropriate distribution of the combined franchise's services across the overall network should also be considered.
- Should services to any destinations transfer, in whole or in part, there must be a requirement for effective liaison between operators, particularly in relation to information, service disruption, connections and the management of station facilities.

Question 6: What changes to services would stakeholders propose, why and would these provide economic benefit?

Question 11: What improvements would respondents like to see made to other South Eastern services, what is the rationale for them and would these provide economic benefit?

Passenger Focus firmly believes that changes and improvements to services should prioritise the factors that are most important to passengers. In this response we focus primarily on high-level issues but there is substantial additional detail available about passenger views and aspirations at a far more granular level from both the route research and NPS, and bidders should demonstrate how they have used this evidence in developing their proposals for the franchise. Consultation with passengers and stakeholders at the local level should also inform service plans.

One specific issue that the South Eastern franchise should address is the provision of an alternative service to mitigate the impact of the withdrawal of the South London Line as capacity is reduced at London Bridge.

The route based research highlighted in table 3 above identifies passengers' top priorities for improvement as:

- value for money
- punctuality and reliability
- frequency of service
- being able to get a seat
- length of time of journey.

Key points in relation to making effective use of capacity have already been set out in the preceding section. Issues around value for money are addressed in the section on fares and retailing and the accompanying Appendix 3.

7.4 Performance

The significance of performance to passengers

There can be no mistaking the crucial importance of punctuality and reliability to passengers. Figure 1 above shows the overwhelming driver of passenger satisfaction on Southeastern, as it is nationally, is the punctuality and reliability of trains.

Table 5 shows passenger satisfaction scores for punctuality and reliability across the different service groups and for peak and off-peak passengers. It shows the lowest levels of satisfaction are on Metro services and amongst peak passengers.

Table 5 NPS scores for punctuality and reliability, spring 2012, % satisfied

Southeastern	
High Speed	90
Mainline	81
Metro	78
Peak	72
Off-Peak	83

Improving performance

We noted in our initial submission that other research¹⁵ demonstrates that commuters' satisfaction with punctuality falls from the very first minute a train is late not just after the five minutes on commuter services allowed by the Public Performance Measure (PPM). It was also found that the average passenger lateness in the evening peak was worse than the average train lateness. This was because of the effect of cancellations and because many trains were late arriving at intermediate stations even if on time at their destination.

Passenger Focus's principal conclusion from the research is that Britain's railway must in future ensure operational focus on 'right-time' arrival at all stops. We recommend that this is made a core requirement of the new franchise, together with a requirement for publication of detailed performance information which will inevitably act as a catalyst to improvement.

Bidders should demonstrate an ability to take an organisation-wide approach to delivering improved performance. There should be plans to ensure that every department, team and individual involved in train operations knows and does precisely what is required to achieve right-time, and how to respond to any challenges that threaten this delivery. Comprehensive reporting on all elements of performance across the entire franchise should be a matter of course and management should ensure sufficient focus and attention to detail to be confident that nothing is overlooked. A powerful strategy to engage and motivate all staff to understand and play their role should also be evidenced.

¹⁵ *Towards a 'right-time' East Anglian railway*, Passenger Focus, March 2010

In view of the differences between the service groups, Passenger Focus recommends that a route-based management approach will provide the most appropriate structure in which performance can be effectively managed and improved.

Performance improvements should be a core aspect of the working arrangements with Network Rail (NR) and these should build on previous joint plans. Where services overlap or connect there should also be an explicit commitment to work collaboratively with other operators and to ensure that passenger interests are firmly established as the first priority when decisions relating to performance are made.

Passenger Focus recognises that some of the infrastructure on which the franchise operates is intensively used and that this can have an impact on performance, especially once something has started to go wrong. However, this is the operating scenario for this very busy network and performance must not be used as an argument to reduce capacity. Rather, this reinforces the argument for operational focus on right-time running to ensure valuable capacity is not eaten up by delays.

Passenger Focus reiterates the previous recommendations¹⁶ to drive improved performance in the franchise:

- Challenging but achievable PPM targets for the franchise as a whole and key service groups.
- Punctuality disaggregated to the maximum extent possible to be meaningful to passengers. This should include (as a minimum) reporting on all identifiable routes and service groups; ultimately we see no reason why passengers ought not to be able to identify performance of individual trains.
- Challenging but achievable targets for reductions in the number of trains reaching their destination more than 20 minutes late, but without resorting to extended journey times.
- Moves towards a 'right-time' railway possibly involving the reduction of the current five minute allowance and/or publication of right-time performance.
- A requirement to report performance of trains arriving at key intermediate stations, which for simplicity could also function as stations against which 'right-time' performance is published.

7.5 Improvements to frequency of service

Frequency of service is a high priority for improvement. Our route-based research indicates that expectations of peak frequency are loosely linked to distance travelled. Those travelling on Metro routes, where there will be higher levels of crowding in the peak, are more likely to

¹⁶ *Thameslink franchise 2013 onwards: an initial submission from Passenger Focus*, May 2012: <http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/research/publications/thameslink-franchise-2013-onwards-an-initial-submission-from-passenger-focus-may-2012>

want a turn up and go frequency (around six trains per hour). Passengers travelling from further afield tend to be content with three or four trains per hour.

Our route research showed satisfaction with frequency was typically lower in the evenings and at weekends, particularly Sundays, but with some distinct variations between routes, as shown in Appendix 2. There was some interest in being able to take earlier and later trains than the current timetable allows on most routes, as shown in table 6 below. The case for improving frequencies on different routes, including Sundays and bank holidays, in response to passenger aspirations should be explored by bidders.

Table 6 Passenger interest in earlier and later services

	High Speed	Hastings / Tonbridge to London	Rochester / Ramsgate to London	Ashford via Maidstone East to London	Other Mainline journeys	Gravesend/ Dartford to London	Sevenoaks to London
Percentage of passengers who said they would travel on trains departing EARLIER than the FIRST train does at present from the station.							
Monday to Thursday	18%	23%	28%	21%	24%	29%	26%
Friday	18%	22%	25%	22%	23%	30%	25%
Saturday	9%	13%	16%	14%	14%	13%	11%
Sunday	11%	13%	18%	14%	15%	13%	12%
Percentage of passengers who said they would travel on trains departing LATER than the LAST train does at present from the station.							
Monday to Thursday	33%	28%	33%	31%	37%	33%	32%
Friday	39%	36%	35%	35%	43%	45%	42%
Saturday	37%	32%	27%	35%	40%	41%	37%
Sunday	29%	20%	20%	29%	31%	27%	23%

7.6 Speed of journey

A further priority for improvement is increasing the speed of journey. The franchise research reveals satisfaction can vary considerably by route. For example, 90 per cent of all High Speed passengers were satisfied with the journey time, as were 78 per cent of those travelling from Sevenoaks to London. But this dropped to between 64 – 66 per cent amongst passengers travelling on the following routes to London:

- Hastings/Tonbridge
- Rochester/Ramsgate
- Gravesend/Dartford
- Ashford via Maidstone East.

There is often a difficult balance between meeting the needs of those who want a faster service (e.g. those making time-critical journeys such as commuters) and passengers travelling to/from intermediate or smaller stations who don't want the reductions in frequency that arise if stops are taken out to speed up a service.

Optimum solutions could be delivered through joint working with Network Rail and carefully targeting investment to parts of the route which have a particular impact on speed of travel, or where passing loops would allow faster trains to overtake slower, stopping services. The franchise specification should encourage bidders to explore all such opportunities.

Clearly, the scope to balance differing journey needs and improve speed will depend on the overall timetable proposition. This emphasises the need to take a holistic look at all services. Comprehensive consultation with all passengers must be a fundamental part of the timetabling process.

7.7 Implications of changes to the combined franchise

The process to let the combined Thameslink, Southern and Great Northern franchise is also underway and changes to the service provision on this network, or the transfer of services from Southeastern, will potentially impact on the overall availability of journey opportunities on the new franchise. It is important that the specifications require liaison between bidders for the combined franchise and South Eastern.

7.8 Folkestone Harbour branch line and station

Question 12: Do respondents feel that Folkestone Harbour branch line and station should be kept open and maintained or would the funding currently devoted to supporting this line and station be better used for other rail schemes?

Passenger Focus is naturally reluctant to see parts of the network closed. However we agree that the status quo is unacceptable. Continually spending money maintaining a line that is not used is clearly unsustainable.

There is not sufficient detail in the consultation document to reach a firm decision. For example, are there any redevelopment plans for the harbour, and what is the status of previous suggestions that the route be turned into a heritage railway? Any final decision must take into account potential future demand as well as the present situation.

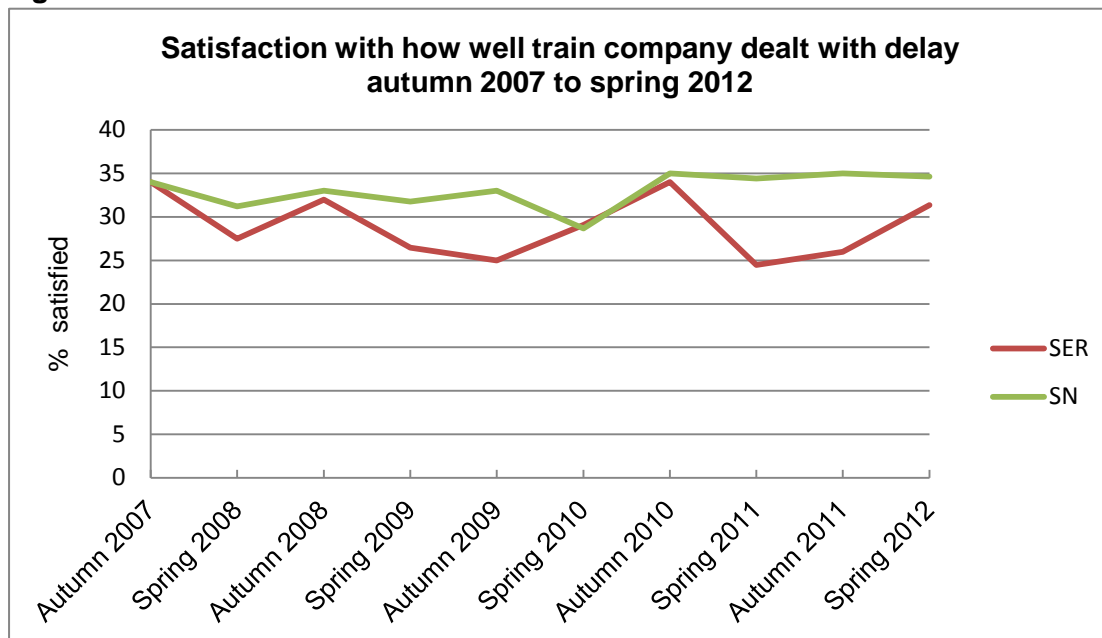
It is also important that we learn from previous 'Beeching' era closures. There are a number of routes where demand would justify re-opening but where the alignment has been built over. If the decision is to proceed with a closure application it will be important that it builds in such a safeguard for the future.

7.9 Dealing with disruption and provision of information

Beyond the management of everyday performance requirements, bidders need to demonstrate how they will effectively manage disruption and ensure provision of information to passengers. This will be particularly important in the new franchise as the Thameslink programme moves into the key phase at London Bridge with the ramifications expected to extend across many services. See Section 7.11 for specific comments about engineering work.

Figure 2, above, shows clearly that ‘how the train company deals with delays’ is, by far and away, the biggest driver of passenger dissatisfaction. Figure 3, below, shows how passenger satisfaction with the way Southeastern and the adjoining Southern franchise have dealt with delays over the last five years has been consistently low and is broadly unchanged despite an increased focus on this issue across the industry. Clearly, more must be done.

Figure 3



Passenger Focus supports efforts by the industry to tackle the management of disruption and also to raise standards of information provision. Research into disruption and passenger needs for information¹⁷ has identified the problems to be addressed and shown how solutions may be found.

Passenger Focus recommends the following requirements be incorporated into the key objectives for the combined franchise to improve the management of service disruption and provision of information to passengers:

- Contractual targets to improve NPS scores for passenger satisfaction with the provision of information during the journey, and a strategy developed and implemented to improve NPS scores for ‘how well the train company dealt with delay’ and ‘usefulness of information during a delay.’
- A facility for passengers to receive email or SMS text alerts free of charge warning them if disruption will, or is likely to, affect their journey with an associated requirement to achieve a strong level of uptake through marketing of the service.

¹⁷ *Delays and Disruption: Rail passengers have their say*, Passenger Focus, December 2010

Reading station engineering works: what passengers want, Passenger Focus, May 2011

Information: Rail passengers’ needs during unplanned disruption, Passenger Focus and Southern, August 2011

Short and Tweet. How passengers want social media during disruption, June 2012

Passenger Focus assessment of online information provided to rail passengers during high winds, March 2012

- Full adoption of the Association of Train Operating Companies' (ATOC) *Approved Code of Practice: passenger information during disruption* and compliance with the Good Practice Guides on provision of passenger information, together with a programme of audit and mystery shopping to assess delivery on the ground.
- Active co-operation to be required with the programme to feed station customer information systems directly from Darwin, the national real time train running database.
- Ensuring that information systems are equipped to explain causes of delay from the current list of industry-wide "agreed reasons" for delays and cancellations.

In addition, bidders must also be required to show and be assessed against the practical steps they will take to improve how passengers are looked after during service disruption, particularly demonstrating their focus on people rather than processes.

An important factor in keeping passengers on the move during service disruption is train crew route knowledge for key diversionary opportunities. We encourage bidders to ensure that their plans include train crew 'signing' for diversionary routes that will allow them to keep passengers on the move and on trains, even during disruption. This will also have benefits in allowing passengers to stay on trains during engineering works.

7.10 Compensation policies

Passenger Focus recommends that, in line with other recent franchises, a 'delay-repay' compensation policy applicable to all passengers whose journeys have been disrupted should be a requirement for the franchise. However, there is a need for the specification to also require meaningful measures to address the specific problems that can be experienced by season-ticket holders who may suffer regular delays of between 10-29 minutes that are not covered by the 30 minute threshold for 'delay-repay'.

A formal definition of sustained poor performance to cover these circumstances, and some firm proposals about how this will be reflected in additional compensation to regular travellers, should be required. The definition should take into account both the frequency of 10-29 minute delays and their cumulative total in any period. The assessment of poor performance should also reflect the proportion of time the passenger was delayed in relation to the scheduled journey.

The proposals for additional compensation should be subject to consultation.

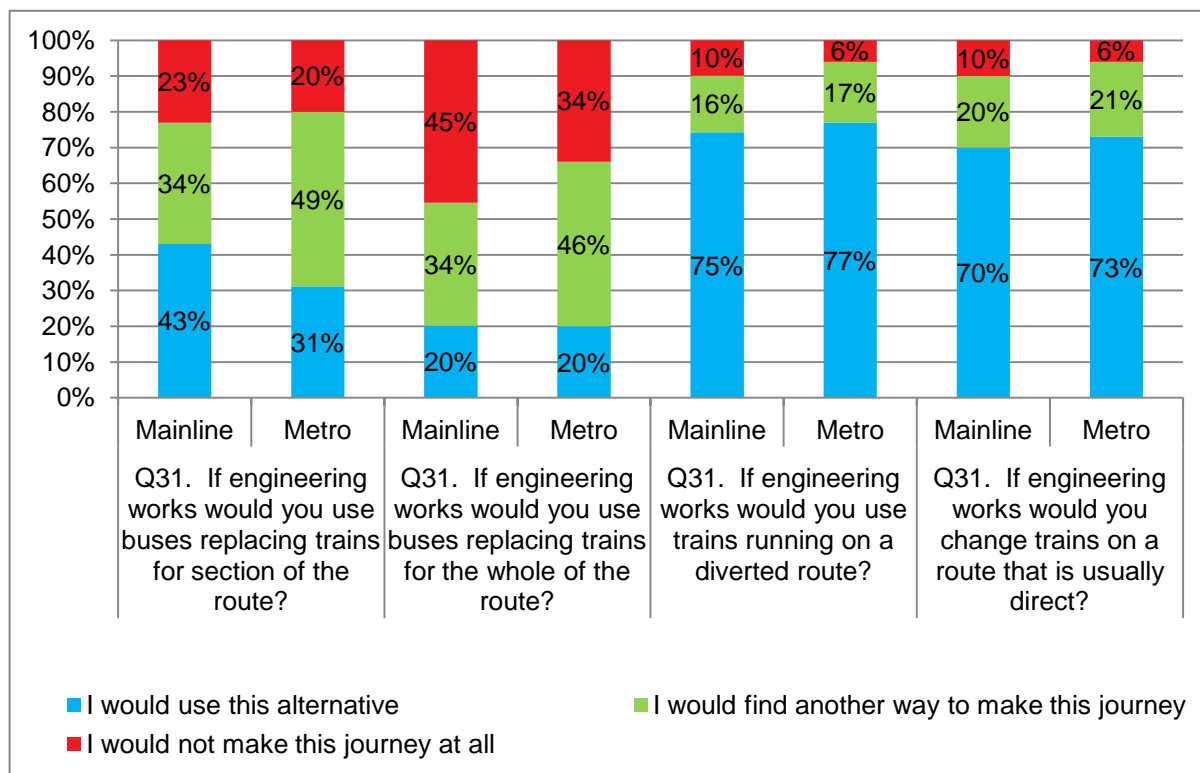
7.11 Management of engineering works

Passenger Focus posed a number of questions about engineering works to passengers on Southeastern routes and recommends that the passenger preferences demonstrated are incorporated into requirements for the next franchise.

The route research found passengers have a very strong preference for engineering options that allow them to remain on a train rather than have services transferred to bus. This is

consistent with other research¹⁸ and the strength of views is such that this passenger preference should be accommodated wherever and whenever possible as work is undertaken on the combined franchise.

Figure 4: Southeastern Mainline and Metro passenger preferences for engineering service scenarios



Passenger preferences for scheduling of engineering

The route-based research also explored passenger preferences about when engineering work should be scheduled. On Southeastern Mainline and Metro services ‘weekend line diversions or amended timetables over a number of weeks’ were more favoured (35 and 39 per cent respectively) than weekend closures (24 and 29 per cent respectively). This was followed by ‘no trains running after 21:00 until the next morning over a number of weeks’ (22 and 16 per cent).

Least popular options were ‘run a reduced service Mon-Sun over a number of weeks’ (10 and 5 per cent), ‘Christmas/Easter/Bank Holidays line closures’ (6 and 8 per cent) or ‘full line closures for a week or more’ (both 4 per cent).

There were some differences in the preferences expressed by different passenger types on different routes, with commuters, in most instances, less likely to opt for works that would impact their regular journey, whilst leisure passengers were less likely to opt for weekend line

¹⁸ Reading Station Engineering Works: What Passengers Want, May 2011:

<http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/news-and-publications/document-search/document.asp?dsid=5162>

closures. Full details are in the route research tables and should be carefully appraised by bidders in conjunction with Network Rail.

Passenger Focus is calling on the rail industry to make a simple pledge to keep passengers on trains wherever possible and use buses only as a last resort. It is important that the new operator is incentivised to embrace this approach.

Passenger Focus recommends that improved management of service disruption, whether planned or unplanned, is incorporated into the key objectives for the combined franchise. The specification should include the following requirements:

- A requirement to reduce the impact on passengers of Network Rail maintenance, renewal and upgrade of the railway and, in particular, to demonstrate efforts to minimise total blockades and the use of bus replacement where options exist to divert or operate single line working etc. The operator should be incentivised against accepting Schedule 4 compensation payments for lack of track access in preference to utilising any available opportunity to retain some level of rail service.
- The operator to be required to allocate resource specifically to provide dedicated staff at key sites charged with managing the impact of major engineering activity on passengers and ensuring the highest possible quality of information.
- The operator to develop, monitor and regularly review procedures for managing both planned and unplanned disruption and assess the adequacy of plans and actual delivery on the ground with reference to the issues identified in Passenger Focus research into passenger experiences and needs during disruption
- The operator to contribute to industry work to improve responses to service disruption and make a commitment to rapid adoption of further good practice as it emerges.

Advance information about planned engineering

The franchise specification should make specific provision for passenger information requirements relating to planned disruption. These should be based on the passenger preferences identified by our route based research shown below.

Table 7: Passenger top five preferences for receiving information on planned disruption

Method	High Speed	Mainline	Metro
Posters at the station in the weeks leading up to the disruption	62%	69%	78%
Announcements at the station in the weeks leading up to the disruption	31%	39%	49%
Announcements on trains in the weeks leading up to the disruption	39%	38%	42%
A timetable on the internet	33%	30%	20%
An email from the train company	30%	24%	25%

In 2010 Passenger Focus conducted research with passengers into communications about the impact on journeys from the closure of Reading station for a large re-signalling project and other infrastructure improvements. On the basis of the findings, that a majority of the passengers surveyed were aware of the works in advance of travelling and were satisfied with how the situation was managed, we believe that the Reading station project should be used as a best practice guide for handling future engineering works.

8 Improving customer experience

Question 16: What are the priorities that respondents consider should be taken into account to improve the passenger experience of using these services?

Question 17: What do stakeholders see as the most important factors in improving security (actual or perceived) and addressing any gap between the two?

Question 18: What is important to stakeholders in the future use and improvements in stations?

Passengers will undoubtedly expect that a new franchise will include proposals to improve the overall quality of service delivered to passengers. Passenger Focus recommends that the specification sets out clear requirements for delivering improved passenger satisfaction across a range of areas. Bidders should be required to demonstrate that they have given full consideration to Passenger Focus and other research on relevant topics, and how their proposals address the aspects that are important to the passenger experience, especially where levels of satisfaction are currently low.

In this response we focus primarily on high-level findings from the route research and NPS but there is substantial additional detail available at a far more granular level and bidders should demonstrate that they have used this evidence in developing their proposals for the franchise.

8.1 Train and journey improvements

In our route research we asked passengers about the importance of different on-board services and what aspects of the service they would like the rail company to concentrate on improving.

On all three Southeastern service groups a wif-fi internet connection was regarded by passengers as the most important on-board facility across all routes, followed by at-seat power sockets. Catering facilities were ranked as next important by 23 per cent of High Speed and 24 per cent of Mainline passengers but there was little interest from passengers on Metro services.

The aspects of journey comfort passengers most wanted the train operator to concentrate on improving were upkeep and maintenance of the seating and fixtures on the train, the cleanliness of the seating and common parts, cleanliness of train toilets and clearing away of litter on the trains.

8.2 Station improvements

NPS shows low levels of satisfaction with station facilities and services for both the Mainline and Metro building blocks. Whilst passengers are fairly pragmatic about what facilities should be provided at different category stations, low scores for facilities and services would suggest that in many instances stations fail to meet even basic expectations.

Passenger Focus research conducted at Clapham Junction, Barking and Luton stations following the Better Stations report¹⁹ shows that at individual stations there are often specific improvements that passengers want to see and that priorities can vary according to location and circumstance. Bidders should consider the detailed results from NPS and the route research and also seek station feedback from local passengers and community rail partnerships to identify issues and aspirations for specific locations and gather information about relevant accessibility issues.

8.3 The importance of staffing and information

Passenger Focus research on stations consistently demonstrates that, in addition to station facilities, there are two key factors that operators need to consider when thinking about how to improve passenger satisfaction with stations: information and staff.

8.3.1 Passenger information

The way the industry manages delays is the biggest single driver of rail passenger dissatisfaction; the key to improving this is through the provision of real-time information on delays. By and large (87 per cent)²⁰ passengers only tend to find out about disruption once they have arrived at the station; it is therefore crucial that operators look at how they can best pass on accurate information to the passenger once it is known to the industry. This is particularly important at unstaffed stations where passengers' only source of information might be a customer information screen (CIS). Real time information provision at all stations should be a core requirement of the franchise.

Other types of information are also important to passengers. It is important that the franchise specification requires bidders to meet high standards of information provision for all stages of the journey; this should include requirements to meet passenger needs for initial planning, at the station of departure, during the journey, at the arrival station and, particularly when there is disruption. Where there are major interchanges it is also important that maps provide information showing adjacent franchises and where one can interchange between networks.

It is also important that, at all times when trains are running, passengers can have access to someone who can provide information and, if disruption means that journeys are curtailed, is empowered to help stranded passengers by arranging/authorising alternative transport, accommodation or other appropriate responses.

¹⁹ The *Better Stations Report* identified 10 of the worst category B stations in the country. Clapham Junction, Barking and Luton, all featured in that list.

²⁰ *Passenger Priorities for Improvement in rail services*, Passenger Focus, 2009

8.3.2 Staffing

The pressure on the industry to reduce costs inevitably places a focus on the overheads associated with staff. However, Passenger Focus is concerned that bidders for the franchise do not overlook the very significant roles that staff play and the value that passengers attach to a visible staff presence, especially at stations.

Staff are an important and trusted source of information for passengers. This role can encompass information about journey planning, cover wider issues relating to ticket retailing, where there remains considerable complexity about terms and conditions applicable to tickets and, of course, sale of tickets that are unavailable from machines.

During disruption staff have a central role in providing information and advice to passengers, helping them with queries and in making further plans for their journey.

Passengers with assistance needs are particularly dependent on staff to deliver the help they require and to fulfil requests made through Passenger Assist.

Many station facilities and services are only available whilst staff are present. Feedback indicates significant concern about the lack of access to toilets and waiting rooms if staff are withdrawn from stations or hours are significantly reduced.

8.4 Security and safety

Passengers cite the lack of staff as a major reason for their feelings of concern over personal security. Passengers consistently identify staff presence as important to providing reassurance to those travelling on the railway. The industry therefore needs to give serious consideration to how it can best deploy staff. Our publication *Passenger perceptions of personal security on the railways* sets out passengers' concerns in more detail. Bidders should set out how they intend to address these issues within the franchise.

The autumn 2011 NPS found, on average, just over one in ten passengers nationally had cause to be concerned about their personal security. The main causes for that concern, both on the train and at the station, were attributed to the anti-social behaviour of others and a lack of staff.

Some notable concerns about security emerged from the route research. High levels of concern for their security were expressed by passengers on Southeastern routes, noted by an average of 15 per cent on the Mainline and 20 per cent on Metro. Particular concern was expressed by passengers on the routes to London by passengers from Gravesend/Dartford (24 per cent), Rochester/Ramsgate (20 per cent) and Sevenoaks (17 per cent). 20 per cent of passengers on other Mainline routes also noted security concerns.

To improve security and safety Passenger Focus recommends that the franchise specification should include CCTV and linked help-point provision at all stations that do not currently have these facilities. Where stations are currently unstaffed during any part of the day when trains operate, they should be priorities for such investment. We believe that virtually every station

should have appropriate technology to enhance personal security, although we acknowledge that it may be appropriate to specifically exempt this requirement for a few particularly lightly used stations in order to ensure best use of limited resources.

Passenger Focus also supports accreditation of stations and car parks through the established industry schemes

8.5 Improving station access

Question 19: What priorities would respondents give to car parking and cycling facilities at locations where these are fully used?

When passengers decide what mode of transport to take they are swayed by three overwhelming factors: how convenient will the journey be, how much will it cost and how long will it take²¹. This applies to the whole door to door journey. The way passengers access the station can affect both overall journey cost and time. If getting to the rail station becomes too inconvenient passengers will often choose to make their whole journey by car,²² adding congestion to the roads and to transport's carbon footprint.

The passenger growth forecasts for the combined franchise mean increased attention will need to be given to how passengers are going to access and pass through stations throughout the life of the franchise.

At some locations the solution to station access needs will be to improve public transport links and parking provision, but at others the solution will be more complex and could be more creative. With limited space for car parking at some stations and the industry's desire to look at more sustainable options, Passenger Focus is supportive of the use of Station Travel Plans. Local groups and Community Rail Partnerships should be involved in developing proposals to improve station access.

Many passengers get to the station on foot but arrival by car is also an important means of access for a significant number of passengers; particularly those travelling in more rural areas, who may not have any other viable alternative. In these places, improvements to car parking provision where it is currently over-subscribed is a priority, especially if increased off-peak usage is to be promoted.

Increasing the options to travel by bus may be a fruitful area to explore. We asked passengers, if they used a car regularly to travel to the station, what would encourage them to use alternative transport. More frequent, cheaper and/or direct bus services were the main preferences.

Improvements to cycle facilities, including access routes, parking and, potentially, changing rooms may help increase the number of passengers who use this option to access the station.

²¹ *Door to door by public transport: improving integration between National Rail and other public transport services in Britain*, June 2009 http://www.cpt-uk.org/_uploads/attachment/690.pdf

²² *Getting to the station*, Passenger Focus, March 2007

Bidders should be encouraged to commit to Station Travel Plan schemes, with rollout dispersed across the network and throughout the life of the franchise. The stations selected should not just be those with the highest footfall, as the 2011 Network Rail Utilisation Strategy (Stations) demonstrated that congestion does not just occur at those stations with the highest number of passengers starting or ending their journeys.

The successful bidder should be able to demonstrate how they will work in partnership with local authorities and other agencies to improve accessibility to stations by all modes, including cycling. Where demonstrably beneficial schemes for passengers can be delivered by other partners, they should be encouraged and their future assured. The franchise should accommodate commitments to the future operation of any facilities provided.

8.6 Service quality, targets and transparency

Targets, measurements and monitoring are fundamental to delivering improvements to service quality. Passenger Focus strongly supports the principle of monitoring and improving service quality through a combination of NPS results and periodic reviews of train operator Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Disaggregated targets for all measures should be set and performance against them published widely. A financial penalty regime should apply with resources ring-fenced for additional investment into service quality measures that are most likely to improve passenger satisfaction.

There should be a requirement for the franchise operator to commit to high levels of transparency about all aspects of the franchise, including operational performance and service quality.

8.6.1 National Passenger Survey

We have long advocated more use of qualitative targets within a franchise. Our strong preference is for targets based on what passengers think, the best judge of quality being those who have used the services in question. NPS provides this measure and, with an average sample size of around 1600 each wave, this already enables robust measures across three distinct service groups.

We have suggested that bespoke targets should be established on each of the service group building blocks to measure passenger satisfaction with station, train service, train facility and customer service attributes. Existing levels of satisfaction should be the starting point for establishing targets which should generally become more stretching as the franchise progresses. An annual assessment of the combined spring and autumn results would provide a fair measure of the overall passenger satisfaction within each given year.

Passenger Focus will continue to discuss the application of NPS targets for the franchise with the Department and bidders as required.

8.6.2 Key Performance Indicators

The KPI assessments should be conducted across the entire franchise and include all stations and representative samples of the major train service groups. Standards of satisfaction with

the customer services function, complaints handling and the level of appeals to Passenger Focus should also be measured. All assessments should be conducted frequently to provide ongoing management information as well as a basis for a regular review based on collated information.

8.6.3 Performance targets

Question 13: How would you like to see performance information published?

Question 14: How frequent should its publication be?

Question 15: What level of disaggregation of performance do you believe is reasonable?

Given the very high significance of these factors to passengers, the specification must include traditional 'hard' performance targets covering punctuality, reliability and crowding as well as more qualitative measures. However, we believe that there is a need for much more transparency surrounding these targets and how the train operator performs against them.

Transparency will promote greater accountability by making clear to rail passengers, staff, management and other parties how key aspects of the rail service are performing at different places and at different times. The provision of detailed information will enable rail passengers and others to hold the train company to account and to ask what is being done to improve services in return for the fares paid. Good management should not feel threatened by this. Indeed the availability of accurate data may actually help them as a particularly bad journey can linger in the memory and distort passengers' perceptions. Accurate, relevant data can help challenge these negative perceptions and is also a vital management tool.

Punctuality data only provided at the overall train operator level can easily mask significant differences between routes and times of day. Providing disaggregated performance data, at minimum, at a route/service group level for morning/afternoon peaks, daytime and evening would help prevent this and focus attention on areas that need improving. Passenger Focus would support further steps to open up performance data (including cancellations) at station level to allow passengers to see information on the particular services that interest them.

Equally, there is currently next to nothing in the public domain about crowding. This is another fundamental aspect of a passenger's journey and an area where greater transparency can also generate improvements for passengers.

In the medium term we also see value in looking more closely at the choice of performance measurement used. The existing measure (PPM) allows a five minute leeway on late arrival; a train is not late until it exceeds this allowance. However, we know from our research²³ mapping passenger satisfaction against train performance that a delay can begin to have an effect on passengers from the first minute. This might mean addressing the suitability of the current thresholds or even introducing a secondary measure based on right-time arrival. Recent steps by the industry towards publication of right-time data on particular trains make

²³ *Towards a 'right-time' East Anglian railway*, Passenger Focus. March 2010

this increasingly feasible and more likely to be the measure on which performance is publicly judged.

Network Rail's performance clearly has a huge bearing on an operator's punctuality and yet a franchise agreement typically only creates an obligation on factors within the train company's control. Clearly there are limits to how far one organisation is willing to be held accountable for another's performance but, from a passenger's perspective, it is overall punctuality that matters not just how well the train company did. There are obvious benefits in aligning train operator and Network Rail incentives and there is much work going on to address this, not least in terms of joint improvement performance plans and potential alliances. We would like to see the franchise specification encourage and cement this joint working approach. To this end we would ask DfT to consider the scope for introducing joint targets within this franchise.

Passenger Focus is currently working with the Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) and National Rail Enquiries, on behalf of all train operators, to explore passenger views on performance and other data and understand how this may best be made available to them. The results of this qualitative research will be provided to the DfT and bidders at the earliest opportunity to inform the approach to data publication in the new franchise.

Input vs. output measures

The balance between input and output measures is a fine one. For instance, the franchise could specify that the bidder purchases 50 new ticket vending machines (an input target) or that it increases passenger satisfaction with retailing (an output target). The latter follows the pattern set in the South Central franchise with the bidders setting targets for passenger satisfaction and these becoming contractual targets with fines for non-compliance.

Passenger Focus recognises the value of both input and output measures provided that they are based on passengers' priorities and needs. Some input targets will clearly remain important to passengers e.g. to cover 'hard' targets for things like punctuality, cancellations and crowding, while output targets (based on passenger satisfaction) may be better placed to address some of the 'softer' qualitative elements of a journey. Passenger responses to the consultation should be used to further inform the targets and measures that go into the franchise specification.

8.6.4 Stakeholder communication and engagement, passenger panels and advisory boards

Central to improving the passenger experience of rail services are effective mechanisms for passenger and stakeholder engagement, particularly for gathering intelligence on local aspirations and developments, and for consulting on future proposals.

Passenger Focus advocates that a wide range of means should be employed to communicate with passengers and wider communities to allow people to access information and provide input in the ways that are most suited to each individual or group. Useful mechanisms include: posters and leaflets at stations and on trains, newsletters, web-based and social media communications, stakeholder events and conferences, rail user/interest group/Local Authority liaison meetings and roadshow events.

Passenger Focus also considers that passenger panels and advisory boards can provide a useful way to establish two-way information channels and structured feedback which can benefit from the ongoing relationship with the participants. We recognise that there are many different ways to approach these structures and are currently reviewing how these can work in practice. We are happy to discuss alternative models and their implications with bidders.

8.6.5 Complaints handling

In our role as the statutory appeals body²⁴ Passenger Focus has extensive experience of working with passengers and rail operators to seek resolution of appeal complaints. We have found a number of recurring issues with either the operators' complaints processes or response quality. We have been working with the industry in an effort to improve customer service and reduce complaint handling times as well as to decrease the number of passenger appeals against train companies.

It is important that the specification for the franchise requires detailed information from bidders about their policy and procedures for dealing with complaints. These should evidence a clear commitment to best practice and should encompass the following points:

Process issues

- Empower customer services advisors to apply 'natural justice' when dealing with poor passenger experiences and allow redress to go beyond the minimum levels of the Passenger Charter or National Rail Conditions of Carriage.
- Establish mechanisms to monitor and manage response times, and acknowledge complaints if they cannot be resolved within the target time, which should be published.
- Implement a process whereby appropriate issues are proactively investigated by the customer service advisor and other relevant staff members and the findings fed back to the passenger.
- Establish mechanisms to feed complaints into service improvements, where possible, and feed information about this back to the passenger.

Response quality

- Train and empower customer service advisors to identify and address all the points in the complaint and give heavy weighting to 'addressing all issues raised by the passenger' in internal quality monitoring processes.
- Provide clear explanations about why the passenger is/ is not receiving compensation and/or gesture of goodwill.
- Make careful use of appropriately worded standard paragraphs, supplemented as necessary by bespoke responses.
- Ensure customer service advisors use clear, jargon-free English with correct spelling, grammar and punctuation when writing responses.

²⁴ For British rail passengers outside of London

Legacy complaints

A clear process for handling legacy complaints should be established. Passenger Focus recommends that all complaints should be dealt with by the new operator from the first day onwards, with appropriate recompense mechanisms from the outgoing operator established to enable this.

Making the incumbent responsible for handling complaints reduces confusion and complexity for the passenger. It also ensures that complaints are handled by the operator with an ongoing interest in retaining the passenger, and who is best placed to resolve any issues and implement any changes as a result of the complaint.

8.7 Fares, retailing and smartcards

Question 20: What sort of ticketing products and services would you expect to see delivered through 'smart' technology on this franchise?

Whilst 'smart' technology will enable an enhanced offer of ticketing products and services, there is a wider agenda about fares, retailing and revenue protection that must be considered for the new franchise.

Passenger Focus has conducted extensive research with passengers on fares, ticketing and value for money and has identified many issues that remain to be adequately addressed. We have recently submitted and published a response to the Government's rail fares and ticketing review²⁵ which summarises our research findings and sets out the improvements we are seeking on behalf of passengers. Appendix 3 is extracted from the fares and ticketing response and provides our overall aspirations for fares, ticketing and value for money for the South Eastern franchise. We do, however, wish to emphasise some particularly important points:

- Passengers on Southeastern have already endured years of RPI +3 per cent fare rises while satisfaction with value for money for the three NPS service groups ranges between 31- 34 per cent, even lower than the poor 38 per cent score for the London and South East sector overall. The ability and willingness of Southeastern passengers to continue to cope with further large fare increases must be questioned.
- We recognise that retailing is evolving but ticketing arrangements in the new franchise must accommodate the needs of all passengers. Our research on Southeastern routes indicates that a high proportion of passengers (46 per cent on High Speed, 52 per cent on Metro and 61 per cent on Mainline) currently prefer to purchase tickets from ticket offices.

²⁵ *Passenger Focus response to the Government's rail fares and ticketing review* -

http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/research/all?research_filter%5Bmode%5D=1&research_filter%5BpublicationType%5D=&research_filter%5Btopic%5D=&research_filter%5ByearOfPublication%5D=&research_filter%5Bq%5D=Rail+fares+and+ticketing+review

Many also expressed a preference to receive a ticket in standard paper format rather than for 'newer' forms of ticketing as shown in table 8 below:

Table 8 Passenger preferences for ticket format

Ticket format	High Speed	Mainline	Metro
Standard paper ticket	63%	65%	44%
Loaded onto smartcard	18%	16%	38%
Sent to your mobile (scan a barcode at the ticket gate)	7%	6%	4%
Sent to your mobile (show message as proof of purchase)	5%	4%	3%
Ticket printed at home/work	2%	3%	2%
Other	2%	2%	3%
Don't know/no opinion	2%	4%	5%

- The new operator must support passengers to take advantage of new ticketing methods and products as retailing evolves.
- The franchise should also include a requirement to include a demonstration of customer satisfaction with retailing overall, within the service quality measures. In the interests of transparency the operator should be required to provide data that illustrates the experience of different passenger groups. This should include monitoring and publishing ticket queuing times at ticket offices and vending machines.
- New products should build on the experience of the smartcard pilots being implemented on the current Southern franchise and elsewhere. However, the new operator should also be encouraged to exploit the opportunities to use other rapidly emerging technologies such as mobile ticketing where this can provide passenger benefits.
- 'Smart' products should include carnet-style tickets for less regular travellers and discounted fares for travel outside the peaks, both of which can benefit passengers and also provide incentives that assist management of capacity. A range of other products and services should also be encouraged, including integrated multi-modal tickets, car parking and, potentially, other station services. The role for zonal-type fares outside of London should be considered.
- Any existing arrangements for special fares or discounts (e.g. Kent Rover or Weekender tickets) should be retained as no change of franchise should erode passengers' existing benefits. Consideration should also be given to introducing new products where the market exists, including a comparable 'rainy day guarantee' as operated on Southern.
- The travel opportunities of off-peak passengers should be protected and there should be no further dilution of periods of validity of off-peak tickets.
- We also wish to see wider use of Advance fares across the new franchise and beyond for better value long-distance travel.

8.7.1 Thameslink and London Terminals fares

Passenger Focus has recommended that the creation of the combined Thameslink, Southern and Great Northern franchise should be taken as an opportunity to address the confusion and inequity surrounding the north-south London Terminals issue. Currently passengers travelling on a London Terminals ticket are only permitted to travel to certain stations within the Thameslink core depending on the direction from which they have travelled. To passengers, London is London; the fine nuances of which station is applicable to which ticket from which origin is incomprehensible and many passengers are penalised for genuine mistakes, the actual cost of which to the industry is negligible.

We wish to see a single, unified London Terminals ticket applicable to all London stations on the Thameslink route from any direction on the combined franchise or South Eastern (including Farringdon, not technically a terminal but nevertheless a London destination within the core). This should be priced at the lowest comparable existing fare when the franchise commences.

8.8 Revenue protection and penalty fares

An effective strategy for revenue protection is important for the new franchise. Passenger Focus believes ticketless travel is an important issue and one that needs addressing. Passengers who avoid paying for their ticket are in effect being subsidised by the vast majority of fare-paying passengers. It is right that the franchisee will take steps to deter, to catch and to punish those who deliberately set out to avoid payment. However, the revenue protection strategy must provide safeguards for those who make an innocent mistake and whose intention was never to defraud the system.

Passenger Focus has recently published a document²⁶ highlighting significant concerns around the application of penalty fares and unpaid fare notices that have arisen as a result of disturbing passenger experiences brought to our appeals team. These issues have been raised with the industry and we await a promised code of conduct from ATOC. The core principles we would expect to see contained within a code are set out in Appendix 5.

In the meantime, a new franchise provides an opportunity to take a fresh look at how the system operates.

Bidders should be mindful of passenger intent in developing and applying a revenue protection strategy. The DfT should ensure that the following safeguards are written into the franchise agreement:

- The operator should provide clear consistent guidelines explaining when staff should show discretion in the application of penalties. For example when:
 - passengers do not have their railcard with them

²⁶ *Ticket to ride*, Passenger Focus, May 2012

<http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/research/publications/ticket-to-ride-full-report-may-2012>

- the required tickets are not available from a ticket machine
 - they are told by a member of staff that they can board a train without a valid ticket
 - ticket restrictions are not clear or available at the point of purchase.
- The operator must clearly state that they will not go straight to any form of criminal prosecution unless they suspect (or have proof) that there was an intent to defraud.
 - Penalties should be proportionate to the actual loss suffered by the operator.
 - The operator must monitor the number of penalty fare notices being issued and the numbers being overturned on appeal.
 - Train companies need to retain overall accountability even when they have outsourced revenue protection to a third party.

8.9 Equality Act 2010

Question 21: What local accessibility and mobility issues do stakeholders see and how they might be addressed?

We note the requirements to comply with equalities and discrimination legislation and to produce a Disabled People's Protection Policy (DPPP). However, we would also highlight the fact that many mobility impaired people do not regard themselves as falling within the scope of disability legislation so access improvements can benefit a much wider range of people including older or frailer passengers and those encumbered by luggage or small children.

Passenger Focus recommends that the franchise specification should include a requirement for the operator to audit the accessibility of stations and establish a minor works fund resourced, on an annual basis, at such a level that the operator can deliver a range of schemes, making appropriate adaptations to ensure that the accessibility of the franchise increases steadily over its duration. There should be a requirement for consultation with relevant groups including inviting suggestions about how this money might best be spent to meet identified needs.

In addition to the provisions set out in DPPP guidance, Passenger Focus believes the franchise specification should also require the following provisions:

- Mobility-scooter policy to ensure that a suitable scooter acceptance scheme is in place for smaller, lighter and more manoeuvrable machines. The new franchisee must not offer worse terms than the current operator; existing passengers should not be prevented from travelling with their scooters merely as a result of franchise change.
- Introduction of a priority seat card scheme (as initiated by Southern and now also adopted as good practice by FCC) to help passengers demonstrate a specific need for a seat, backed up by publicity on stations and greater prominence made of which seats are priority seats so that they are easily located and recognised. This is especially important as no reservation facility is currently available and is of even greater benefit where no on-board staff are present to assist disabled passengers in finding a seat.

- Clarify the hierarchy of use of priority seating and the categories of passenger considered eligible for it.
- Clearly indicate priority of usage in 'shared' spaces i.e. wheelchairs have absolute priority over prams.
- Provide assistance cards which disabled passengers can show to staff to explain their disability; hearing-impaired, speech-impaired, learning difficulties etc so that staff can react and provide the necessary additional assistance.
- Undertake comprehensive Passenger Assist monitoring: the number of bookings made, the number of bookings carried out and passenger satisfaction. The results should be published in each revision of the franchisee's Disabled People's Protection Policy and the Passenger Charter.
- Best use should be made of the management information gained from Passenger Assist e.g. enabling TOCs to plan assistance provision better.
- Training of staff, especially front-line staff, in immediate customer contact, whether face-to-face or by telephone.
- That the new operator participates in the 'Railways for All' process including a quantified commitment to improve access to stations over the life of the franchise. This should include an examination of all possibilities to improve station accessibility, e.g. induction loops, help points, adjustable-height counters and automatic doors.
- Ensure that passengers can always contact staff, either by telephone or via help points at stations, whenever trains are running, or by intercom or telephone aboard trains, to ensure that they cannot be stranded in the event of assistance failure, disruption etc.
- Ensure that special attention is given to maintaining fully-accessible websites, updated as necessary, given the increasing importance of this mode of obtaining information and tickets. At minimum the new operator should not fall below the standards achieved by the current operator.
- An annual action plan should be developed and implemented to enhance the service provided to disabled passengers using the combined franchise network and to improve customer satisfaction among those using the Passenger Assist system.
- All passengers with a Passenger Assist booking whose journey is or will be affected by amendments, cancellations or disruption to services should be contacted as soon as possible to help them re-plan their journey, especially in the case of passengers whose journeys have already begun.

8.10 Improving the environmental performance of the railway

Question 22: What environmental targets would stakeholders like to see within the franchise specification?

The environmental impact of the railway is of lower importance to most passengers than many factors that influence the immediate quality of their journeys such as punctuality and getting a seat.

However, looking more widely, the key candidates for improvement should be those factors which can reduce costs such as the successful example of the application of regenerative braking. Developments that improve comfort would also be welcomed by passengers.

The potential longer term contribution to environmental performance and passenger comfort that would be offered by electrification of the two short stretches on the Uckfield and Marshlink lines should also be considered. This would have the further benefits of reduced running costs once the initial investment in introduction has been met, a more streamlined fleet with consequent improvements to diagramming and driver availability, and freeing up scarce diesel stock for use in other areas which require additional units to alleviate capacity pressures.

Bidders might be encouraged to explore the potential benefits of the introduction of LED lighting at stations and in car parks.

9 Contact for further information

For further information about this submission or other aspects of Passenger Focus's work on franchising please contact:

Sharon Hedges
Passenger Issues Manager
sharon.hedges@passengerfocus.org.uk
07918 626126

10 Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Department for Transport for inviting Passenger Focus to attend and present our research at stakeholder consultation events for the South Eastern and combined franchises. It has also been helpful to discuss the London perspective with Transport for London and London Travel Watch.

We would like to thank all the groups and individuals who submitted their consultation response comments and aspirations to us to help highlight regional passenger issues. At the time of printing, these responses include*:

- Clapham Rail Users Group
- East Sussex Rail Alliance
- Southwark Rail Users Group

- Forest Hill Society
- Three Oaks and Winchelsea Action for Rail Transport
- Crofton Park Transport Users' Group
- Newington Parish Council
- Gatwick Airport Consultative Committee
- Southeastern Trains Stakeholder Advisory Panel
- Kent County Council
- The Access Group (Tunbridge Wells Borough Area)
- Sevenoaks Rail Users' Association
- Hearing Dogs for the Deaf
- Association of Public Transport Users
- Bexhill Rail Action Group
- Trains 4 Deal
- Railfuture (London and South East Branch)
- Sussex Community Rail Partnership
- Friends of Lewes Line
- Hawkhurst Community Partnership and members

Members of Parliament

- Heidi Alexander
Lewisham East

* For data protection reasons, we have refrained from printing the names of individual contributors. Their responses however are very welcome and appreciated

Appendix 1

Table A1 Southeastern passenger priorities by sub-route²⁷

	Overall Rank	HS	A	B	C	D	E	F
Value for money for price of ticket	1	100	100	100	100	100	86	80
Punctuality / reliability of the train	2	71	84	75	99	98	100	100
Frequency of trains for this route	3	48	40	58	63	72	71	75
Being able to get a seat on the train	4	45	58	44	52	47	65	57
Length of time the journey was scheduled to take (speed)	5	38	42	44	66	47	28	35
Provision of information during times of disruption	6	27	26	27	29	38	28	31
Upkeep/ repair and cleanliness of the train	7	24	25	28	35	30	24	29
Ease of buying a ticket	8	22	15	17	24	17	17	17
Provision of information during the journey	9	16	16	17	21	19	19	17
Connections with other train services	10	17	11	13	18	20	12	16
Availability of staff	11	16	11	18	19	17	13	13
Quality of facilities and services at the station (e.g. toilets/shops/cafes)	12	17	12	16	17	14	11	11
Ease of getting to and from the station	13	15	9	11	16	14	8	10
Facilities and services on board the train	14	12	10	10	14	12	6	6
Top three priorities								
Next three priorities								

²⁷ Key to sub routes at Table A1:

HS- High Speed route

A Hastings/ Tonbridge to London

B Rochester/Ramsgate to London

C Ashford London via Maidstone East to London

D Other Mainline

E Gravesend/ Dartford to London

F Sevenoaks to London.

Appendix 2

Passenger requirements for frequency of service at peak times

	High Speed	Hastings/ Tonbridge to London	Rochester/ Ramsgate to London	Ashford via Maidstone East to London	Other Mainline journeys	Gravesend/ Dartford to London	Sevenoaks to London
Every 10 minutes	8%	17%	8%	8%	8%	55%	36%
Every 15 minutes	22%	32%	30%	20%	31%	28%	38%
Every 20 minutes	26%	20%	29%	31%	30%	8%	12%
Every 30 minutes	17%	10%	12%	14%	14%	1%	2%
Not sure	5%	2%	2%	2%	4%	3%	1%
Not relevant do not use at peak times	23%	19%	19%	26%	14%	6%	11%

Appendix 3

Passenger Focus response to the fares and ticketing review: Appendix A

In the area of fares, ticketing and value for money, Passenger Focus is seeking the following improvements on behalf of passengers:

Improvements to regulatory and legal arrangements

- That an individual regulated fare should not be allowed to increase by more than two percentage points above the nominal price cap (currently an individual fare can increase by five percentage points above the price cap, leading to a postcode lottery in regulated fare increases).
- That ticket vending machines (TVMs) and ticket retailing websites should be subject to formal 'impartial retailing' rules, as are ticket offices at stations.
- As a 'second best' to the previous point, that TVMs and ticket retailing websites should be obliged to say explicitly if they sell all tickets and on an impartial basis, or restrict their range.
- That all normally-available tickets, whether issued as physical tickets or electronically, should be subject to the NR Code of Conduct, undiluted by more restrictive conditions applicable to the type of ticket held.
- As called for in Passenger Focus's May 2012 publication *Ticket to ride?*²⁸ that passengers should not be treated as if guilty of a criminal offence relating to ticketing without the train company demonstrating deliberate intent to defraud.

Improvements to the pricing structure

- That, in order for passengers to effectively mix and match between Advance and 'walk up' ticket types, Off-Peak Single tickets for long-distance journeys should be half the price of the current Off-Peak Return (this would deal with the illogical situation in which a single ticket can be just £1 less than a return, and provide a mid priced ticket that fills the gap between the complete inflexibility of Advance and the fully-flexible Anytime).
- That a comprehensive exercise should be carried out to identify where fares do not exist between pairs of stations; where they exist but are not valid for a perfectly reasonable routing; and where for no apparent reason Advance tickets do not exist for a journey between pairs of stations.

Improvements for commuters

- That passengers should be able to pay for an annual ticket by monthly direct debit at the same cost as a conventional annual season ticket.
- That ticketing arrangements should offer regular commuters who travel less than five days each week a discount on the price of five full price day return tickets.

²⁸ *Ticket to ride?* Passenger Focus, May 2012

<http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/research/publications/ticket-to-ride-summary-report-may-2012>

Giving passengers confidence that they are not paying more than they need to

- That on any 'walk up' interavailable flow the through fare should not exceed the cost of buying 'walk up' interavailable fares for individual legs of the journey. One example of many where the unwary currently pay more than necessary is Aberystwyth to Leicester: the Anytime Single through fare is £55.50, yet an Anytime Single Aberystwyth to Birmingham ticket (£26.20) plus an Anytime Single Birmingham to Leicester ticket (£15.50) comes to £41.70. Addressing the problem by increasing the price of the individual legs of the journey would not be an acceptable solution.
- That TVMs should display only the tickets that it is appropriate to sell at the time, in order that passengers do not buy a more expensive ticket than they need (at present, many TVMs display tickets that are more expensive than needed at the time, leading to confusion and potential for the unwary to overpay).
- That TVMs and websites must charge the GroupSave price when a passenger seeks to buy three or four tickets for a journey where that product is offered. It is unacceptable that the unwary are charged for all passengers in their party when a 'three/four for the price of two' deal is available to anyone in the know.
- That to help passengers through the 'two singles may or may not be cheaper than a return' jungle, ticket retailing websites should not sell a more expensive ticket than a passenger needs, without at least warning them first. Scenarios to cover include:
 - not selling an Advance ticket when a cheaper 'walk up' single ticket is valid on the same train
 - not selling out and back Advance tickets (in the same transaction) at a higher price than a 'walk up' return ticket valid on the same trains
 - not selling a 'walk up' ticket for a specific train or trains without first warning the purchaser when a cheaper ticket is available for the same train or trains.
- That ticket retailing websites should alert passengers making enquiries about journeys where Advance tickets are normally available, but on dates where reservations are not yet open, that the cheaper tickets have not yet gone on sale (at present, there is nothing to stop passengers buying a 'walk up' ticket in the mistaken belief that it is the cheapest price unaware that cheaper, potentially very significantly cheaper, tickets will go on sale at a later date).
- That towards the end of peak periods, booking offices, TVMs and websites should warn passengers making long distance journeys that it may be cheaper to buy an Anytime ticket for part of the journey and an Off-Peak ticket for the remainder (for example, an Anytime Single from Kettering to Exeter for the 08:56 departure costs £175; however, by the time the passenger departs from Paddington at 11:06, Super Off-Peak tickets are valid and therefore a Kettering to London Anytime Single at £60 including Underground from St. Pancras to Paddington plus a London to Exeter Super Off-Peak Single at £43 would save £72).
- That sufficient information about all Day Ranger tickets (e.g. restriction times, geographic boundaries etc) should be contained in the fares system to enable websites to sell them to passengers making relevant journey enquiries. At present, many websites are 'blind' to Day Rangers, even when they are the most appropriate ticket for the journey in question and

passengers are instead offered a higher priced ticket. Resolving this problem would, we understand, also allow Day Rangers to show on TVMs where relevant.

Acting in a fair and reasonable way towards passengers

- That if a passenger misses the train on which they booked an Advance ticket, the sum paid already should count towards the new ticket they need to buy (less a reasonable administration fee).
- That passengers who have a ticket for the date in question between relevant stations, but are asked to buy a new one or pay an excess because it is not valid for the train they are on, should be sold/upgraded to the cheapest 'walk up' ticket valid on that train. In these circumstances passengers should not be forced to buy a full price Anytime ticket on a train where Off-Peak fares are valid. This is already the policy of Virgin Trains, Southern, ScotRail and Hull Trains and should become universal.
- That if a passenger cannot produce a ticket for the train they are on, but can prove at the time or later that they have bought an Advance ticket for that train they should not be asked to pay again, or should receive a refund of any additional fare paid.
- That passengers who hold a railcard-discounted ticket but who have forgotten their railcard should have the option to present it within a fixed period without financial penalty, with further action taken only if they fail to do so. A limit to the number of 'grace' occasions within a 12 month period may be reasonable; names and addresses should always be taken discreetly in these circumstances. The industry should also consider how technology can help in future with on -the-spot verification that the individual concerned holds a valid railcard.
- That passengers who have bought a train company specific 'walk-up' ticket, but travel on another company's train, should be asked to pay the difference between what they have paid already and the interavailable price and not treated as if they had bought no ticket at all.
- *Ticket to ride?*²⁹ also called for a code of practice to be introduced to provide safeguards for passengers, including appeal arrangements, around the use of Unpaid Fare Notices by train companies.
- That passengers wishing to change previously purchased advance tickets for a different date or time should pay one £10 administration fee to cover all the tickets in the transaction (at present, a family of four needing to change out and back return tickets would face £80 in administration fees, which feels utterly disproportionate to the train company's costs and makes many Advance tickets de facto 'no refund, no change').
- It should be permitted to change the origin or destination of an Advance ticket prior to departure (on payment of a reasonable administration fee). At present, there is no facility to change an Advance ticket from, say, London-York to London-Leeds, adding to the inflexibility of this ticket type. Venues change as well as dates and times.

²⁹ *Ticket to ride?* Passenger Focus, May 2012

<http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/research/publications/ticket-to-ride-summary-report-may-2012>

- That TVMs should be programmed to allow off-peak fares to be sold early enough for passengers to buy one and board the first off-peak train. As soon as the last more expensive train has departed, the cheaper ticket should be available (passengers have problems with TVMs displaying off-peak tickets only from the moment they are valid, in some instances allowing no time to buy one and board the first train on which that ticket can be used).
- That automatic ticket gates should be programmed to allow holders of off-peak tickets to access platforms in sufficient time to board the first off-peak train (in some instances passengers find that an off-peak ticket will not open the gates in time to get on the first train on which it is valid).

Transparency, clarity and reassurance

- That validity restrictions should be printed on 'walk up' tickets, whichever purchasing channel is used.
- That booking offices, TVMs and websites should be able to show passengers the permitted routes applicable to any 'walk up' or season ticket.
- That season tickets should be sold with a map of permitted routes.
- That, to guard against passenger perception that no or very few tickets are available at the advertised headline price (e.g. A to B one way from £8), train companies should be transparent about how many tickets they have sold at the lowest Advance price for their key passenger flows.

Ticket vending machines and ticket retailing websites

- That validity restrictions, for both outward and return legs if applicable, should be clear to passengers before they commit to purchase the ticket.
- That TVMs and websites should recognise London stations with or without the prefix "London" (e.g. Paddington and London Paddington), with arrangements to prevent confusion around similarly named stations elsewhere in the country (e.g. Waterloo on Merseyside and Charing Cross in Glasgow).
- That TVMs and websites should display '5-15 years' wherever child fares are referred to.
- That TVMs and websites should give a clear explanation of the London Travelcard zones to which they are selling tickets.
- That sufficient information (e.g. restriction times, geographic boundaries etc) should be contained in the fares system about all non-national railcards to enable websites to sell discounted tickets to passengers making relevant journey enquiries. At present, some websites are unaware that particular railcards exist, making it impossible for passengers holding them to buy online. Resolving this problem would, we understand, also allow TVMs to offer discounts relevant to those railcards.
- That TVMs should be able to sell tickets with an origin station other than that at which they are located. A passenger wishing to buy out and back single tickets because it is cheaper than a return cannot currently do so using a TVM at the start of their outward journey. Boundary zone 'add on' tickets also need to be available from TVMs. The 'remote purchase' option

exists at ticket offices and TVMs should replicate this functionality to ensure passengers are not disadvantaged at times when the booking office is closed.

Access to Advance tickets

- That the cut-off time for Advance tickets should be two hours before departure, unless there is a genuine practical reason to make it longer.

Ticket office opening and queuing times

- That, for each station, train operators should report regularly on their success at achieving published opening hours and at ensuring passengers do not wait more than three minutes (off-peak) or five minutes (peak). Passenger Focus research suggests that ticket office queuing times need to be monitored and managed more proactively by train companies³⁰.

Ticket sales during service disruption

- That ticket sales for trains that have been cancelled should be prevented, but should be possible on replacement trains or buses. There is partial progress in this direction, but more needs to be done.

³⁰ *Still waiting for a ticket? Ticket queuing times at large regional rail stations*, Passenger Focus,

© 2012 Passenger Focus

Passenger Focus
One Drummond Gate
Pimlico
London
SW1V 2QY

0300 123 2350
www.passengerfocus.org.uk
info@passengerfocus.org.uk

Passenger Focus is the operating name of the Passengers'
Council

