

Passenger Focus on punctuality and timetables

Passenger expectations appear largely in line with industry guidelines, although the report challenges some conventional thinking on timetables

Passenger Focus has published some research into what people think of bus punctuality and timetable information – and what they want in the future.

Passengers largely agreed on what appropriate standards for measuring punctuality should be. Perceptions of punctuality are largely determined by their experience of lateness at the departure stop. Delays in arrival at the destination are considered differently – as passengers are already in transit, anxiety and frustration tend to be lower. Cancellations, while frustrating, are also not generally considered in terms of punctuality unless they happen a lot.

The type of bus service has an affect. Those using services which operate to a fixed timetable, with each bus scheduled to arrive at a particular time, deliberately go to the bus stop early to make sure they do not miss their bus. They measure whether the bus is early or late against the timetable, and have more of an expectation that this information will be accurate.

Passengers using regular services without precise times go to the bus stop expecting a bus to come in the next few minutes rather than at a set time. These passengers tend to have less of an idea of when buses are running late.

78% of passengers who know when their bus is meant to arrive because their buses run frequently are satisfied with punctuality, compared to 60% for passengers who didn't know when their bus was meant to arrive.

Passengers in the research said they do not expect 'perfection' in terms of punctuality and accept some flexibility, through windows of tolerance. They also take some responsibility for managing their own journey. However, passengers' tolerance is not unlimited. They expect their goodwill to be rewarded, with operators trying hard to be punctual, improving where there are issues and



Passengers were largely satisfied with wait times of up to five minutes for their services

providing good communication to help passengers with their bus travel.

Not all passengers use timetables all the time; examples given of when they might be consulted were for journeys they make irregularly, for journeys which might already be familiar but at a new time or completely new journeys on unfamiliar routes or in unfamiliar areas.

Passengers largely agreed timetables should provide a relatively high degree of detail that gives the most amount of information an individual might require. Passengers are happy to see more complex schedules to get information that is more accurate. They prefer this to a simple, easy-to-remember timetable which does not reflect traffic patterns and is less accurate. Passenger Focus said this challenges some conventional thinking on timetabling and may warrant some further exploration.

Five minutes waiting time is the threshold after which satisfaction with punctuality decreases markedly. When passengers have

to wait six to nine minutes for their bus, satisfaction falls considerably (from 87% to 77%). A similar drop in satisfaction can be seen for those passengers waiting 10 minutes.

For more frequent services (every 10 minutes or less) passengers consider it acceptable for buses to depart from a stop early. This is because the impact on the passenger is relatively limited should they miss the bus and there is a potential gain to them if they are able to catch a bus which arrives early. By contrast, for buses operating at less frequent intervals passengers feel it is unacceptable for buses to leave stops early. This is because the impact on the passenger of missing the bus is felt to be more significant than waiting at stops while on the journey.

Passengers' experience of bus travel is improved significantly when they receive information about scheduling updates and delays which assists with their journey planning, management and understanding of why problems have happened at a

particular time.

No passengers within the research study were aware that Traffic Commissioners exist and have responsibilities which benefit bus users. This has an impact on passengers' willingness to complain, as many felt that the effort of complaining was not worth it, either because they felt the problem was not of great enough significance or because they expected their efforts would be in vain.

During the research, participants were introduced to some basic information about Traffic Commissioners, which changed some of their perceptions. Passengers felt reassured that regulation and authority was in place.

Passengers in the research felt that bus operators should aim to run all of their buses on time. They do not expect this to be achieved but they feel that this aim is likely to be necessary for operators to achieve what they feel is a good standard of delivery, around 80% punctuality.