

Passengers'

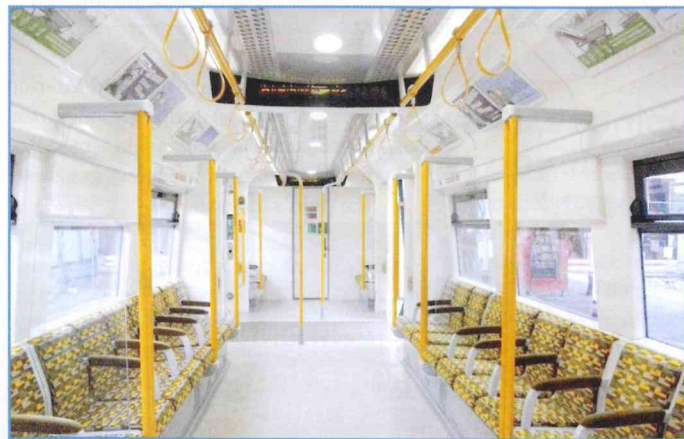
most-loved (and hated) rolling stock

Anthony Smith, chief executive of Passenger Focus, spoke at ATOC's 'Future Train' event to outline passenger views on positive and negative aspects of current and proposed rolling stock layouts.

The rail industry has a big problem to tackle over the coming years to deal with rising passenger numbers – but according to Anthony Smith, chief executive of Passenger Focus, that's "a great problem to have" and is far preferable than managing decline.

"It's a boom industry, with passengers flocking to the railways – the trends are all pointing in the right direction," Smith said, speaking at ATOC's Future Train event in London on April 17.

But there are also new problems for engineers and operators to address – passengers growing not only in number but in size, more without English as a first language, more people wanting to use technology on the move, and few wanting to have to use airline-style ticket systems even if that would be more convenient for operators.



Above: The Class 378 London Overground seat layout is liked by passengers, Smith says.

Layout and interior design remains key, Smith said, with passengers rating being forced to stand uncomfortably as the biggest overall negative.

On the positive side, Smith said: "It's very important to pause and reflect and realise that we do have a very safe railway. When we ask passengers through our research, safety of trains is hardly ever mentioned, which is a great success.

"Increasingly, the cost of the railways is being borne by passengers: roughly £2 for every £1 spent by Government, in terms of subsidy. Passengers' top priorities for improvement are all about the basics; it's important to bear that in mind.

"Comfortable seating is important. The train company that gets the highest rating on seat comfort in London & South East is London Overground, which has the least seats!"

3+2 style seating is "strongly disliked", Passenger Focus's research shows, and comes up as a spontaneous negative. It's "socially awkward and cramped", Smith said, and other speakers at the event backed that up with their own anecdotes, including event chair Kate Bellingham.

Smith relayed passenger feedback from a number of research projects, including work it has done on future rolling stock and also on the proposed Thameslink train designs.

He said: "It's important to ask people what they like about current trains in service.

"There were very interesting results. The highest scores came around the Meridians, Voyagers and Pioneer trains, derivatives of the same train shape; there were lower scores for Pendolinos and First Great Western HSTs. I think that work is still relevant and useful, it tells us a lot about how passengers feel.

"There was lots of feedback about how

passengers move around the train, how you get on and off, and concern about cleanliness. We fed all that back to the manufacturers."

He said designing the Thameslink layout was a particular challenge, as that rolling stock more than most is going to be used by passengers with very different needs at different times of day.

He said the "grim reality" is that many people aren't going to get seats, and therefore the design needs to make standing as comfortable as possible. This is applicable across all operators running busy commuter trains, he said. "As a consumer organisation, we'd like a seat for every passenger at all times, but clearly that's not going to happen. [The industry]

has to think about standing in a much more comfortable and ergonomic way.

"Looking at some existing rolling stock, London Overground's [Class 378 Capitalstars are] a clear success. They've stripped out most of the seats, it's got that very longitudinal view, you can see right down the train, people can stand in comfort and grab the rail – and people seem to like it, they're piling onto the service. That's set the benchmark for new rolling stock, and people can get on and off fairly quickly."

Examining refurbishment projects, he called South West Trains' Class 455s "very successful, very light, very airy, very open around the vestibule". He added: "If you watch people using it and getting on and off, it just seems to work."

But he said Southern's refurbishment of its 455s was "much less successful". "That layout is not passenger-friendly, it blocks the vestibule.

"You can't move around inside, it has that 3+2 seating. That's not the future."

He praised London Midland's Class 350 Desiros, saying that although they have 3+2 seating, they retain a "light and airy feel".

Looking at long distance trains, he said passengers "love the old Grand Central HSTs" but he thinks Pendolinos and FGW HSTs are "ghastly" in terms of passenger comfort, even though the HST would always struggle to meet all the different passenger needs on the routes it serves. But the Hitachi IEP mock-ups he's seen so far are "looking fairly positive".

He said paying attention to how passengers act is vital, and said the car industry does this obsessively, following drivers to see what they do and tailoring cars' interior design and even key shapes to suit.

"Passengers are pragmatic," Smith said.

"Seating design and layout are very important, and providing passengers with the opportunity for input is absolutely crucial."



Anthony Smith

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