



What passengers want from the InterCity West Coast rail franchise:

A submission from Passenger Focus

April 2011

Passenger Focus – who we are and what we do

We are an 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.

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1. Executive Summary

Passengers using the InterCity West Coast (ICWC) franchise are among the most satisfied in Great Britain. Results from the Autumn 2010 National Passenger Survey (NPS) showed that 90% were fairly or very satisfied, which ranks first out of the five long distance train companies.

The ICWC franchise has seen investment in new trains since privatisation: with the introduction of Pendolinos and Voyager trains. Substantial investment has also been made in upgrading the West Coast Main Line (WCML). Both of these factors have contributed to increased levels of passenger satisfaction and passenger growth.

In January/February 2011, Passenger Focus carried out new research among over 4,000 passengers throughout the ICWC franchise operating area to establish what passengers want from the new franchise. Passengers told us that their priorities for improvement are:

1. Value for money
2. Punctuality and reliability
3. Journey time
4. Capacity
5. Train presentation

We make recommendations about all of the above passenger priorities that passengers see as pivotal in awarding the new franchise.

In the context of the Government's reform of franchising policy and longer franchises the operator shall have more flexibility to make changes through the life of the franchise. If there is to be less specifying of inputs, there has to be more emphasis on passenger output measures. Service quality targets based on NPS scores should be enshrined in the new franchise that give passengers' a voice in the performance of the franchise and clearly demonstrate how their priorities are being tackled by the successful new operator.

DfT's specification for the new franchise must stretch the successful bidder to take ICWC passenger satisfaction to higher levels. Bidders for the new franchise should be asked to submit plans on how to improve NPS scores and meet passengers priorities.

2. Introduction

This document is Passenger Focus's submission to DfT setting out what passengers want from the InterCity West Coast (ICWC) rail franchise to run from 1 April 2012. The franchise is currently operated by West Coast Trains Ltd trading as Virgin Trains. This is the first occasion Passenger Focus has been invited to make a submission to DfT since the Government's reform of rail franchising. The revised Government policy recognises the need to protect and potentially, improve the quality of rail service offered to passengers'. It is pleasing that the importance of understanding passenger needs is recognised and embedded in the process to let a new passenger franchise. Passenger Focus has based this submission on new and existing research among users of ICWC services, to both help inform DfT in its drafting of the specification for a new rail franchise and to inform bidders, when submitting bids for the new rail franchise.

2.1 Franchise Policy

The ICWC franchise will be the first to be issued following the publication of DfT's franchise policy document/statement in January 2011. This 'new' policy heralds some significant changes to the way that franchises are specified and operated. For instance, longer franchises, train companies having more flexibility to plan, manage and change services, and a less interventionist approach from DfT in terms of input specifications.

Passenger Focus responded to the consultation on the new strategy¹. In our response we:

- Accepted that that longer franchises could bring advantages subject to them:
 - being based on what passengers want in the first place
 - containing a robust mechanism to deal with poor performing TOCs
 - ensuring that such a mechanism included service quality.
- Welcomed the aim of attracting more private sector investment from bidders as part of the franchising process but felt that this would only be feasible with the introduction of a mechanism that addressed the issue of residual value. Rail capital investment has long lead times and, frequently, long pay-back periods. While longer franchises may help, they will still not cover long-term assets such as rolling stock unless there is some attempt to tackle the issue of residual value at the end of the franchise period.
- If bidders are to have greater flexibility in how they specify, develop and change the service offered to passengers, it is crucial that the franchise creates a framework of accountability and transparency. This includes output based targets based on a mixture of 'hard' targets (e.g. punctuality, reliability, crowding) but also 'softer' targets on more qualitative issues (e.g. passenger satisfaction).

Our submission below builds on some of these themes with the use of passenger research.

¹ <http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/news-and-publications/document-search/document.asp?dsid=4740>

2.1 New passenger research

As well as drawing on National Passenger Survey (NPS) results for Virgin Trains, new quantitative research was undertaken by Continental Research on behalf of Passenger Focus in January and February 2011 to provide a reliable, up-to-date understanding of the views of ICWC passengers in order to inform this submission.

Passengers travelling on ICWC trains were asked to complete a questionnaire covering various aspects of their journey. The forms were distributed on train. A total of 4503 completed questionnaires were received from ICWC passengers. The questionnaires were also analysed to show results for passengers making the journeys on the following routes listed below:

- Route 1 - London and Wolverhampton (sample 834): Commuter, business and leisure passengers travelling on VWC trains from London Euston to Wolverhampton or vice versa and intermediate stations en-route
- Route 2 - London and Manchester (sample 890): Commuter, business and leisure passengers travelling on VWC trains from London Euston to Manchester Piccadilly or vice versa and intermediate stations en-route
- Route 3 - London and Liverpool (sample 719): Commuter, business and leisure passengers travelling on VWC trains from London Euston to Liverpool Lime Street or vice versa and intermediate stations en-route
- Route 4 - London and Wales (sample 748): Commuter, business and leisure passengers travelling on VWC trains from London Euston to Holyhead or vice versa and intermediate stations en-route
- Route 5 - London and Glasgow (sample 715): Commuter, business and leisure passengers travelling on VWC trains from London Euston to Glasgow Central or vice versa and intermediate stations en-route
- Route 6 - Birmingham and Scotland (sample 597): Commuter, business and leisure passengers travelling on VWC trains from Birmingham New Street to Glasgow Central/Edinburgh Waverley or vice versa and intermediate stations en-route.

3. National Passenger Survey

Passengers using the ICWC franchise are among the most satisfied in the country, with 90% in the Autumn 2010 NPS expressing overall satisfaction with their journey. For fourteen factors they are the most satisfied among long distance train operators and least satisfied in only three factors which are; upkeep/repair of station buildings/platforms, availability of staff at stations and attitude and helpfulness of staff at stations. The tables below show the combined NPS results for Virgin Trains in Spring and Autumn 2010.

Table 1 – NPS, Virgin Trains (whole TOC) results, Spring and Autumn 2010

NPS Attribute	Virgin Trains (whole TOC)	Long distance TOC average	Rank among the 5 Long Distance TOCs
Overall satisfaction	90	87	1
Ticket buying facilities	83	81	2
Provision of information about train times/platforms	87	86	2
Upkeep/repair of station buildings/platforms	69	72	5
Cleanliness of stations	74	77	4
Facilities and services at stations	65	64	2
Attitudes and helpfulness of staff at stations	76	77	5
Connections with other forms of public transport	79	76	2
Facilities for car parking	54	56	4
Overall station environment	71	74	4
Your personal security whilst using the station	72	73	4
Availability of staff at the station	63	66	5
How request to station staff was handled	89	89	3
Frequency of trains on that route	90	84	1
Punctuality and reliability	89	86	1
Length of time the journey was scheduled to take	94	89	1
Connections with other train services	84	79	1
Value for money for the price of your ticket	64	58	1
Upkeep and repair of the train	89	84	2
Provision of information during the journey	82	77	1
Helpfulness and attitude of staff on the train	79	78	3
Space for luggage on the train	51	51	3
Toilet facilities on the train	55	51	1
Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	74	70	1
Comfort of the seating area on the train	78	78	2
Ease of being able to get on and off the train	86	83	1
Your personal security whilst on board the train	86	84	1
Cleanliness of the inside of the train	87	82	1

Cleanliness of the outside of the train	84	78	1
Availability of staff on the train	69	66	1
How well train company deals with delays	54	52	2

Table 2 – NPS, Virgin Trains by different routes, Spring and Autumn 2010

NPS Attribute	London – Wolverhampton	London – Manchester	London - Liverpool	London –Wales	London – Scotland	Birmingham – Scotland
Overall satisfaction	90	92	91	94	86	87

Ticket buying facilities	81	85	76	92	82	81
Provision of information about train times/platforms	85	89	89	91	90	84
Upkeep/repair of station buildings/platforms	65	76	76	59	69	61
Cleanliness of stations	71	81	81	65	75	69
Facilities and services at stations	64	69	68	66	62	61
Attitudes and helpfulness of staff at stations	70	79	77	80	80	80
Connections with other forms of public transport	80	84	84	77	72	67
Facilities for car parking	56	54	50	57	51	48
Overall station environment	67	78	78	61	70	64
Your personal security whilst using the station	69	78	76	70	71	71
Availability of staff at the station	56	68	64	67	64	66
How request to station staff was handled	84	89	96	88	91	95

Frequency of trains on that route	92	93	88	94	86	79
Punctuality and reliability	91	92	88	92	83	82
Length of time the journey was scheduled to take	94	97	95	96	91	87
Connections with other train services	86	86	83	89	77	79
Value for money for the price of your ticket	66	63	63	67	63	60
Upkeep and repair of the train	89	88	90	88	88	89
Provision of information during the journey	82	84	81	80	82	82
Helpfulness and attitude of staff on the train	75	81	81	85	78	80
Space for luggage on the train	56	55	49	43	46	39
Toilet facilities on the train	55	54	51	62	57	60
Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	71	78	82	79	71	69
Comfort of the seating area on the train	76	82	75	79	80	78
Ease of being able to get on and off the train	85	89	89	88	87	82
Your personal security whilst on board the train	83	88	89	87	89	85
Cleanliness of the inside of the train	86	89	87	87	85	86
Cleanliness of the outside of the train	82	87	88	87	83	79
Availability of staff on the train	69	68	73	70	69	70
How well train company deals with delays	52	59	59	56	47	59

For some factors, there is considerable variation between the different parts of Virgin Trains. Overall satisfaction ranges from 86% (London – Scotland) to 94% (London – North Wales). Satisfaction with punctuality is lowest on the Birmingham – London route (82%), while value for money scores range from 60% (Birmingham – Scotland) to 67% (London – North Wales). Upkeep and repair of the train is consistent across all routes whether it is Pendolino or Voyager trains, while frequency of trains on that route ranges from 79% (Birmingham – Scotland) to 94% (London – North Wales). It is clear that passengers' are less satisfied on Birmingham and London to Scotland services.

3.1 Drivers of satisfaction

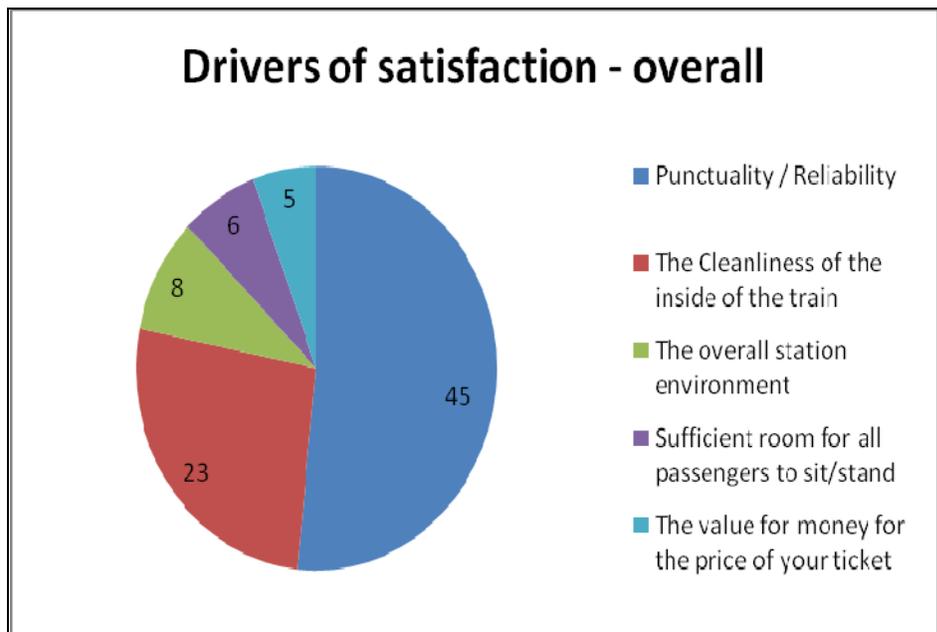
Analysis of the NPS results for Spring and Autumn 2010 shows that the most significant driver of overall satisfaction varies between the different 'routes' of Virgin Trains. However taking the train company as a whole, the most significant drivers of overall satisfaction among ICWC passengers are punctuality and reliability and the cleanliness of the inside of the train as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 – Virgin Trains drivers of satisfaction, NPS Spring and Autumn 2010

Drivers of satisfaction	Virgin Trains (whole TOC)	London-Wolverhampton	London-Manchester	London-Liverpool	London-Wales	London-Glasgow	Birmingham-Scotland
Top driver	Punctuality / Reliability (45%)	Punctuality / Reliability (52%)	Punctuality / Reliability (55%)	The overall station environment (50%)	Punctuality / Reliability (43%)	Punctuality / Reliability (38%)	Punctuality / Reliability (30%)
2nd	The Cleanliness of the inside of the train (23%)	The Cleanliness of the inside of the train (21%)	The Cleanliness of the inside of the train (23%)	The frequency of the trains on that route (18%)	The facilities and services at the station (29%)	The comfort of your seating area (24%)	The overall station environment (29%)
3rd	The overall station environment (8%)	The value for money for the price of your ticket (11%)	Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand (8%)	Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand (11%)	The Cleanliness of the inside of the train (28%)	The Cleanliness of the inside of the train (22%)	The comfort of your seating area (14%)
4th	Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand (6%)	Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand (7%)	The helpfulness and attitude if staff on train (5%)	Your personal security whilst using the station (10%)	-	The frequency of the trains on that route (9%)	Provision of information about train times and platforms (12%)

5 th	The value for money for the price of your ticket (5%)	The ease of being able to get on and off the train (4%)	The ease of being able to get on and off the train (4%)	Upkeep & repair of the train (7%)	-	The value for money for the price of your ticket (8%)	Upkeep & repair of station buildings & platforms (8%)
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Figure 1: Top five drivers of passenger satisfaction, NPS Spring and Autumn 2010



3.2 Drivers of dissatisfaction

Similar analysis of the Spring and Autumn 2010 NPS shows the top two drivers of dissatisfaction on the whole of Virgin Trains, comparing it with the other long distance train operators average results. The most significant factors driving overall dissatisfaction are punctuality and reliability and how well the train company dealt with delays.

Table 4 – Drivers of dissatisfaction, NPS Spring and Autumn 2010

Driver of dissatisfaction	Long distance operators average	Virgin Trains
PUNCTUALITY/ RELIABILITY (I.E. THE TRAIN ARRIVING/ DEPARTING ON TIME)	28%	39%
HOW TRAIN COMPANY DEALT WITH DELAYS	34%	30%

**Recommendation 1:
Giving passengers a voice in the new franchise**

The consultation document recognises the importance of service quality to passengers. The National Passenger Survey (NPS) is ideally suited to capture this information. NPS has a large sample size covering some 1300 passengers each wave. The sampling plan ensures that it is representative of day of travel, journey purpose (commuter, business and leisure), train company and, of course, by a range of demographic attributes (age, sex, ethnicity etc).

DfT's specification for the new franchise must stretch the successful bidder to take ICWC passenger satisfaction to higher levels.

Bidders for the new franchise should be asked to submit bids that include plans on how to improve NPS scores.

Passenger Focus recommends the setting of NPS targets for stations, trains and customer service that the successful bidder should achieve. Consideration should be given as to whether the targets should apply on a route basis or to the whole franchise because the average for the whole franchise can mask poor route performance.

4. Passengers' priorities for improvement

In January/February 2011, Passenger Focus carried out new research² with passengers travelling on the ICWC franchise operating area, to inform this submission about what passengers want from the new franchise, to operate from 1 April 2012.

Passengers have told us that their top four priorities for improvement are value for money, performance, being able to get a seat and journey speed. These, coupled with upkeep of the train in fifth place, emphasise the importance passengers place on the 'core product' and should be a major consideration that influences the final franchise specification and subsequent bids.

The final specification should address those 'core products'.

Our research into passengers' priorities for improvement clearly demonstrates the importance of the 'core product' and the recommendations that follow this section make valid passenger centric recommendations on that 'core product' of:

1. Value for money
2. Punctuality and reliability
3. Journey time
4. Capacity
5. Train presentation

These are backed up by a series of other desirable improvements that we explore later in detail:

- Service frequency
- Provision of information during times of disruption
- Personal security
- Ease of buying a ticket

The table below shows passengers' priorities for the ICWC franchise. It also shows the relative importance of each attribute – the higher the score, the greater priority passengers assign to that service aspect, with scores over 125 being particularly important.

² What passengers want from the ICWC franchise, Passenger Focus, February 2011

Table 5 – Passengers’ priorities for improvement

ICWC	Priorities for improvement: rank order	Priorities for improvement: indices
Value for money for price of ticket	1	246
Punctuality / reliability of the train	2	203
Being able to get a seat on the train	3	187
Length of time the journey was scheduled to take (speed)	4	139
Upkeep/repair and cleanliness of the train	5	108
Frequency of trains for this route	6	96
Provision of information during times of disruption	7	76
Personal security while on board the train	8	70
Personal security at the station	9	59
Ease of buying a ticket	10	57
Facilities and services on board the train	11	57
Quality of facilities and services at the station	12	44
Provision of information during the journey	13	38
Facilities for car parking at the station	14	20

The table below presents the results for the six discrete routes³ of the ICWC franchise:

Table 6 – Passengers’ priorities for improvement

Priorities for improvement	Virgin Trains (whole TOC)	London-Wolverhampton	London-Manchester	London-Liverpool	London-Wales	London-Glasgow	Birmingham-Scotland
Top priority	Value for money for price of ticket	Punctuality / reliability of the train	Value for money for price of ticket				
2nd	Punctuality / reliability of the train	Value for money for price of ticket	Punctuality / reliability of the train				
3rd	Being able to get a seat on the train	Being able to get a seat on the train	Being able to get a seat on the train	Being able to get a seat on the train	Being able to get a seat on the train	Being able to get a seat on the train	Being able to get a seat on the train
4th	Length of time the journey was scheduled to take (speed)	Length of time the journey was scheduled to take (speed)	Length of time the journey was scheduled to take (speed)	Length of time the journey was scheduled to take (speed)	Length of time the journey was scheduled to take (speed)	Length of time the journey was scheduled to take (speed)	Length of time the journey was scheduled to take (speed)
5th	Upkeep/rep air and cleanliness of the train	Frequency of trains for this route	Upkeep/rep air and cleanliness of the train	Frequency of trains for this route			
6th	Frequency of trains for this route	Upkeep/rep air and cleanliness of the train	Frequency of trains for this route	Upkeep/rep air and cleanliness of the train			
7th	Provision of information during times of disruption	Provision of information during times of disruption	Provision of information during times of disruption	Personal security while on board the train	Provision of information during times of disruption	Provision of information during times of disruption	Provision of information during times of disruption
8th	Personal security while on board the	Personal security while on board the	Personal security while on board the	Provision of information during times of	Personal security while on board the	Personal security while on board the	Personal security while on board the

³ See Section 2 for definitions.

	train	train	train	disruption	train	train	train
9 th	Personal security at the station	Facilities and services on board the train	Facilities & services on board the train	Personal security at the station			
10 th	Ease of buying a ticket	Personal security at the station	Ease of buying a ticket	Ease of buying a ticket			

Passengers travelling on ICWC services have told us that their top priorities for improvement. Passenger Focus makes recommendations on all of these priorities in the sections that follow. However, the 'core product as detailed earlier in this section must be a major consideration that influences the final specification for the new franchise. The bidders for the new franchise should address those 'core products' when submitting their respective bids.

5. Value for money, fares and ticketing

5.1 Value for money and trust among passengers

Improving value for money for the price of the ticket is the top priority for improvement among Virgin Trains passengers who took part in Passenger Focus's 2011 research⁴, ahead of punctuality and reliability. It was the top priority for improvement among passengers using all parts of the franchise except London - Wolverhampton passengers.

NPS shows that, for Spring and Autumn 2010 combined, 64% of passengers were satisfied with value for money for the price of the ticket. However, when looked at by journey purpose a different picture emerges with higher satisfaction for leisure passengers masking lower levels of satisfaction for commuters and business passengers.

Table 7 – Value for money, Virgin Trains, NPS Spring & Autumn 2010

	Virgin Trains (whole TOC)	Commuter	Business	Leisure
Satisfaction with value for money	64%	40%	52%	73%

⁴ What passengers want from the ICWC franchise, Passenger Focus, February 2011

Passenger Focus’s February 2009 Fares and Ticketing Study⁵ looked at the structure of long-distance fares and at the high cost of flexibility compared with our European counterparts. The research showed that long distance travel in Britain can be cheaper than anywhere else, but in return passengers have zero flexibility – the ticket is for one train, and one train only. At the other end of the spectrum, the price of complete flexibility is very high compared with other countries - up to 10 times higher than the cheapest ‘one train only’ ticket on some routes.

Our research indicates that flexibility is still important. NPS records when passengers buy tickets and analysis (for the Spring and Autumn 2010 waves combined) shows that 41% of passengers only bought their ticket in the week before travelling (rising to 60% of business passengers). Of this 41%, 19% bought Anytime tickets, 41% Off-Peak and 35% Advance. This indicates a strong continued demand for a ticket offering flexibility as to when you can travel.

Table 8 – When passengers purchase their tickets, NPS Spring and Autumn 2010

Ticket type	In the last week	In last fortnight	In last month	In last two months
Anytime	19%	12%	8%	4%
Off-Peak	41%	32%	24%	15%
Advance	35%	51%	62%	78%
Other	5%	6%	6%	4%

This is also consistent with our research which shows employers find the lack of flexibility within the ticketing structure a real problem. For example to allow for a meeting that overruns by 30 minutes, was cited as a problem for businesses⁶.

Developing a way to give some flexibility at an affordable price is a key challenge. It is odd that we have what amounts to a bus service frequency on many long distance routes in Britain (e.g. three trains per hour London to Birmingham and London to Manchester), but the price of taking advantage of there being “another one along in a minute” is so high.

It is clear that discounts associated with Advance tickets represent an important incentive for many longer distance passengers – and this is reflected in the higher levels of satisfaction reported among leisure ticket holders. However, not everyone is able to take advantage of Advance fares – for some business users the lack of flexibility can outweigh the cost benefits and act as a deterrent to purchase.

Our research also shows passengers’ concerns at the complexity surrounding the current fare structure. Existing attempts at simplifying the structure were more about presentation – the underlying structure is still seen as too complicated. For example:

⁵ <http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/news-and-publications/document-search/document.asp?dsid=2526>

⁶ [Employers Business Travel Needs from Rail](#) , Passenger Focus, February 2009

- a return may only be £1 more than a single
- it can cost less to get off at a station further down the line
- a combination of tickets can cost less than the through-fare.

It also reflects a lack of trust and transparency. There is a perception of:

- the cheapest 'headline' tickets never being available
- not being sold the cheapest tickets
- not being able to find out when tickets are valid (e.g. difference between peak, off-peak and super off-peak).

Our route based research⁷ found that while 69% of passengers were confident that they had purchased the right ticket for their needs some 17% (nearly 2 in 10) were not.

5.2 Ticket retailing

Passenger confidence is also key when it comes to buying a ticket. Our route based research reveals concerns with ticket machines in particular, with only 46% confident they will get the best value ticket for their journey.

Table 9 – Passengers level of trust with ticket purchasing methods⁸

Level of trust with the extent to which purchase methods provide value for money	
Ticket Office at Station	72%
Ticket Machine at Station	46%
Internet	84%
Over the Phone	51%
From staff on the train	57%
Travel Agent	39%

We know from research [Ticket Vending Machine Usability July 2010⁹] that confidence is one of the key barriers to using a Ticket Vending Machine (TVM). Even some passengers who were used to buying tickets through a TVM experienced difficulty when asked to find the correct ticket for an unfamiliar journey, especially when this was complex or expensive. The main cause of this confusion was linked to questions over the validity of ticket types and the restrictions that apply. Unlike buying tickets from staff or online, TVMs were often unable to provide the precise information or reassurance needed by the passenger. This potentially results in passengers buying the more expensive ticket, utilising a 'better safe than sorry' mentality, or taking a chance on the cheaper ticket and 'hoping for the best'. It also found that many passengers would have abandoned the TVM and joined the queue at the ticket office window.

⁷ What passengers want from the ICWC franchise, Passenger Focus, February 2011

⁸ What passengers want from the ICWC franchise, Passenger Focus, February 2011

⁹ <http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/news-and-publications/document-search/document.asp?dsid=4460>

This research also found that more needs to be done to ease the passenger through the process of selecting and purchasing the correct ticket. There was a sense of the passenger having to do all the work to find the most appropriate ticket rather than the machine. When buying from a ticket office for instance, the clerk will ask some basic questions (about destination, day and time of travel and, where appropriate, about the choice of route/operator) and then offer the passenger a narrowed down range of options. In essence the ticket clerk navigates the passenger through the decision-making process. With TVMs on the other hand, passengers are left to work things out on their own.

By contrast Table 8 shows the internet records a high degree of confidence – with 84% being confident in finding the best value fares. However, the emerging findings from our (as yet unpublished) work on the usability of websites suggests that some of this confidence may be misplaced – one of the potential causes being a perception that Advance Fares are *always* the cheapest. An Off-Peak Return can often be cheaper than two Advance Purchase Singles.

Recommendation 2: Improving value for money, trust among passengers and ease of buying a ticket

Passenger Focus recommends that DfT includes the following requirements in the specification for the new franchise:

Structure

- That a new, easily-understood fares structure is introduced on ICWC that will be regarded by passengers as logical, transparent and a fair price for the journey being made. Prices for those passengers who can buy well in advance and stick to their plans can be fantastic value for money however the options for those travelling at short notice, or requiring even a small degree of flexibility are in some cases extremely expensive. Flexibility at an affordable price is a key requirement and it should seek to reduce those unregulated prices, e.g. Anytime Singles and Returns that have risen considerably ahead of inflation in recent years
- To help deliver flexibility at an affordable price, the Off-Peak Single (formerly Saver Single) should be priced at 50% of the Off-Peak Return (formerly Saver Return) instead of being £1 less at present. This mechanism is partially used already by First Great Western and Virgin Trains (on internet sales only, when booked as part of a return) to give passengers the opportunity to mix their use of train-specific Advance Single tickets and more flexible options – for instance, travelling out on a specific train but needing flexibility about the return time.
- Passengers holding Advance Single tickets who miss the train on which they have booked should be permitted to pay the difference, plus an administration fee, between what they have paid already and the appropriate new ticket they are required to purchase. This will substantially address the genuine anger passengers feel when they miss their intended train and are asked to buy a completely new ticket with no account taken of the money already paid. The sums involved can be significant: a Standard Advance Single from London to Manchester costs up to £119. Surely, with an administrative fee applied, that sum should count towards the new ticket a passenger is required to buy?
- To ensure passengers have confidence in the fares structure, that fares on ‘walk up’ inter-available flows controlled by ICWC, the official through fare must never exceed the sum of ‘walk

up' inter-available fares for individual legs of the journey (except where a journey takes place partly at peak time and partly not).

Retailing

General

- On flows controlled by ICWC, applicable restrictions should be printed on passengers' tickets to remove confusion over validity

Ticket vending Machines

- All ICWC ticket vending machines must clearly display outward and return ticket restrictions on the screen prior to a passenger committing to purchase.

Internet

- Some passengers are suspicious that train company websites favour their own services over those of other companies and that they do not necessarily offer the best value tickets for the journey being made. It is important to take the opportunity through the new ICWC franchise to protect the unwary, potentially irregular traveller paying more than they need and to give all on-line purchasers confidence that they have obtained the best price available.

We recommend that DfT includes the following requirements in the specification for the new franchise:

- That impartial retailing rules be formally extended to cover internet ticket sales through the new operator's website.
- In order to prevent overcharging and ensure passengers can have confidence that they are getting the best price, that it be made impossible to buy an Advance Single ticket at a higher price than the 'walk up' fare available on the same train and that it be made impossible to buy out and back Standard Class Advance Singles at a higher price than the 'walk up' return fare available on the same trains.
- That the 'cut off' time for buying Advance Single tickets be moved to the latest practicable time to allow the production and positioning of ticket reservation systems. The remaining as-yet-unsold Advance Single tickets should stay on sale, if practicably possible, until two hours before the train departs from its origin station.

Ticket offices

- That the current Virgin Trains Ticketing and Settlement Agreement Schedule 17, ticket office opening hours be maintained and delivered consistently at all stations, with a formal requirement to report adherence levels to DfT stations by station, period by period
- That Ticketing and Settlement Agreement standards for queuing times be met at all stations, with a formal requirement to report adherence levels to DfT stations by station every six months. At stations where 'tickets for today' and 'tickets in advance' have separate queues, they should be reported separately.

6. Punctuality and reliability

6.1 Virgin Trains' punctuality and reliability

Improving the punctuality and reliability of trains is passengers' second highest priority for improvement in Passenger Focus's January/February 2011 research¹⁰. Among passengers using London – Wolverhampton services it was the highest priority for improvement.

Punctuality is currently only at 84.6% in the published Public Performance Measurement (PPM). Passengers expect punctuality to be at least 90% plus, having seen significant investment in both new trains and the upgrade of the West Coast Main Line (WCML) in recent years.

Table 10 – Historic performance measures for Virgin Trains (MAA)¹¹

Rail year	Virgin Trains PPM (%)	Long distance PPM (%)	National PPM (%)
1998/99	79.5%	81.7%	94.4%
1999/00	77.0%	80.6%	93.6%
2000/01	81.7%	83.7%	93.7%
2001/02	62.8%	69.1%	88.1%
2002/03	68.7%	70.2%	88.6%
2003/04	73.5%	70.6%	89.0%
2004/05	74.8%	73.4%	90.3%
2005/06	72.1%	79.2%	91.7%
2006/07	83.5%	82.2%	93.1%
2007/08	86.0%	84.9%	93.6%
2008/09	86.2%	86.2%	94.5%
2009/10	80.0%	87.3%	94.8%
2010/11	84.6%	88.8%	95.1%

6.2 Measurement

We believe there is an imbalance between the 'passenger experience of delay' and the official measure of delay. Our research [Improving Punctuality for Passengers – February 2011¹²] examined in detail the correlation between passenger satisfaction with punctuality as measured by the NPS for a three to four year period and actual train performance recorded by the train company over the same period.

An initial study was conducted on London commuter services with National Express East Anglia, with two further studies carried out on Northern Rail regional commuter services (into and from Manchester) and on longer distance journeys with CrossCountry. It found:

¹⁰ What passengers want from the ICWC franchise, Passenger Focus, February 2011

¹¹ <http://www.dft.gov.uk/consultations/open/2011-01/consultationdocument.pdf>

¹² <http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/news-and-publications/document-search/document.asp?dsid=4966>

- Average lateness experienced by passengers is worse than that recorded for train services. This is because of the effect of cancellations and because many trains that are on time at their destination are late at intermediate stations;
- On average, passenger satisfaction with punctuality reduces by between two and three percentage points with every minute of delay;
- Commuters (except those travelling long distances) notice lateness after one minute of delay, not just after the five or ten minutes allowed by PPM. Their satisfaction with punctuality falls by an average of five percentage points per minute during the initial period of delay;
- Business and leisure users and long distance commuters tend to change their level of satisfaction with punctuality after a delay of four to six minutes;

In many ways this confirms suspicions that PPM does not adequately reflect passengers' own experience of delays. We believe that this raises two key issues that must be addressed by the industry:

- Measuring punctuality at intermediate stations rather than just at the destination. As PPM measures performance at the final station it is possible for passengers en-route to be late arriving at their station only for the 'empty' train to arrive on time – in other words the train is on time despite most of the passengers being late.
- Adequacy/fairness of the 5 or 10 minute 'allowance' when determining delay.

The research shows that passengers view on-time as the scheduled arrival time (i.e. known in railway-speak as 'right-time') and that satisfaction for business and leisure users starts to drop after 4-6 minutes of lateness rather than after the 10 minutes currently allowed for a TOC such as Virgin Trains. The situation is even starker for commuters, with satisfaction starting to drop as soon as the train is one minute late. As punctuality is the main driver of overall passenger satisfaction it follows that greater adherence to a right-time railway could help drive up overall satisfaction. For these reasons we have advocated that the industry move towards a 'right-time' railway – possibly involving the reduction of current delay thresholds (i.e. 3 and 5 minutes allowance rather than 5 and 10) as an interim step.

6.3 Transparency

PPM figures are only produced for the train company as a whole and are not broken down by line of route. This means that performance on a problematic route may be masked by better performance elsewhere.

Giving rail passengers access to performance figures relevant to their services will help them to hold the train company to account and to ask what is being done to improve services in return for the fares they pay. Good management should not feel threatened by this. Indeed the availability of accurate data may actually help them – a particularly bad journey can linger in the memory and distort passengers' perceptions. Accurate, relevant data can help challenge these negative perceptions.

Providing performance data at a route/service group level would help prevent this and focus attention on areas that need improving. It is important to stress that this information already exists – it would not involve any new costs in terms of data gathering. Ultimately we believe that performance data should be provided under the Government's open-data vision – something that could allow passengers to see the performance on a specific train over a period of time.

Recommendation 3: Improving overall performance, measurement and transparency of punctuality and reliability for the benefit of passengers

Passenger Focus recommends that DfT includes the following requirements in the specification for the new franchise:

- The new operator must deliver as part of their bid plans to improve performance on all routes and on the overall franchise to achieve above 90% PPM
- Challenging but achievable targets for increasing the number of trains achieving 'right time or early' at destination and/or within 5 rather 10 minutes (but without resorting to extended journey times).
- 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.
- A requirement to report the percentage of trains arriving at key intermediate stations
- A requirement to provide performance data on a disaggregated level – at least on a service group level but ideally in a form capable of allowing passengers to track the performance of a specific train.

7. The timetable

Passenger Focus's January/February 2011 research¹³ found that passengers' highest priorities for improvement that relate to the timetable are journey time (speed) and frequency. This is despite NPS recording reasonably high levels of satisfaction (especially on the London – Manchester route but less so on the Birmingham – Scotland route).

This indicates that, despite relatively high levels of satisfaction, journey time and frequency remain of great importance to passengers. This was clearly demonstrated through the depth of interest shown, and concern expressed, at the point the new Very High Frequency (VHF) timetable was introduced by Virgin Trains. While many passengers benefited from considerable improvements in journey times some lost out: in particular passengers travelling from Milton Keynes, Penrith and Motherwell.

It will be important that bidders take into account the depth of passenger (and community interest) when developing timetable proposals. In the longer-term the advent of HS2 will provide opportunities to look at the issue of speed versus regional connectivity but in the meantime bidders must engage with stakeholders and demonstrate that they have made efforts to balance the needs of passengers.

One area where our research does show a consensus is in terms of passengers wanting earlier and later services during the week and at weekends.

¹³ What passengers want from the ICWC franchise, Passenger Focus, February 2011

7.1 Journey time

Passengers are satisfied with existing journey times on all ICWC routes except those between London/Birmingham and Scotland. The WCML Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS) includes proposals to improve London to Glasgow journey times, and the ORR has proposed that the WCML timetable should be re-written for December 2013. Bidders for the new franchise should show how they propose to engage fully in that process and improve journey times.

7.2 Frequency

The consultation document raises challenging questions regarding frequency of service. The Passenger Focus response to the WCML RUS¹⁴ addresses those issues in detail as does our response to the Office of Rail Regulation consultation on Track Access Rights on the WCML¹⁵. During the consultation period for the WCML RUS, Passenger Focus held workshops for Rail User Groups and passengers in Glasgow, Preston and London. At each meeting local stakeholders requested consideration for an improved level of frequency in their region and at their particular station.

There are clear relationships between frequency, journey time and capacity. More frequent services reduce the wait for the next train and therefore reduce generalised journey times, in effect, speeding up journeys. They also increase the number of seats available; at an hourly frequency by a greater amount than operating longer trains. As train frequency increases lengthening trains can provide more seats – three eleven-car Pendolinos provide more standard class seats than four nine-car Pendolinos.

7.3 Earlier first trains and later last trains

Passengers on the WCML tell us they want earlier and later services as shown in tables 11, 12, 13 and 14¹⁶. Overall, on all parts of the ICWC franchise around 20% of passengers sought an earlier Monday to Friday first train (between 4am and 6am) than is provided at present. A similar opinion was expressed for later trains on Monday to Friday, with 14% wanting services after 11pm; this was repeated for Saturday and Sunday. This expression for improved services is consistent across all routes as shown in table 12; passengers want earlier services on all routes and this is similar for services southbound as well as northbound.

¹⁴ <http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/news-and-publications/document-search/document.asp?dsid=5042>

¹⁵ <http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/news-and-publications/document-search/document.asp?dsid=4857>

¹⁶ What passengers want from the ICWC franchise, Passenger Focus, February 2011

Table 11 – Passengers want earlier first trains

First train	Total
Monday to Friday	
04:00 - 04:59	5%
05:00 - 05:59	14%
06:00 - 06:59	12%
07:00 - 07:59	3%
08:00 - 08:59	1%
From 09:00 onwards	1%
Saturday	
04:00 - 04:59	2%
05:00 - 05:59	4%
06:00 - 06:59	6%
07:00 - 07:59	3%
08:00 - 08:59	1%
From 09:00 onwards	0%
Sunday	
04:00 - 04:59	2%
05:00 - 05:59	2%
06:00 - 06:59	4%
07:00 - 07:59	3%
08:00 - 08:59	1%
From 09:00 onwards	1%

Table 12 – Passengers want later last trains

Last train	Total
Monday to Thursday	
20:00 - 20:59	2%
21:00 - 21:59	3%
22:00 - 22:59	10%
After 23:00 onwards	14%
Friday	
20:00 - 20:59	1%
21:00 - 21:59	2%
22:00 - 22:59	8%
After 23:00 onwards	16%
Saturday	
20:00 - 20:59	1%
21:00 - 21:59	2%
22:00 - 22:59	5%
After 23:00 onwards	14%
Sunday	
20:00 - 20:59	1%
21:00 - 21:59	2%
22:00 - 22:59	6%
After 23:00 onwards	9%

Table 13 – Passengers want earlier trains by route

Mon- Thu	London-Wolverhampton		London-Manchester		London-Liverpool		London-Wales		London-Glasgow		Birmingham-Scotland	
	North	South	North	South	North	South	North	South	North	South	North	South
Between 04:00 and 04:59	15%	18%	12%	19%	14%	15%	14%	17%	13%	33%	13%	14%
Between 05:00 and 05:59	50%	44%	47%	47%	39%	45%	29%	41%	30%	33%	29%	33%
Between 06:00 and 06:59	26%	33%	32%	28%	36%	32%	34%	32%	42%	20%	43%	38%
Between 07:00 and 07:59	7%	4%	7%	4%	8%	6%	10%	6%	11%	10%	9%	12%
Between 08:00 and 08:59	1%	-	0%	1%	2%	1%	5%	3%	2%	3%	4%	1%
From 09:00 onwards	1%	1%	2%	2%	1%	0%	8%	2%	2%	2%	3%	3%

Table 14 – Passengers want later last trains by route

Mon - Thu	London-Wolverhampton		London-Manchester		London-Liverpool		London-Wales		London-Glasgow		Birmingham-Scotland		All routes combined	
	North	South	North	South	North	South	North	South	North	South	North	South	North	South
Between 21:00 and 21:59	7%	7%	8%	10%	18%	17%	14%	11%	11%	12%	15%	9%	12%	11%
Between 22:00 and 22:59	25%	28%	40%	40%	43%	40%	38%	34%	27%	21%	37%	39%	35%	34%
After 23:00 onwards	65%	56%	48%	43%	34%	35%	33%	31%	30%	42%	31%	28%	42%	40%

7.4 High-speed

DfT are currently consulting on High Speed Rail (HSR), specifically the route for HS2, the first section of a high-speed line to the West Midlands and the North. Potential improved journey times on the ICWC routes after the first section of HS2 opens in 2026 are as follows:

Table 15 – Journey times for ICWC routes¹⁷

Route	Current Journey Time	Possible HS2 Journey Time
London – Birmingham	1hr 24m	49m
London – Manchester	2hrs 8m	1hr 13m
London – Liverpool	2hrs 10m	1hr 37m
London - Glasgow	4hrs 30m	3hrs 30m
Birmingham - Scotland	3hrs 57m	3hrs 15m

It is clear from the above proposals that the development of HSR shall address journey speed issues in the longer term.

The successful bidder should be proactive in the development of the timetable specification for the WCML after HSR services begin.

Recommendation 4: Improving the timetable

Passenger Focus recommends that DfT includes the following requirements in the specification for the new franchise:

- The successful bidder should exploit the full potential of the route without worsening the timetable for any station currently served by the franchise
- The successful bidder should fully engage in the process to re-write the WCML timetable
- Proposals to address the demand for earlier and later trains, in particular at weekends
- Proposals showing how the operator will carry out meaningful consultation prior to implementing any timetable changes, particularly when developing their proposed services for the stations listed in the DfT consultation.

8. Capacity

Passenger Focus's January/February 2011 research¹⁸ found that passengers on all parts of the ICWC network passengers' rank 'getting a seat' their third highest priority. The NPS (Spring & Autumn 2010) shows that satisfaction with 'sufficient room for all passengers to sit or stand' is at 74% but ranges from only 69% on the Birmingham – Scotland route to 82% on the London – Liverpool route.

¹⁷ <http://highspeedrail.dft.gov.uk/sites/highspeedrail.dft.gov.uk/files/hsr-consultation.pdf>

¹⁸ What passengers want from the ICWC franchise, Passenger Focus, February 2011

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. For instance, Passenger Focus is aware of specific instances of crowding on a Friday between London and Manchester which is becoming an issue on all other routes.

The public reporting of crowding levels needs to be more transparent and data should be disaggregated by route to make it more representative of an individual passenger's experience. Capacity should not be managed by 'pricing-off' passengers from the rail network.

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. We further welcome that the High Level Output Specification (HLOS) identified the need for additional carrying capacity on services to be delivered by lengthening some peak service (106 new carriages) and platforms.

However, our response to the WCML RUS consultation¹⁹ recognised that *'Capacity is the key issue for the WCML as figures show the current overcrowding levels and further projected increases over the next few years. It is imperative that the options included within the final RUS are tailored to address these capacity constraints'*.

Recommendation 5: Increasing capacity

ICWC passengers have placed 'getting a seat' as their third top priority for improvement. Passenger Focus therefore recommends the following:

- That the specification requires the introduction of the full increment of 106 carriages to the timescale stated
- That the contract will require the operator to develop proposals to further increase capacity to meet demand that is expected to emerge during the franchise term and so inform development of the HLOS for 2014 – 2019 and 2019 – 2024
- That the specification requires access to high quality loading data across all routes that provides a standard for capacity levels
- That the specification requires that crowding information be published by route, rather than as a single figure for the whole franchise.

9. Train presentation

In Passenger Focus's January/February 2011 research²⁰, ICWC passengers placed up-keep and cleanliness of the train as their 5th highest priority for improvement. The NPS shows high levels of satisfaction with train presentation factors in comparison with other long distance operators but in absolute terms improvements should be sought.

¹⁹ <http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/news-and-publications/document-search/document.asp?dsid=5042>

²⁰ What passengers want from the ICWC franchise, Passenger Focus, February 2011

Figure 2 – Virgin Trains NPS train presentation factors 2006-2010

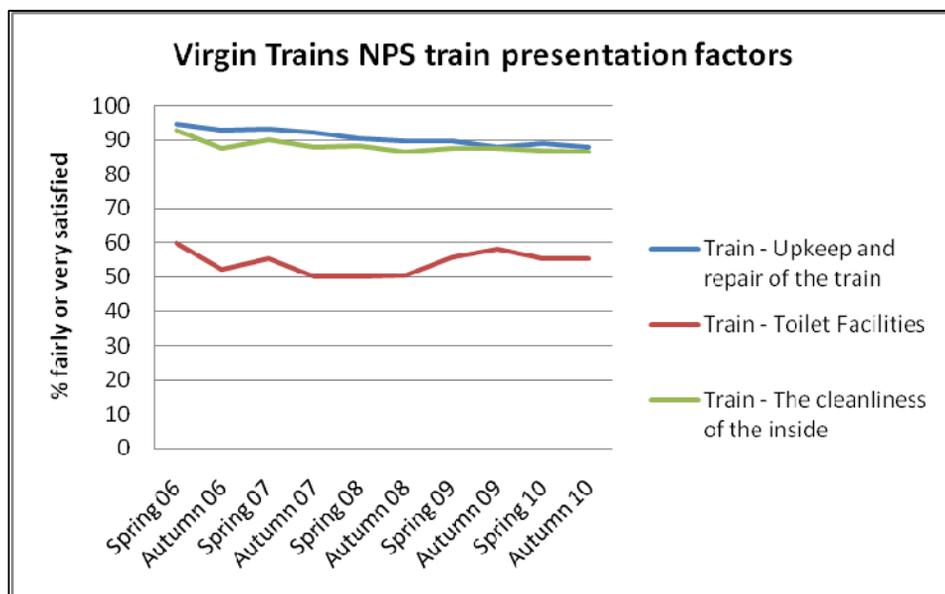


Table 16 – Train presentation factors, Virgin Trains, NPS Spring & Autumn 2010

	Virgin Trains	Long distance average	Virgin Trains rank among five long distance train companies
The toilet facilities	55%	51%	1
The comfort of the seating area	78%	78%	2
The cleanliness of the inside	87%	82%	1
The cleanliness of the outside	84%	78%	1
Up keep and repair of the train	89%	84%	2

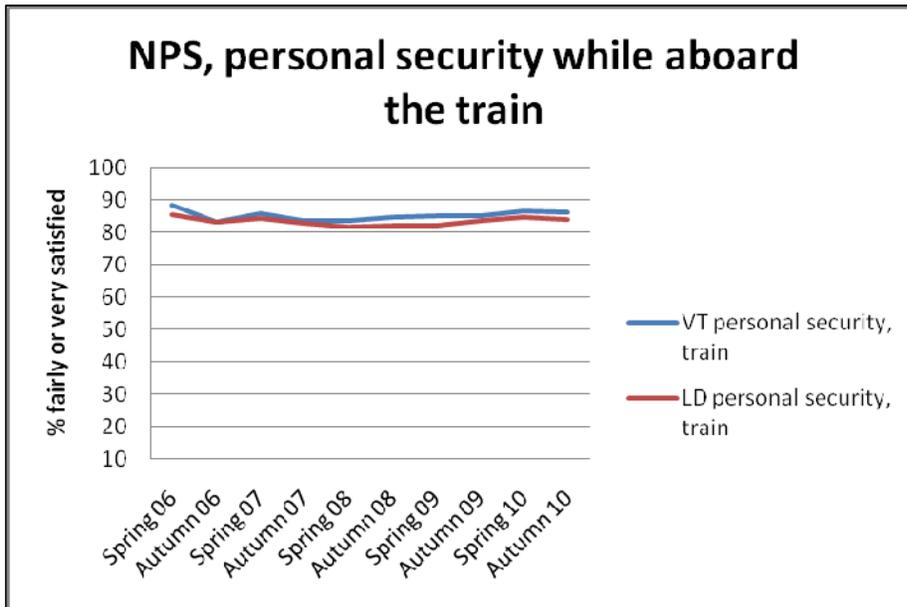
**Recommendation 6:
Improving train presentation**

Passenger Focus recommends that DfT includes NPS targets that the operator should meet in regard to train presentation.

10. Personal security when using the railway

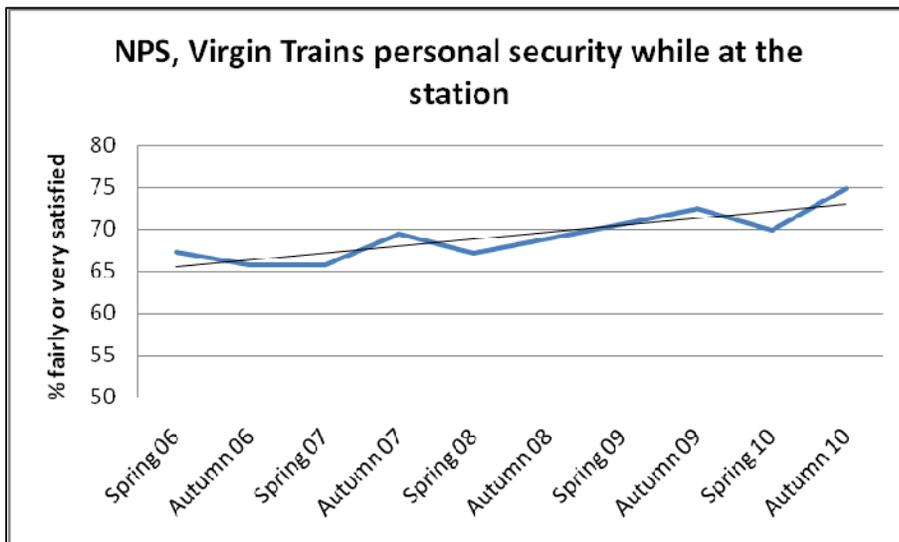
Passenger satisfaction with personal security onboard the train has been rising gradually in recent years, with Virgin Trains having the highest satisfaction among long distance operators at 86%.

Figure 3 – Virgin Trains NPS, personal security onboard the train 2006-2010



The proportion of passengers satisfied with their personal security at the station when making a Virgin Trains journey has increased more gently, with 63% satisfied – fourth among the long distance train companies.

Figure 4 – Virgin Trains NPS, personal security at the station 2006-2010



When asked about priorities for improvement in January/February 2011²¹, ICWC passengers placed improving their personal security while on the train and at the station as their eighth and ninth highest priorities.

Passenger Focus's recent research into anti-social behaviour²² found that passengers find 'abusive or threatening behaviour' (61%) their main concern, followed by 'people under the influence of alcohol and drugs' (37%) and 'theft of belongings' (36%). Passengers also find it worrying when groups of passengers behave rowdily, including football supporters. The research found the top three things that would help passengers feel safer while on the train are 'not allowing rowdy or drunk people to board the train', 'more rail staff visibility on trains' and 'more police visibility on trains'.

Earlier Passenger Focus research into passenger security²³ found that when passengers compared journeys that they had made before and after 20:00, they were far less satisfied with personal security and the availability of staff when travelling after 20:00. Satisfaction with personal security dropped 12 percentage points, from 61% to 49%, while satisfaction with the availability of staff fell from 48% to 37%²⁴.

We believe the visible presence of railway staff is key to allaying passengers' concerns. Passenger Focus draws DfT and bidders' attention to its publication "Passenger perceptions of personal security on the railways"²⁵ and "Anti-social behaviour report: rail passenger views, February 2010"²⁶

Recommendation 7: Improving passenger satisfaction with personal security

Passenger Focus recommends that development and implementation of a strategy to deliver improved passenger satisfaction with personal security while using the railway. The strategy requires the input of both the successful bidders and British Transport Police (BTP). The specification should include the following requirements:

- NPS targets to improve personal security on board trains and at stations
- measures to increase the visible presence of staff on trains and at stations, particularly at times of the day when passenger satisfaction with personal security is lowest
- provision of comprehensive CCTV coverage within each coach of each train operated by the franchise
- maintenance of Secure Stations status at all stations that are currently accredited and its achievement at others.
- successful operator must demonstrate partnership working with BTP on delivery of an effective strategy

²¹ What passengers want from the ICWC franchise, Passenger Focus, February 2011

²² Passenger Focus, Anti-social behaviour report: rail passenger views, February 2010

²³ Passenger Focus, Passenger perceptions of personal security on railways, March 2009

²⁴ Passenger Focus, Evening Rail Travel, April 2008

²⁵ <http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/news-and-publications/document-search/document.asp?dsid=2572>

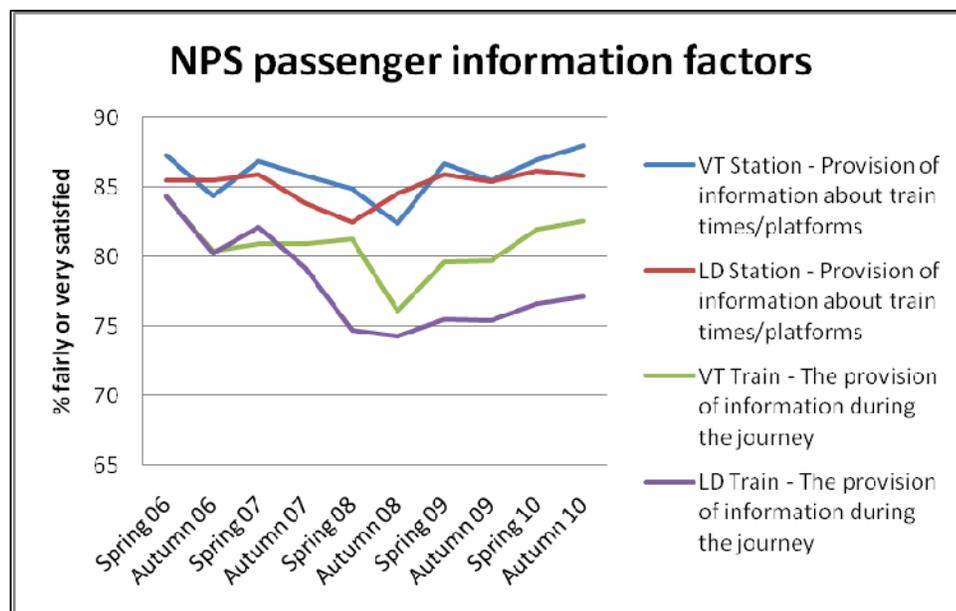
²⁶ <http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/news-and-publications/document-search/document.asp?dsid=3629>

11 Passenger information and service disruption

11.1 Provision of information at stations and during the journey

The NPS shows that satisfaction among ICWC passengers is high for provision of information at stations and during the journey and above the long distance TOC average. It is notable that, while Network Rail has recently renewed the 'back office' equipment that feeds the Virgin Trains customer information systems, many stations retain late 1980s/early 1990s 'television' display screens that are now barely fit for purpose. We welcome the 'roll-out' of the new 'darwin' system that shall improve the provision of information.

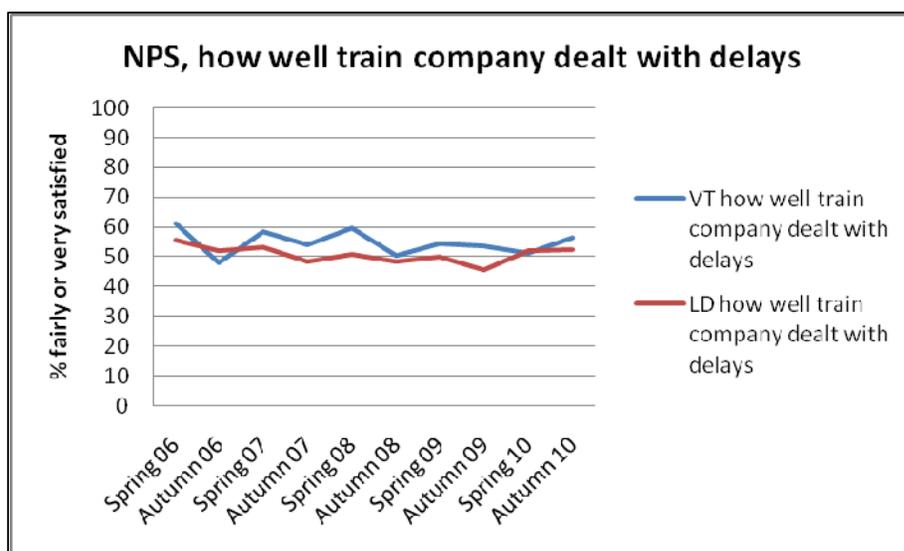
Figure 5 – Virgin Trains NPS passenger information factors 2006-2010



11.2 Dealing with delays and passenger information during disruption

The NPS shows that passengers travelling with Virgin Trains now rate it slightly above the long distance TOC average. However, still only one in two passengers who experienced a delay is satisfied with the way it was handled. When services are delayed or disrupted passengers want the information that allows them to make an informed choice about their options.

Figure 6 - Virgin Trains NPS, how well train company dealt with delays 2006-2010



With the introduction of HSR, there will be major work taking place at Euston station which will impact on passenger services. It is vital that information is available to passengers at all times during this construction period. Best practice on this can be sought from the recent redevelopment work at Reading station over Christmas and New Year 2010/11.

11.3 Keeping passengers on trains during engineering work

Travel patterns have changed over the past decade and there is now much more demand for later-evening services during the week and especially at weekends. Network Rail is developing the concept of the 'seven day railway' with the aim of providing trains when passengers want them and reducing disruption, particularly on Saturdays and Sundays. It is important that the new operator is incentivised to keep passengers on trains wherever possible and use buses only as a last resort.

Our recent research on planned disruption in the Reading area over the Christmas 2010 period confirms that passengers' preference is to 'stay on the train' (i.e. by virtue of trains running over diversionary routes) rather than having to catch a rail replacement bus. However, it also showed that satisfaction with the bus replacement service can be positively influenced if the disruption is well planned and communicated in advance.

Recommendation 8: Provision of information to passengers and management of service disruption

Passenger Focus recommends that improved provision of information to passengers and management of service disruption be one of DfT's key objectives for the ICWC franchise. The specification should include the following requirements:

- contractual targets to improve NPS satisfaction with information at stations and during the journey, and that a strategy be developed and implemented to improve NPS scores for "how well train company dealt with delay" and "usefulness of information during a delay"

- targets to reduce the impact on passengers of Network Rail maintenance, renewal and upgrade of the railway and, in particular, measures to prevent the operator choosing to receive a ‘schedule four’ compensation payment even when opportunities exist to run at least some trains
- a facility for passengers to receive 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 sign up through marketing of the service
- compliance with the ATOC Approved Code of Practice: Passenger Information During Disruption and Good Practice Guides on provision of passenger information, together with a programme of audit and mystery shopping
- that active co-operation be required with proposals developed by the industry, Passenger Information During Disruption (PIDD) Steering Group to feed station customer information systems directly from Darwin, the national real time train running database.
- the franchisee must have the ability and capacity to effectively plan and manage the change and disruption from major projects, consulting and communicating clearly with passengers.

12. Station facilities and services

Evidence from the NPS (Spring & Autumn 2010) shows that ICWC passengers are among the least satisfied with stations in the long distance sector. The overall station environment, upkeep/repair of station buildings/platforms, facilities for car parking and availability of staff at stations all rank below the sector average.

Table 17 – Passenger satisfaction with station factors, NPS Spring & Autumn 2010

	Virgin Trains	Long distance average	Virgin Trains rank among 5 LD train companies
The overall station environment	71%	74%	4
The upkeep/repair of the station buildings/platforms	69%	72%	5
Facilities for car parking	54%	56%	4
Availability of staff at stations	63%	66%	5

In our January/February 2011 research²⁷ we asked passengers their preference for new/improved facilities at stations. The message is clear: when it comes to improvements at stations the top priority, across all routes, is cleaner station toilets. Alongside that comes accurate information at stations both visual and announcements regarding delays, visible staff at stations and improved waiting rooms.

²⁷ What passengers want from the ICWC franchise, Passenger Focus, February 2011

Table 18 – Passengers’ priorities for improvements at stations

Priority for Improvement	All passengers
Clean station toilets	32%
Accurate visual information about delays	26%
Visible staff at the station	24%
Waiting room	21%
Accurate announcements about delays	21%
Well maintained station buildings and platforms	20%
Accurate visual information about actual train times	19%
Accurate announcements about actual train times	16%
Presence of station toilets	16%
Refreshment room/kiosk	13%
An interactive help point	11%

The consultation document recognises that stations ought to be attractive gateways to the railway system. Improvements in station standards to meet passengers aspirations are required and Passenger Focus believes that the best way to ensure this happens is through contractual targets to improve NPS satisfaction with these factors.

**Recommendation 9:
Station facilities and services**

Passenger Focus recommends that DfT includes the following requirements in the specification of the West Coast franchise:

- that the operator is contracted to improve NPS satisfaction with up-keep/repair of stations, station cleanliness and station facilities and services throughout the franchise term.

13. Meeting the needs of disabled passengers

Passenger Focus mystery shopping findings published in 2008²⁸ and 2011²⁹ found a number of deficiencies in how assistance is provided to disabled passengers through the Assisted Persons Reservation System (APRS): in particular, the booked assistance not being delivered on the day and poor attitude/helpfulness among some staff. Arrangements during disruption to services are also known to be a problem, despite the greater likelihood that train operators have the phone number of a passenger using APRS, and so the means to get in touch if things start going wrong.

Passenger Focus draws DfT and bidders’ attention to its best practice guidelines in this area.³⁰

²⁸ <http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/news-and-publications/document-search/document.asp?dsid=1897>

²⁹ <http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/news-and-publications/document-search/document.asp?dsid=4843>

³⁰ <http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/news-and-publications/document-search/document.asp?dsid=1898>

One of the reasons for repeating the research in 2011 is our continuing concern that a system which cannot cope with present demand would buckle seriously under the additional and intense burdens of the Olympic and Paralympic Games. We emphasised how reliance on the telephone, 1980s' fax and a bolt-on arrangement to the seat reservation system to make bookings and communicate passengers' needs to stations is hopelessly inefficient. We remain convinced that the Olympics demand and deserve a fit-for-purpose system.

Funding has finally been allocated for a new system which will abandon faxes in favour of staff PDAs. This system will have the added benefit of being able to alert on-train staff in advance, particularly useful in case of unstaffed stations and/or unreservable on-train accommodation. Initial testing of this system is due to begin in April and we hope that it has passenger input. It is hoped that the new system will be in place to begin taking assistance requests for the Games when ticket bookings open shortly. If not, Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC) advises that disabled passengers can book assistance the old-fashioned way in the meantime and these requests will be input to the new system when it becomes available.

However, we remain anxious that, even with the new system in place, the proposed arrangements will not provide the flawless operation which ATOC and the Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA) predict. As a result, we have written to the ODA to express our continuing concerns.

Recommendation 10: Meeting the needs of disabled passengers

Passenger Focus recommends that DfT includes the following requirements in the specification of the ICWC franchise:

- that an annual action plan be developed and implemented to enhance the service provided to disabled passengers using the ICWC network and to improve customer satisfaction among those using the APRS system
- 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
- that bidders for the franchise have in place robust plans to deal with the intense burden of the Olympic and Paralympic Games
- that sufficient post-journey customer satisfaction surveys are conducted each period to give a robust indication of the views of ICWC passengers who used APRS when making their journey
- that all passengers with an APRS booking whose journey will be affected by amendments, cancellations or disruption to services will receive a telephone call to help them re-plan their journey.

14. Additional issues

14.1 Passenger's Charter

Recommendation 11: Passenger's Charter

Passenger Focus recommends that the ICWC operator be required to introduce a new Passenger's Charter. Drawing on best practice from around the industry, we recommend that it contains the following provisions, a number of which are already contained in the Virgin Trains Charter.

- An 'irrespective of cause' delay repay scheme giving compensation to the value of 50% of either the outward or return portion for a delay of 30-59 minutes; compensation to the value of 100% of either the outward or return portion for a delay of 60-119 minutes; and compensation to the value of 100% of the outward and return portions (where applicable) for a delay of 120 minutes or more. The new operator should be encouraged to add "without quibble, we will exchange National Rail travel vouchers for a cheque on request".
- Compensation to the value of your ticket in the event that a seat reservation is not honoured and an alternative seat cannot be found on the train.
- Compensation to the value of your ticket in the event that an Assisted Passenger Reservation System (APRS) booking is not honoured.
- In the event of a missed connection because of delay to or cancellation of an ICWC train, a commitment to arrange alternative transport to get passengers to their final destination if the next connecting train is more than 60 minutes later and the alternative transport will result in an earlier arrival than waiting for the next train.
- In the event that delay to or cancellation of an ICWC train makes it impossible for a passenger to get to their destination at a reasonable time by train or alternative transport, a commitment to EITHER get the passenger back to their origin point and let them travel again the following day OR arrange overnight accommodation and let them continue the following day, in either instance without additional charge. The new operator should be encouraged to add "taking into account the passenger's preferences".
- A commitment to provide refreshments on trains and at stations in the event of severe delays.

As with all 'delay repay' style Passenger's Charters, regular passengers who experience a large number of sub-30 minute delays receive no compensation. While an individual would have to be particularly unlucky, it is a fact that a season ticket holder could be 29 minutes late to and from work every day, yet receive no compensation.

Passenger Focus recommends that DfT requires the Charter for the new ICWC franchise to contain:

- Additional protection for season ticket holders in the event of poor punctuality in the peaks over a sustained period. The principle is setting an appropriate delay threshold and trigger level. Based on research conducted previously on this subject, we suggest a 10 minute threshold because less than 10% of passengers expect to be compensated for a delay of under 10 minutes.

Passenger Focus also believes that DfT should explicitly make clear to bidders that the current derogation from EC regulation 1371/2007 on rail passengers' rights and obligations expires during the lifetime of the franchise period. We believe that bidders must factor in such risks during the bidding process rather than look to pass any subsequent implementation costs back to DfT through the franchise change process.

14.2 Getting to and from the station

Passenger Focus has long maintained that few passengers' journeys start or finish with the train reaching the station; completing the journey involves another mode of transport of some sort. We therefore believe that a strategic approach is required to how passengers will get to and from ICWC stations, particularly where significant volume growth is expected over the course of the franchise. This should be multi-modal, including walking and cycling at one end of the spectrum and the private car at the other. It should be noted that a Passenger Focus March 2009 report³¹ found that, after dark, 51% of women and 20% of men feel unsafe walking from home to the station and 61% of women and 26% of men feel unsafe walking from the station to home. It is important that the successful bidder works closely with Local Authorities to ensure the best possible provision for pedestrians.

14.2.1 Car parking

Passenger Focus research in 2007³² found that insufficient car parking at stations is likely to increase the number or length of car journeys and may suppress demand for rail travel:

- passengers are more likely to be dropped off at the station, resulting in additional car journeys
- passengers may drive to more distant stations to be able to park
- potential passengers may decide not to travel by rail but drive the whole way because of the risk of not getting a parking space at the station.

Alongside measures to encourage the use of more sustainable modes to access the railway, the new franchise must ensure that the needs of those who have little reasonable choice but to park at the station are met properly. Our research with passengers told us that only 56% of Virgin Trains' passengers are satisfied with the car park facilities at stations along the Virgin Trains' routes. This data is presented in table 1 on page 8.

Passengers tell us that car parking prices are a deterrent to using the railway. It may not be possible to sustain an argument in law that train companies control both the supply and price of car parking around railway stations: or that even, if they do their behaviour amounts to abuse of market position. However, that is the perception of many passengers. For commuters, the car park fee is often an extension of their rail season ticket cost and many find it odd that one is regulated and one is not. It is important that in the new franchise car parking is regarded as part of the overall rail service and not subject to significant price increases during the franchise term.

Our January/February 2011 research³³ told us that cheaper parking, more spaces and better security at car parks are passengers' top priorities in this area.

³¹ Passenger perceptions of personal security on the railways, March 2009

³² Getting to the station, March 2007

³³ What passengers want from the ICWC franchise, Passenger Focus, February 2011

14.2.2 Cycle parking

NPS also asks passengers about bicycle parking facilities at stations and this is lower than the long distance average.

Table 19 – Passenger satisfaction with bicycle parking facilities, NPS, Spring & Autumn 2010

NPS Attribute	Virgin (whole TOC)	Long distance average	Virgin Trains rank among 5 LD train companies
Facilities for bicycle parking	48	56	5

14.2.3 Integrated ticketing

To make things easier for passengers travelling to and from stations by bus, we believe that multi-modal ticketing arrangements should be encouraged.

Recommendation 12: Getting to and from the station

Passenger Focus recommends that DfT includes the following requirements in the specification of the ICWC franchise:

- that alongside assumptions about growth in passenger volume during the franchise term a strategy must be developed for how passengers will get to and from ICWC stations, including implications for car and bicycle parking. This should include a requirement to:
 - monitor, review and improve car and bicycle parking spaces
 - car parking is regarded as part of the overall rail service and not subject to significant price increases
 - implement Station Travel Plans at key locations

15. Summary of recommendations

Recommendation 1: Giving passengers a voice in the new franchise

The consultation document is supportive of those elements that seek to improve service quality, passenger information and link improvements to a results monitored mechanism. The NPS is a results monitored mechanism that gives passengers a voice in the new franchise.

DfT's specification for the new franchise must stretch the successful bidder to take ICWC passenger satisfaction to higher levels.

Bidders for the new franchise should be asked to submit bids that include plans on how to improve NPS scores.

Passenger Focus recommends the setting of NPS targets for stations, trains and customer service that the successful bidder should achieve. Consideration should be given as to whether the targets should apply on a route basis or to the whole franchise.

Recommendation 2: Improving value for money, trust among passengers and ease of buying a ticket

Passenger Focus recommends that DfT includes the following requirements in the specification for the new franchise:

Structure

- That a new, easily-understood fares structure is introduced on ICWC that will be regarded by passengers as logical, transparent and a fair price for the journey being made. Prices for those passengers who can buy well in advance and stick to their plans can be fantastic value for money however the options for those travelling at short notice, or requiring even a small degree of flexibility are in some cases extremely expensive and result in value for money scores plummeting. Flexibility at an affordable price is a key requirement of such a new structure and it should seek to reduce those unregulated prices, e.g. Anytime Singles and Returns that have risen considerably ahead of inflation in recent years
- To help deliver flexibility at an affordable price, that the Off-Peak Single (formerly Saver Single) be priced at 50% of the Off-Peak Return (formerly Saver Return) instead of being £1 less as at present. This mechanism is used already by First Great Western and Virgin Trains (on internet sales only) to give passengers the opportunity to mix their use of train-specific Advance Single tickets and more flexible options – for instance, travelling out on a specific train but needing flexibility about the return time.
- That passengers holding Advance Single tickets who miss the train on which they have booked should be permitted to pay the difference, plus an administration fee, between what they have paid already and the appropriate new ticket they are required to purchase. This will substantially address the genuine anger passengers feel when they miss their intended train and are asked to buy a completely new ticket with no account taken of the money already paid. The sums involved can be significant: a Standard Advance Single from London to Manchester costs up to £119.

Surely, with an administrative fee applied, that sum should count towards the new ticket a passenger is required to buy?

- To ensure passengers have confidence in the fares structure, that fares on 'walk up' interavailable flows controlled by ICWC, the official through fare must never exceed the sum of 'walk up' interavailable fares for individual legs of the journey (except where a journey takes place partly at peak time and partly not).

Retailing

Ticket vending machines

- That on flows controlled by ICWC, applicable restrictions should be printed on passengers' tickets to remove confusion over validity
- That all ICWC ticket vending machines must clearly display outward and return ticket restrictions on the screen prior to a passenger committing to purchase.

Internet ticket sales

Some passengers are suspicious that train company websites favour their own services over those of other companies and that they do not necessarily offer the best value tickets for the journey being made. It is important to take the opportunity through the new ICWC franchise to protect the unwary, potentially irregular traveller paying more than they need and to give all on-line purchasers confidence that they have obtained the best price available.

We recommend that DfT includes the following requirements in the specification for the new franchise:

- That impartial retailing rules be formally extended to cover internet ticket sales through the new operator's website.
- In order to prevent overcharging and ensure passengers can have confidence that they are getting the best price, that it be made impossible to buy an Advance Single ticket at a higher price than the 'walk up' fare available on the same train and that it be made impossible to buy out and back Standard Class Advance Singles at a higher price than the 'walk up' return fare available on the same trains.
- That the 'cut off' time for buying Advance Single tickets be moved to the latest practicable time to allow the production and positioning of ticket reservation labels. The remaining as-yet-unsold Advance Single tickets should stay on sale, if practicably possible, until two hours before the train departs from its origin station.

Ticket offices

- That the current Virgin Trains Ticketing and Settlement Agreement Schedule 17 ticket office opening hours be maintained and delivered consistently at all stations, with a formal requirement to report adherence levels to DfT stations by station, period by period
- That Ticketing and Settlement Agreement standards for queuing times be met at all stations, with a formal requirement to report adherence levels to DfT stations by station every six months. At stations where 'tickets for today' and 'tickets in advance' have separate queues, they should be reported separately.

Recommendation 3: Improving the measurement and transparency of punctuality and reliability for the benefit of passengers

Passenger Focus recommends that DfT includes the following requirements in the specification for the new franchise:

- Challenging but achievable targets for increasing the number of trains achieving 'right time or early' at destination and/or within 5 rather 10 minutes (but without resorting to extended journey times).
- 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.
- A requirement to report the percentage of trains arriving at key intermediate stations
- A requirement to provide performance data on a disaggregated level – at least on a service group level but ideally in a form capable of allowing passengers to track the performance of a specific train.

Recommendation 4: Improving the timetable

Passenger Focus recommends that DfT includes the following requirements in the specification for the new franchise:

- The successful bidder should exploit the full potential of the route without worsening the timetable for any station currently served by the franchise
- The successful bidder should fully engage in the process to re-write the WCML timetable
- Proposals to address the demand for earlier and later trains, in particular at weekends
- Proposals showing how the operator will carry out meaningful consultation prior to implementing any timetable changes, particularly when developing their proposed services for the stations listed in the DfT consultation.

Recommendation 5: Increasing capacity

ICWC passengers have placed 'getting a seat' as their third top priority for improvement. Passenger Focus therefore recommends the following:

- That the specification requires the introduction of the full increment of 106 carriages to the timescale stated
- That the contract will require the operator to develop proposals to further increase capacity to meet demand that is expected to emerge during the franchise term and so inform development of the HLOS for 2014 – 2019 and 2019 – 2024
- That the specification requires access to high quality loading data across all routes that provides a standard for capacity levels

- That the specification requires that crowding information be published by route, rather than as a single figure for the whole franchise.

**Recommendation 6:
Improving train presentation**

Passenger Focus recommends that DfT includes NPS targets that the operator should meet in regard to train presentation.

**Recommendation 7:
Improving passenger satisfaction with personal security**

Passenger Focus recommends that development and implementation of a strategy to deliver improved passenger satisfaction with personal security while using the railway, should be one of DfT's key objectives for the new franchise. The specification should include the following requirements:

- contractual targets to improve personal security on board trains and at stations*
- measures to increase the visible presence of staff on trains and at stations, particularly at times of the day when passenger satisfaction with personal security is lowest
- provision of comprehensive CCTV coverage within each coach of each train operated by the franchise
- maintenance of Secure Stations status at all stations that are currently accredited and its achievement at others.

**Recommendation 8:
Provision of information to passengers and management of service disruption**

Passenger Focus recommends that improved provision of information to passengers and management of service disruption be one of DfT's key objectives for the ICWC franchise. The specification should include the following requirements:

- contractual targets to improve NPS satisfaction with information at stations and during the journey, and that a strategy be developed and implemented to improve NPS scores for "how well train company dealt with delay" and "usefulness of information during a delay"
- targets to reduce the impact on passengers of Network Rail maintenance, renewal and upgrade of the railway and, in particular, measures to prevent the operator choosing to receive a 'schedule four' compensation payment even when opportunities exist to run at least some trains
- a facility for passengers to receive 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 sign up through marketing of the service
- compliance with the ATOC Approved Code of Practice: Passenger Information During Disruption and Good Practice Guides on provision of passenger information, together with a programme of audit and mystery shopping
- that active co-operation be required with proposals developed by the industry Passenger Information During Disruption (PIDD) Steering Group to feed station customer information systems directly from Darwin, the national real time train running database.

Recommendation 9: Station facilities and services

Passenger Focus recommends that DfT includes the following requirements in the specification of the Greater Anglia franchise:

- that the operator is contracted to improve NPS satisfaction with up-keep/repair of stations, station cleanliness and station facilities and services throughout the franchise term.

Recommendation 10: Meeting the needs of disabled passengers

Passenger Focus recommends that DfT includes the following requirements in the specification of the ICWC franchise:

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- 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
- that bidders for the franchise have in place robust plans to deal with the intense burden of the Olympic and Paralympic Games
- that sufficient post-journey customer satisfaction surveys are conducted each period to give a robust indication of the views of West Coast Mainline passengers who used APRS when making their journey
- that all passengers with an APRS booking whose journey will be affected by amendments, cancellations or disruption to services will receive a telephone call to help them re-plan their journey.

Recommendation 11: Passenger's Charter

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connecting train is more than 60 minutes later and the alternative transport will result in an earlier arrival than waiting for the next train

- In the event that delay to or cancellation of an ICWC train makes it impossible for a passenger to get to their destination at a reasonable time by train or alternative transport, a commitment to EITHER get the passenger back to their origin point and let them travel again the following day OR arrange overnight accommodation and let them continue the following day, in either instance without additional charge. The new operator should be encouraged to add “taking into account the passenger’s preferences”.
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