

Submission to Transport for Greater Manchester Oxford Road Bus Priority package consultation

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Passenger Focus is the statutory watchdog for rail passengers in Great Britain; and for bus, tram and coach passengers in England (outside London).
- 1.2. This submission is with regard to the bus priority measures proposed for Oxford Road services to and from Manchester city centre.

2. Bus Passenger Priorities

- 2.1. To direct the focus of our work, Passenger Focus commissioned research into bus passenger expectations and priorities for improvement, published in March 2010.
- 2.2. Headline results found that punctuality is the aspect of their bus service that passengers most want to see improved. Top ten results were:

Bus passenger priorities for improvement (North West) March 2010	
Rank	Aspect
1	More buses are on time or within five minutes of when they are scheduled to arrive
2	All passengers are able to get a seat on the bus for the duration of their journey
3	Buses go to a wider range of destinations in your local area
4	Buses run more frequently at times when you want to use the bus
5	Bus fares, tickets and passes offer better value for money
6	Personal security while waiting for the bus is improved through the use of CCTV cameras at all bus stops
7	All bus stops have a well-maintained shelter
8	Tickets and passes are available that entitle you to travel on all types of public transport in your local area, not just buses
9	Tickets and passes are available that entitle you to travel on all bus services in your local area, not just those operated by a specific bus company
10	All bus drivers are helpful and have a positive attitude

- 2.3. More frequent services going to a wider range of destinations and cheaper fares are very important, with passengers placing a very high priority on flexible, multi-operator tickets. Getting a seat also matters, although most

passengers seem not to be experiencing difficulties at the moment.

- 2.4. Bus passengers also told us that the number twelve priority for improvement in Manchester was “The length of time your bus journey takes is reduced by five minutes”. This is interesting at the same factor across the rest of England only came in as the 23rd priority for improvement.
- 2.5. When asked to rate expectations of factors affecting their journey, the two lowest attributes where passengers feel reasonable expectations are not being met are information provided at the stop on fares and electronic information showing the length of time until the next bus arrives.
- 2.6. While the majority of bus passengers in Manchester have not used a bus network that has the benefit of real-time bus service information, in areas of our work elsewhere it is abundantly clear that passengers value the benefits that real-time bus stop information can provide. This has been reflected in our research work in areas such as Southampton and Leeds for example ,where high levels of overall passenger satisfaction have been driven up by the provision and use of real-time information . Passenger Focus is confident that the general provision of real-time bus running information can be a major benefit to bus passengers in Manchester.

3. Passenger satisfaction

- 3.1. Passenger Focus conducts the Bus Passenger Survey (BPS) each year to compare and benchmark what passengers think about their bus service.
- 3.2. In Greater Manchester, passenger satisfaction with and factors affecting key journey aspects in 2012 and 2013 were:

Bus Passenger Survey (Greater Manchester)		
Aspect	March 2012	March 2013
Punctuality	71%	70%
On-board journey length	80%	82%
Factors affecting journey length	Congestion: 27%	Congestion: 26%

- 3.3. Whilst satisfaction with the length of the journey rates reasonably well with passengers once on-board, the punctuality of the bus scores much lower and when compared with other areas is in the middle of results, both against other PTEs and across the survey as a whole. The key impact factor passengers identify is congestion.

- 3.4. Furthermore, when asked about the factors preventing them from making more journeys by bus, thirty percent of passengers quoted journey time and twenty-nine percent said reliability.
- 3.5. With punctuality as the number one priority for improvement and a key barrier to making more journeys and congestion a major impact factor, addressing these issues will contribute to driving high levels of overall passenger satisfaction and making bus services more attractive to current non-users of bus services in the city.

4. Passengers' experiences of delays and disruption

- 4.1. Following on from understanding priorities, we conducted qualitative research into delays and service disruption and what passengers felt would help when it happens. This was published in April 2013.
- 4.2. Passengers understand that buses will get caught up in traffic, but they feel more effort is needed to prevent delays and disruption arising from issues which authorities or operators can control or take measures to address.
- 4.3. Disruption has consequences not only for passengers' journey connections, arrangements and appointments, but also gives rise to anxiety, stress and additional expense. Better information would help passengers make informed choices, provided through real time information at bus stops and via smartphone apps; website details and a greater customer-focus from drivers providing information, demonstrating empathy and expressing regret during delays and disruption.

5. Oxford Road proposals

- 5.1. Passenger Focus supports and encourages the aim of the proposals in focusing on key priorities for improvement for bus passengers in Manchester – improved bus punctuality and reliability through the introduction of bus priority measures.
- 5.2. From our work with TfGM on the Bus Punctuality Project, we would raise a number of points:
 - What methods are employed to study punctuality data for bus services along Oxford Road and what analysis has been done of that data?
 - What has that study shown about when, where and why buses are being delayed along Oxford Road and how has this shaped the specific proposals?
 - What predictions can be made for improvements in journey time and reliability resulting from these proposals?

- What monitoring will be carried out after the changes have been introduced to test the accuracy of those forecasts and continue to measure passenger satisfaction?

5.3. Passenger Focus would be happy to meet with TfGM to discuss these points in more detail and to work together to support effective design and implementation of the proposals.

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