

Independent national passenger watchdog

Passenger Voice

Rail, bus, coach and tram



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Anthony's Editorial



The Government has made big announcements about the future of their involvement in the bus and rail industries. Much of it is good news – on-going high levels of investment in the railways, more new buses, bus-lane improvements and a commitment to stopping the seemingly endless excessive rail fare rises. However, will the Government ever get the credit for this support? Until the rail fares and ticketing system is substantially sorted out, passengers will not trust the rail industry that they have the best-value fare. Much of the work behind the recent fares consultation was based on Passenger Focus research. While the fare structure may never be really simple, what can be done is to dramatically improve the quality of information, so passengers understand what they are buying. Changes will need to pass two tests: they will need to be both affordable and acceptable to passengers. We will be working to help ensure both tests are passed.

Bus passengers will ultimately benefit if local government and the industry are nudged into working more closely together. Good-quality bus services need both these to work together, be it in a voluntary deal, quality corridor or quality partnership. Passengers don't care who is in charge, but that the end product offers value for money. The recent Bus Passenger Survey showed wide variations in the scores for value for money around the country. Closing those gaps will be a key issue in the next few years.

Local authority cuts consultation toolkit

Passenger Focus was asked by the House of Commons Transport Committee to provide some best practice guidance on how local authorities can hold meaningful consultation processes with local communities about bus service proposals. As part of this Passenger Focus met or discussed matters with transport authorities in Surrey, Worcestershire, Norfolk, Essex, Thurrock and Suffolk. The aim was to draw out the common themes and principles underpinning a successful consultation exercise. During these interviews Passenger Focus was particularly keen to build up a picture of how authorities planned and managed the process and how they used the results in their ongoing deliberations. This work will be published in a report soon.



Along the right lines?

Passenger Focus welcomed the publication of the Rail Reform command paper which outlines the Government's commitment to the long-term funding of the railways, promises to end inflation-busting fare increases and to make it easier for passengers to get the right information and tickets. Passenger Focus, backed up with extensive passenger research, has been arguing for years that these changes are needed, so these commitments are well received.

The accompanying fares consultation makes an important statement as it acknowledges the effect that the current fares and ticketing system is having on passengers. It also states that it wants to make it easier for passengers to get to the right information and to buy the right ticket. The Government continues to acknowledge the need for fares regulation and the 'turn up and go' railway - Passenger Focus has long argued for the continued existence of both. Over the last few years, extensive research on ticket vending machines, internet buying, ticket queues and value for money has been carried out. Seeing this reflected in this consultation is positive. It will be crucial to make a wider variety of tickets available to passengers. This could include helping more passengers access the benefits of season tickets – part-time workers, most of whom are women, should find 'carnet' ticketing useful if they are priced right. Smartcards can be used to underpin these changes. However, there is clearly going to be change, both to the system of regulation and ticketing. Three proposals in particular need careful attention: the potential for a super peak, changes to off-peak long-distance fares regulation, and changes to staffing at stations.

The Future of Public Transport

Passenger Focus is carrying out an innovative piece of future trends research in order to understand:

- how public transport will develop in the future and what trends will affect it
- how these trends might change passenger expectations, needs and behaviours
- the implications for types of service and experiences (including technology) that passengers will expect.

As we are in an unpredictable and fast-moving world, this report will not focus on making grand predictions (as transport has been guilty of in the past, most notably in an obsession with jet-packs and personal travel pods available to all). It will instead outline the direction and signs of significant change to provide good start-points for Passenger Focus to be part of innovating and setting the future transport agenda. The report will be published in June.



Passenger advice

In 2011-12 Passenger Focus's advice team was contacted by more than 14500 passengers. Over 3000 were 'appeal complaints' where passengers asked Passenger Focus to help because they were dissatisfied with how the train company dealt with their complaint. Last year almost £84,000 of extra compensation for passengers was secured and 81% of passengers were satisfied with the way Passenger Focus handled their case. The main issues raised by passengers relate to fares and ticketing and the way complaints were handled - with operators East Coast, First Great Western and Virgin Trains generating the most appeal complaints.



Rail franchises

The Government's rail franchising programme continues at pace. The Department for Transport is in the midst of a public consultation on the Essex Thameside franchise, while the consultation for the Greater Western franchise has just ended. A formal Invitation to Tender (ITT) document has also been issued for the West Coast franchise. Coming up next is the new Thameslink franchise. Passenger Focus has already responded to both the Essex Thameside and Greater Western franchises – in both cases we drew heavily on all our published research. Passenger Focus is also analysing bespoke research carried out on Thameslink passengers to find out what they want from their new franchise.

Huge variations in bus services across England revealed

The transport minister, Norman Baker MP, giving the keynote speech at Passenger Focus's Bus Passenger Survey briefing

Most of England's bus passengers (85%) are satisfied with their bus journey according to the latest Bus Passenger Survey (BPS), which includes the opinions of more than 21,000 bus users. Leading the pack were operators in Nottingham City and Tyne and Wear, with over 90% satisfaction, closely followed by operators in Surrey and Dorset whose passengers reported 88% satisfaction. However, across all areas the research found wide disparities, with passengers' ratings of satisfaction and value for money varying dramatically between different operators and services within the same area. The other statistic that the bus industry needs to take action to improve came from the question about anti-social behaviour. This revealed almost one in five bus passengers has felt worried or uncomfortable by the behaviour of other passengers. Passenger Focus's findings provide a network-wide picture of customers' satisfaction with bus travel and it is the largest survey of its kind. Passengers rate bus companies on both the journey experience on the bus and at the stop itself. Visit <http://player.vimeo.com/video/38254591> to see a video summary of the BPS. The data behind it can be analysed using a new service which lets you look at particular aspects of the research and make your own charts.

Visit <http://bit.ly/KqyLDn> to find out more.



Buses on time



Passenger Focus is working with the bus industry, local transport authorities and traffic commissioners to explore the causes of bus delays and find ways to reduce them.

Punctuality data on up to 30 case study bus route across England will be examined and progress has been made to identify a wide selection of transport authorities and bus routes to study. Some areas are well advanced with their work, having already started to analyse data and even identified and started to take action to improve bus punctuality. Authorities and operators have already identified benefits in the involvement of Passenger Focus, for example in further stimulating local partnership working and in supporting bids for government funding. As Passenger Focus develops its work over the summer it will consider producing a step-by-step practical guide for authorities and operators on how to get the best out of the punctuality data that their systems are capable of collecting. In July progress will be reported to the Bus Partnership Forum. This forum is chaired by the transport minister, Norman Baker MP.

Bus Passenger Survey in numbers

Responses

21,000

Areas of England covered

23

Highest overall satisfaction (Nottingham and Tyne and Wear PTE)

91%

Lowest satisfaction with value for money from fare-payers (Leicester)

39%

Highest satisfaction with bus punctuality (East Sussex)

81%

Lowest satisfaction with bus punctuality (West Midlands)

64%



Route-by-route analysis uncovers a gulf in passenger satisfaction

The latest National Passenger Survey (NPS) shows that passenger satisfaction with Britain's railways varies widely between different train companies and routes. It also shows scores dipping for value for money, with over a third of passengers dissatisfied. While the percentage of passengers satisfied overall remains stable at 84%, this masks a variation of 77% to 95% overall satisfaction between different train companies. Passenger experience varies greatly across the country with different aspects of their journey. The scores with wide variations on individual routes include:

- **value for money - 27% to 80%**
- **room to sit or stand - 53% to 95%**
- **punctuality and reliability - 68% to 97%**
- **overall satisfaction - 72% to 95%**

Punctuality scores, especially for long-distance operators, have been on the slide, in part due to infrastructure problems. South West Trains and Chiltern have also experienced more problems with getting their trains to run on time in autumn 2011 compared with autumn 2010.

HS2 could free up space for faster, more frequent trains on Britain's busiest rail line.

Passengers on Britain's busiest rail route could benefit from faster, more frequent trains, less crowding and better connections if the first phase of a high-speed rail line goes ahead as planned. Those are the conclusions of a report published by Network Rail and Passenger Focus.

One of the biggest groups to benefit would be commuters travelling between Northampton, Milton Keynes, Watford Junction and London, where the worst overcrowding is forecast in the coming years as demand for rail continues to grow. Initial analysis suggests as many more train could operate on this section of the route in the busiest peak hours.

Other key beneficiaries would be passengers travelling between the major towns and cities of the West Midlands and between London and destinations in the Trent Valley. There are also likely to be opportunities to improve connectivity between the south end of the route and towns and cities further the north as well as more capacity for additional freight to be moved.

New passenger information licence conditions welcomed

Passenger Focus welcomed news from the Office of Rail Regulation that all train companies have agreed to a new licence condition designed to improve passenger information. The train companies have agreed to a new Code of Practice which requires them to set out their plans to deliver improved passenger information. The National Passenger Survey shows that just 38% of rail passengers believe train companies handle disruption well – and the quality of information during delays plays a key part in that assessment.

Bus cuts research

The Comprehensive Spending Review meant many local authorities have sought to cut expenditure by making reductions to tendered bus services. Passenger Focus is carrying out research to find out what impact the reductions have had on passengers' lives. Topics are being explored include: changes to lifestyle; greater reliance on other people's time; changes in usage of other local authority services; and new costs borne by passengers. It will also look at how passengers felt they were consulted about the changes. Fieldwork which has involved talking to passenger who used to use services that have now been cut has been completed in Suffolk, Somerset, Derbyshire and West Sussex. A summary of the findings will be published in the summer.