

Independent national passenger watchdog

Passenger Voice



Rail, bus, coach and tram

Autumn 2012

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Anthony's Editorial



The railways are in the news again as the franchise replacement process has stalled. What is the passenger interest in all this? Delay breeds uncertainty. Investment is delayed. While short term concerns about who will run services until franchise replacement restarts can be allayed, all this chips away at passenger confidence. We passengers want to rely on public

transport, not to have to worry about who will be running what and when. In the longer term more openness is needed in the process and perhaps more weight attached to current passengers' views. The government's announcement that the cap on regulated rail fares in England will be limited to RPI+1 per cent until 2015 is very good news. However, the operation of the fares 'basket' allows train companies to

raise fares on individual routes by more than this – as long as the overall average limit is kept to. Some passengers could still be seeing well above inflation rises for years to come. Some flexibility is needed but not the 5 per cent typically allowed. It is time to curtail this opaque and unfair practice. The government and industry will never get credit for all the investment being made until passengers can trust the fares system. Bus passengers are again having their say through our next Bus Passenger Survey. We are aiming to capture the views of over 25000 passengers. We will then use that evidence to drive change for passengers. In this wave of surveys over half the funding came from local authorities and bus companies – proof of its value. Meanwhile the Olympics really showed what public transport can do. Pretty near faultless delivery over a long period. What really stood out for us was the information and staff – if you dawdled for 30 seconds someone asked if they could help. Let's hope the lessons learned and the legacy of the tube, rail and bus industries working closely together endure.

Mixed feelings from Britain's rail passengers

Overall passenger satisfaction with Britain's railways has held up at 83 per cent. However, this overall figure masks enormous variations on different routes and widely differing value for money scores.

Key findings include:

- Overall satisfaction scores on individual routes varied from 97 per cent (Merseyrail – Wirral) to 70 per cent (FCC – Thameslink South and Greater Anglia* – Metro) with value for money satisfaction ranging from 75 per cent (ScotRail – rural) to 23 per cent (Greater Anglia – mainline) on those routes
- Satisfaction with value for money dipping to 42 per cent from 44 per cent in spring 2011.
- Passengers using different tickets giving very disparate scores for value for money
- Comparing the views of Advance and Off-peak ticket holders who think that the railway is reasonably good value, with season ticket holders who do not
- First Capital Connect (FCC) passengers noticing improvements at stations
- East Midlands Trains recording some good gains both on train and at stations.



Follow us on Twitter @passengerfocus 

Short and Tweet

Passenger Focus research has found out how passengers want to be communicated with via social media such as Twitter and Facebook. The research revealed that passengers did not want an informal 'mate-like' tone, but wanted information delivered in a direct and professional manner.



The key points from this work are:

- Many passengers appear to use and wish to use Twitter as an information channel about service disruption rather than as a truly 'social' medium
- Passengers regard Twitter, rather than Facebook, as having an important role in how they're communicated to about disruption – but they see social media as complementary, rather than replacing traditional channels of communication
- Train companies can potentially use Twitter to tackle long-standing perceptions of poor customer service
- Passengers expect active Twitter feeds when trains are running and on all days of the week
- Passengers want to be able to filter or personalise communications to receive only the information relevant to their journey.

The broad message from passengers spoken to about how Twitter should be used is:

- Twitter feeds should focus primarily on train service information of direct, immediate relevance to passengers, with sparing use of non service-related Tweets
- Overly-technical language and abbreviations should be avoided in Tweets
- Two-way communication with a train company via Twitter is expected in specific circumstances.

Passenger Focus invited many industry practitioners to a briefing on the research, which resulted in a lively, informative and useful session. There was discussion about where in this new brave world responsibility for social media should sit. Is it the responsibility of the communications team? Some train companies have sat those responsible for maintaining the twitter feed in the control centre, thus providing a feedback loop that is only one step removed from talking to the passenger face to face.

Innocent passengers caught in ticket crackdown

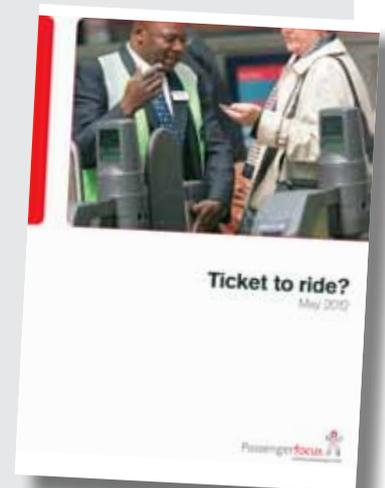
Passengers using Britain's rail network face very inconsistent treatment when travelling without a 'valid' ticket, a new report from Passenger Focus has revealed. Passengers who make an innocent mistake can find themselves facing a hefty bill, or in some of the worst cases, a criminal prosecution.

Rail Minister Norman Baker said: "Passengers have a right for the rules to be consistently applied across all operators. It is worrying if Passenger Focus has found that this is not case. It is in the interests of train operating companies that passengers are confident in what they are buying."

Passenger Focus wants to see:

- The introduction of a code of practice for non Penalty Fare areas which sets out clear and consistent guidelines on how passengers who board without a 'valid' ticket should be dealt with.
- Passengers should only face criminal prosecution when there is proof of intent to defraud
- Greater flexibility when a passenger can prove they bought a valid ticket but cannot produce the ticket (or all of them) when asked
- Greater transparency on how many penalties are issued, for what, and how many appeals are upheld or overturned.

The Association of Train Operating Companies has already agreed to co-ordinate the drawing up of national guidelines to ensure more consistent treatment of passengers. In order to make those guidelines as effective as possible, Passenger Focus asked passengers to tell their stories, good and bad, about how they were dealt with when found without a 'valid' ticket, on a dedicated Facebook page.



Passenger Focus's London office has moved

Our new address is: **Passenger Focus, Fleetbank House, 2-6 Salisbury Square, London, EC4Y 8JX.**
Please send all correspondence to our new address.

For further information go to www.passengerfocus.org.uk

Rail fares and ticketing consultation

In its response to the Government's consultation on rail fares and ticketing (which is trying to address long-standing concerns about the fare system's complexity), Passenger Focus made four key points:

- Train companies need to take greater responsibility for selling the right ticket – not put the burden on passengers to buy the right ticket
- Encouraging commuters away from the busiest trains should not result in prices going up for those who cannot be flexible
- Self-service ticket machines at stations are currently not good enough to justify major reductions in ticket offices across the railway
- Long distance price caps are still needed to protect passengers – regulated fares rose by 0.2 per cent in real terms between 1995 and 2010 while unregulated fares rose by 47.7 per cent in the same period.

It also set out specific changes it believes should be made to help passengers. These include:

- Train companies doing more to stop passengers inadvertently paying more than they need to
- Allowing people to mix and match between inflexible Advance and flexible Off-Peak single tickets by setting single fares at half of the current return price
- Changes to aspects of ticketing that passengers think are unreasonable – e.g. in future giving credit for what passengers have paid already if a new ticket needs to be bought
- Making it transparent when a ticket can and cannot be used, both before purchase and once passengers have a ticket in their hand.



Survey of Go-Ahead bus network finds good levels of satisfaction



Go-Ahead and Passenger Focus have worked together to find out the views of more than 6300 passengers on 11 of Go-Ahead's bus companies outside of London to help make sure Go-Ahead can deliver a better service. 89 per cent of passengers surveyed were satisfied overall with their service; however they are concerned with value for money. Top performers were East of England-based Konectbus, Oxford Bus Company and Oxford Park & Ride with 97 per cent, 92 per cent and 92 per cent overall passenger satisfaction respectively. The remaining eight companies scored between 82 per cent and 91 per cent. Isle of Wight-based Southern Vectis saw passenger satisfaction from the previous year drop by 9 per cent from 91 to 82 per cent. This research also found that only about half of passengers were satisfied with value for money. Passenger satisfaction with this aspect of their bus service dropped from 60 per cent last year to 52 per cent. On the back of this research individual bus companies are already planning a number of initiatives to deliver a better service.

Franchising update



While the West Coast problems have brought a halt to future franchising processes for now, Passenger Focus has been working hard to influence the next round of new franchises on behalf of passengers. Bespoke research has been carried out to ensure that the new franchises include things which passengers see as important.

Regardless of the final decision on West Coast, or any interim arrangements, franchises will be pressed to deliver the best outcomes for passengers.

Earlier this year Passenger Focus responded to consultations on Great Western and Essex Thameside. It was pleased to see that its recommendations for inclusion of wide-ranging targets for passenger satisfaction, measured through the National Passenger Survey (NPS), have been included in the requirements for bidders. More recently Passenger Focus has submitted consultation responses on South Eastern, East Coast, and what will become the combined Thameslink, Southern and Great Northern franchise. They will continue to discuss with the Department of Transport (DfT) and potential bidders how the franchise specifications can best address passenger needs.

In advance of the renewal and a potential merger of Northern and TransPennine Express franchises, passengers have been asked for their views on a range of issues, including combining the franchises into one and a possible greater role for local transport authorities in specifying and managing franchises.

Passenger Focus is also in talks with national bodies in Scotland and Wales, where the initial stages of planning for franchise replacements are underway. They will also shortly be starting to plan their input to the next Greater Anglia franchise. With many franchises now on hold, pending the Government reviews, we will be seeking assurance that passengers' everyday journeys will be protected. We will also seek to ensure that any changes to franchising place passenger interests at the heart of the process.

In brief

- Passenger Focus welcomed the scale and ambition of the Government's High Level Output Specification announcement in July. Research shows that passengers' main priorities for rail improvement include more trains arriving on time, more and longer trains and more chance of getting a seat – these announcements will help meet these aspirations. Value for money remains a concern. Passengers will want to see the Government avoid above-inflation fare increases. These investments must be delivered in a cost-effective way. Also, the work to deliver the new trains, track and equipment must be done in a way that minimise the effect on today's passengers.
- In May a Norwich bus group asked passenger manager Linda McCord to help put together a regular bus forum. Norfolk County Council and the local branch of Bus Users UK agreed to fully support it, and Linda contacted other organisations likely to be interested by the work. The first forum was held in July and was extremely well attended by bus companies, Greater Anglia Trains (GA), Norfolk County and Norwich City Councils (NCC), Bus Users UK (BUUK), the local user group and other key stakeholders. Bus Passenger Survey results for Norfolk were presented to the forum, integrated transport was emphasised by GA, and NCC presented bus improvement plans. BUUK discussed the effectiveness of such forums. All attending were very supportive of the benefit of an ongoing regular forum with an emphasis on strategic and clear objectives to improve bus services throughout Norfolk. Local MPs are also very supportive of the forum.
- Smart ticketing is increasingly on the agenda and in the news. Passenger Focus will be working with rail and bus passengers to understand their views of and needs for smartcard ticketing, as well as other new ticketing solutions. This work has been funded by the Department for Transport, and will run through to 2014.
- Bus passenger satisfaction in the West Midlands has increased by six per cent, following major investment in the region's buses. The biggest improvements, according to bus users, were in cleanliness, safety, punctuality and journey times. The research was carried out by Passenger Focus and jointly funded by Centro, the regional transport authority, and National Express West Midlands. It found that overall customer satisfaction had increased to 85 per cent, up four percentage points from a similar survey undertaken in the autumn of 2011. The results of the region's major bus company, National Express West Midlands, saw commuter satisfaction go up to 82 per cent, a six per cent increase on November 2011. Non-commuters' satisfaction also increased by three per cent during the same period, to 86 per cent. Bus user satisfaction with the cleanliness of vehicles had the biggest increase of eight per cent.