

Sharing Best Practice Workshop – Midlands

30 March 2012, 11am – 3pm

Maple House, Birmingham

Notes

Key points from presentations and group discussions:

	<u>Presentations</u>
1	<p>David Sidebottom, Passenger Team Director, Passenger Focus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following extension of our remit two years ago to cover the bus industry in England (outside of London), public bodies review retained Passenger Focus through recognition of our work as a consumer organisation with a strong evidence base. However 50% budget cut caused us to refocus and reflect. We will work to change the way we influence; concentrate on a smaller number of passenger priorities and develop relationships and contact methods. • Our research, policy and influence capabilities remain intact. New Passenger Issues Team will focus on 'long term work' of key national passenger themes and developing policy, whilst the Passenger Team looks after 'here and now' work of contact with passengers, using bedrock of research to engage with industry on poor performance and managing relationships with groups and other stakeholders. • New Bus Passenger Survey just published, taking in 23 areas of England and delivered with considerable joint funding. Given a good send-off by Norman Baker. Results drawn from over 21,000 responses and is being used by transport authorities to provide evidence base to support bids. Strategy is for this to become a self-sustaining national survey; plan for three-year programme is with DfT. New commission from Go-Ahead just started, giving research a stamp of independence and authority. National Passenger Survey also published, with tweaks to some questions as this continues to develop. In the pipeline is research into impact on communities of cuts to local bus services and how passengers find out or are consulted, with fieldwork being carried out at the end of March. Also had money to research passengers' experience of smart card schemes to influence future decisions and we are developing a best practice guide to consulting passengers aimed at local authorities, following a Transport Select Committee recommendation. • In the longer term we will work to secure change in bus and train punctuality with access to route information, pursuing poor performance and identifying good practice. Improving the way disruption is dealt with – particularly rail – how does the information work and using technology to put information together quickly. We have assembled a panel of volunteers that we are able to call on for feedback. On fares and ticketing and the Command Paper, looking at simplifying ticketing and conditions, opening hours and Schedule 17 and using major processes as levers for change, such as rail franchise replacement and long-term industry planning; ensuring groups' voices are heard. • Working together, we want to understand what groups need from us, what is available that we need in return and developing how we can maintain useful relationships and involve each other at the right time. We will continue to work to our core principles, using our research and policy base to focus on passenger priorities and to having influence at the right time in the right way. We are working in a changing world, with new players such as FixMyTransport.com opening up opportunities and availability of new channels to joining the debate and using to raise awareness of groups and could provide a useful recruitment ground.

2	<p>Professor Paul Salvesson, ‘The Railway Doctor’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extensive background in rail campaigning – assisting Passenger Focus. Founded the community rail partnership work, from which emerged ACoRP. Worked for Northern Rail as Head of Government Strategies and now is Professor at University of Huddersfield. • While bus campaigns look at cuts, rail is suffering problems of growth with overcrowding. Most local rail lines are covered by groups or community rail partnerships which is distinctive and unique to Britain; not the same breadth elsewhere in the world. Big Society is alive and well with voluntary effort, not dependent on funding. There is also a significant degree of informed comment and expertise, with positive relations local authorities, Government and train companies; with Passenger Focus supporting with informed and expert lobbying which is important, as there are not many who understand the breadth of technicalities with skills and ability to put well-argued cases. • Groups do have that freedom, with not being reliant on funding. Managers are more likely to look into issues if supportive and positive. For example, Hope Valley wanted extra train, but main obstacle was freight path to cement works. User group knew people at the works, approached and asked to be flexible. Worked because of the way it was done – train started on 12th December. • There are challenges; getting people involved and being representative, but do represent and take on issues across the board. Sometimes a danger of pet projects, so need to look at what people think is important. Real benefits to linking with local voluntary sector; good allies and potential members. There are good skills, but need evidence to back up passion with well-researched evidence – work together with Passenger Focus to benefit from research budget. • We’re celebrating 200th anniversary of Luddites’ uprising and sometimes groups can have those tendencies, with patchy use of technology. Got to have standard form of communication; there’s no way to avoid it. It’s essential to be wired up and the whole system is geared for email. Also taken seriously with well-designed research and evidence-based. Sometimes advantage in persistence but can crowd out other issues. Can get quick wins but need to be taken seriously to get big issues on agenda. Need to understand language of new landscape to put new arguments and take advantage of funding through LEPs and PTEs. Important to be responsible with politics and media, putting personal politics aside and influence effectively. With media, impact of bad news can dissuade others from using services so need to balance with good news and cultivate local relationships with editors, collaborating with Passenger Focus to develop media skill. • On refranchising, work with Passenger Focus, make the most of the relationship and present strong arguments to bidders and introduce positive working and be even-handed. Recognise group strengths and weaknesses and see what resources are needed, also look outwards and help each other and make the most of new opportunities, such as FixMyTransport.com who will push issues under the noses of local authorities, transport authorities and operators for a response. This helps FixMyTransport.com and ATOC come together and is a possible ground for finding new members. It’s democratic and promotes change through small steps.
3	<p>David Beer, Passenger Focus, Toolkit Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideas for toolkit being put together alongside new Passenger Focus website. Discussion groups have provided very valuable ideas and development of content very much shaped in line with groups’ priorities. Passenger Focus also want to use this as an opportunity to put across a flavour of the resources we are planning to develop. • Groups should ensure they are able to take advantage of big opportunities to be heard, such as formal consultations; rail franchise replacement, timetable consultations and impact of service cuts. Supporting resources being developed for gathering evidence and compiling submissions alongside ensuring that key channels of communication are made available for groups’ direct access. Research and mystery

	<p>shopping are two key methods of gathering evidence; guidance will be available for planning effective work, with sound and consistent methodology, creating briefs for all involved, recording and analysing results and writing reports for effective influence.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The wealth of Passenger Focus research is available from our website. This will be revisited to make it easier to find relevant reports. In addition, we are keen to provide more issue-specific extracts of research, to support groups' work, extending its reach and delivering better value for money. For our National Passenger Survey, there is also a tool called Reportal which allows individuals to extract result in a more tailored way and access to verbatim comments, although care is needed to ensure extracts are not narrowed to the point of impacting on statistical significance. • Working with others is of key importance. Communication channels should be available for groups to have dialogue with key stakeholders such as Government departments, transport authorities, operators and industry organisations. However do let us know of any difficulties with channels being open to you. Equally important is sharing best practice with other groups; coming together on common issues, skills sharing and encouragement. Also where appropriate, providing local intelligence back to us, broadening our local reach and making effective use of communications, publicising and sharing wins. • Local events are a good way of raising awareness of issues, as a group or supporting others such as surgeries. These can also be a useful way of recruiting new members, gaining feedback through questionnaires and harnessing interest. The appeals Passenger Focus deals with may also provide individuals wanting to be put in touch with local groups and our advice line is also available to groups as a first point of contact. An essential part of communication is through email and internet. Not only being expected by the industry, but also giving access to the wealth of resources available online and useful links to industry organisations and published statistics through our website. New media can also be an effective tool; forums such as FixMyTransport.com for reporting local problems can also be used to give a 'local expert' response. Facebook and Twitter can extend local reach and are being used more to reach passengers individually and add to the presence of organisations – including Passenger Focus.
	<p><u>Group Discussions</u></p> <p>Groups discussed priorities for shaping proposed toolkit resources</p>
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Database of user groups – contacts & email addresses • Names within Passenger Focus: experts in... + general • Calendar of principal dates for consultation esp regional/county, deadlines for RUS submissions, timetables etc • Summary of key info from NR, ORR; prioritising issues • How to engage with consultations – local/national government, through MP... 'who you know' – networking [exercising caution] • Create a common calendar – share positive info, try to find common ground & understand agendas • Info on smart cards – get feedback on new methods of ticketing to enable responses • Summary of key information to use in campaigns • RUGs to highlight questions they are asking – response • Skills within groups – advice on effective setup • General distribution of newsletters between RUGs, LTAs etc
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passenger Focus point of contact • Independence as an organisation – guard against 'cosiness' • Local services – don't reinvent the wheel – borrow/copy

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are Passenger Focus doing, how can groups help? Feeding local expertise up and guidance back down • Opportunities for funding – put in touch with sources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Building capacity - Local groups helping out with surveys – eg service use/interchange - Think-tank approach – sounding board • Where are local groups to go for assistance eg LEPs • Survey groups potential for local ambitions – understand who/how set up • Fares – clarity eg non-payers • Helping groups to set up, using skills within groups
	<p><u>What next?</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eight regional events around Britain, which will be completed in May • Priorities compiled from each event to inform toolkit development • New Passenger Focus website will include User Group resources • Website under construction from May, with on-going development and updating • Groups will be invited to view new website once this is available • Future event details will be forwarded as programme develops • Key contact point for groups is usergroups@passengerfocus.org.uk
	<p><i>Thank you for your contributions</i></p>