

Thameslink Franchise

Introduction

Ahead of the new Thameslink franchise, due to start in 2013, Passenger Focus commissioned research to develop a more detailed understanding of passengers' views, needs and aspirations. We had responses from over 3000 passengers travelling within the franchise area. This report is a summary of that research.

According to the Autumn 2011 wave of the National Passenger Survey, the overall satisfaction (79 per cent) of passengers using First Capital Connect (FCC) services is slightly lower than other train operating companies in London and the South East (82 per cent).

As with other train operating companies in the region the main driver of passenger satisfaction is the punctuality and reliability of trains, whilst the way in which Southeastern deals with delays is the principal cause of the dissatisfaction expressed by passengers. Only 30 per cent of FCC passengers were satisfied with this – below the sector average (36 per cent).

In addition, only 17 per cent of FCC passengers said they were satisfied with availability of staff on the train. There are also some differences in satisfaction between lines within this franchise, which ranges from Great Northern (83 per cent), to Thameslink South (70 per cent).

Journey purpose

Passengers' reasons for making the journey varied greatly by route. For example, while journeys between Cambridge and King's Lynn were primarily for leisure purposes, on the Thameslink Loop they were primarily for work.

Methodology

Fieldwork was undertaken by BDRC Continental Research on behalf of Passenger Focus. Questionnaires were distributed to passengers on board trains and at stations between 10 February and 8 March 2012. To ensure a representative sample, shifts were carried out at weekday peak and off-peak times as well as weekends.

Passenger Focus selected four routes, which could be further split to represent the different parts of the franchise area:

Loop

- Stations within the Thameslink loop (498)

First Capital Connect (FCC) North

- Blackfriars/Kentish Town to Luton/Bedford (500)
- Blackfriars/Kentish Town to Harpenden (300)

First Capital Connect (FCC) South

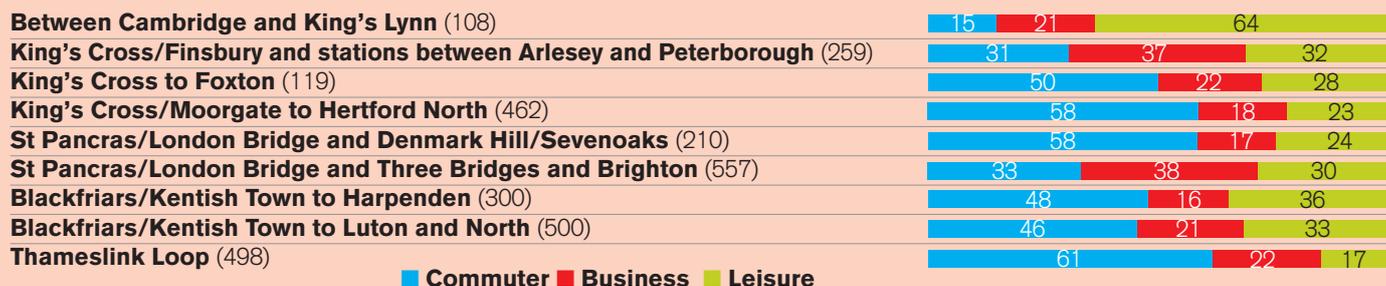
- St Pancras/London Bridge to Three Bridges/Brighton (557)
- St Pancras/London Bridge to Denmark Hill/Sevenoaks (210)

Great Northern

- King's Cross/Moorgate to Hertford North (462)
- King's Cross/Finsbury Park to Welwyn North/Foxton (119)
- King's Cross/Finsbury Park to Cambridge/King's Lynn (87)

Chart 1

Journey purpose (%) all passengers





Joshua Brown

Passenger priorities for improvement

We asked passengers what improvements they would most like to see to the Thameslink service.

Passengers' top three priorities for improvement were:

- 1 Punctuality/reliability of the train,
- 2 Value for money for price of ticket,

3 Frequency of trains on these routes. These three priorities were the most important to passengers by some margin. There are, however, variations by passenger type. Value for money was the top priority for passengers travelling on the Blackfriars/Kentish Town to Luton/

Bedford, and King's Cross/Finsbury Park to Arlesey/Peterborough routes. Being able to get a seat on the train was the third highest priority on the Blackfriars/Kentish Town to Luton/Bedford and St Pancras/London Bridge to Three Bridges/Brighton routes ahead of frequency.

Overall passenger satisfaction with journey

Passengers were asked to rate aspects of their overall journey. As seen in chart 2, 62% of Thameslink passengers rated their overall journey experience as very or fairly good.

Thameslink loop passengers were least satisfied overall (51% rated their overall experience as very/fairly good) whilst King's Cross/Finsbury Park to Arlesey/Peterborough passengers were most satisfied overall (71% rated their overall experience as very/fairly good).

Passengers were most satisfied with the length of time the journey was scheduled to take, and frequency of trains on the route. They were least satisfied with availability of staff, value for money for price of ticket, and facilities and

services on board the train. In particular, only 17% of Thameslink loop and 15% of King's Cross/ Moorgate to Hertford North passengers were satisfied with facilities and services on board the train.

Passengers travelling on these routes were mainly commuters and, when asked about train facilities (as discussed later in this report), the more regular commuter travellers were particularly dissatisfied with the availability of power sockets, toilet facilities, and space for bikes. While frequency and punctuality of service rank second and third highest for satisfaction respectively, they are two of the highest priorities for improvement, emphasizing the importance of punctual, frequent trains for passengers.



Tom Page



Matt Buck

Chart 2

Rating of different journey attributes (% saying very or fairly good) (all passengers)

Length of time the journey was scheduled to take (2928)		75
Frequency of train on the route (2942)		73
Punctuality/reliability of the train (2971)		71
Ease of buying a ticket (2349)		71
Ease of getting to and from the station (2819)		71
Connections with other train services (2216)		71
Upkeep/repair and cleanliness of the train (2924)		51
Quality of facilities and services at the station (2433)		48
Provision of information during the journey (2701)		47
Provision of information during times of disruption (2176)		38
Availability of staff (2306)		38
Value for money for price of ticket (2826)		32
Facilities and services on board the train (2224)		23
Overall experience of service on this journey (2907)		62

Ticketing

Just over half the passengers that we spoke to (53%) purchased their ticket

from the ticket office, 27% used ticket vending machines and 11% bought their tickets online.

A quarter of passengers (25%) said that they wanted to be able to get their

ticket loaded onto a smart card. The majority (54%) still preferred a paper ticket and 10% were interested in some form of mobile ticketing.

Train timing/frequency

Passengers were asked about their satisfaction with the frequency of trains at various times throughout the week. As can be seen in chart 3, passengers were less satisfied with the frequency of trains after 1900 than they were with earlier trains. They were also less satisfied with frequency over the weekend. Passengers travelling on the Thameslink loop were least satisfied with frequency, regardless of time of day/day of week. In particular, only 13% were satisfied with service frequency on Sunday after 1900, 14% with Sunday before 0900 and 16% with Saturday after 1900.

Overall 34% of passengers would like a train every 10 minutes at peak times, while nearly half (48%) of commuters would like a train this regularly.

Chart 3

Satisfaction with frequency of service between station boarded and station alighted (% fairly or very satisfied) (all passengers)

Monday to Friday before 9:00		76
Monday to Friday between 9:00 and 16:00		77
Monday to Thursday between 16:00 and 19:00		69
Monday to Thursday after 19:00		62
Friday between 16:00 and 19:00		69
Friday after 19:00		59
Saturday before 9:00		53
Saturday between 09:00 and 19:00		59
Saturday after 19:00		46
Sunday before 9:00		43
Sunday between 09:00 and 19:00		48
Sunday after 19:00		42

The station

When asked about station attributes, passengers were most satisfied with the provision of information about train times and platforms, and least satisfied with staffing levels at the ticket office, the availability of staff at the station generally and facilities for bicycle parking.



James Offer

Chart 4

Rating of station (% saying very or fairly good)

Provision of information about train times and platforms (3026)	83
Cleanliness of the station (2974)	72
Upkeep and repair of station buildings/platforms (2966)	69
Connections with other forms of public transport (2525)	69
Your personal security at the station (2714)	69
Helpfulness and friendliness of the staff (2530)	67
Ticket buying facilities (2490)	66
Staffing levels at the ticket office (2460)	60
Availability of staff at the station generally (2705)	58
Facilities for bicycle parking (975)	58

The train

Passengers were most satisfied with being able to get a seat on the train – with 81% saying very/fairly good. However, scores on space for bicycles (as at stations), toilet facilities, and availability of power sockets were very low, with a large proportion of passengers rating these facilities as very/fairly poor. Journey purpose and regularity of use had an effect on scores for these facilities.

Availability of power sockets, toilet facilities and space for bikes were rated particularly poorly by those who used routes more regularly, particularly commuters. 7% of commuters rated availability of power

Chart 5

Rating of train (% saying very or fairly good) (all passengers)

Being able to get a seat on the train (3030)	81
Availability of emergency instructions (2432)	67
The comfort of the seating area (2928)	63
Your personal security whilst on train (2928)	61
Helpfulness and friendliness of the staff (1388)	53
Space for luggage (2435)	49
Security of your luggage (2152)	43
Space for bicycles (1015)	31
Toilet facilities (1309)	24
Availability of power sockets (1090)	11

48% poor/very poor (Space for bicycles)
55% poor/very poor (Toilet facilities)
77% poor/very poor (Availability of power sockets)

sockets as very/fairly good compared to 22% of leisure users. 17% of commuters rated toilet facilities as very/fairly good

compared to 38% of leisure users, 22% of commuters rated bike space as very/fairly good compared to 46% of leisure users).

Aspects to concentrate on improving

We asked passengers to select a maximum of two aspects of journey comfort, station staffing, and train staffing they would like the train company to concentrate on most.

Aspects of journey comfort passengers would like the train company to concentrate on most:

- Upkeep and maintenance of seating and fixtures in the trains (56% chose as a priority)
- Cleanliness of train seating and common parts (53%)

Aspects of station staffing passengers

would like the train company to concentrate on most:

- Availability of station staff during times of disruption (52% chose as a priority)
- Availability of ticket office staff (44%)
- Availability of station staff on the platform (30%)

Aspects of train staffing passengers would like the train company to concentrate on most:

- Availability of train staff during times of disruption (61% chose as a priority)

- Better provision of journey information from train staff (34%)
- Visibility of train staff (31%)

The detailed research findings have been made available to the Department of Transport (DfT) and bidders for the franchise and, together with information from other research, formed the basis for our response to the franchise consultation. These documents are now available on the Passenger Focus website – www.passengerfocus.org.uk