

# A chance for tram users to air their views

A pilot survey of satisfaction levels among light rail travellers has been well received and provides potential for comparison with bus and train. Now Passenger Focus is hoping to extend it nationally



**P**assenger Focus already runs the influential rail National Passenger Survey and Bus Passenger Survey. We have now completed a pilot of a planned Tram Passenger Survey.

This was carried out earlier this year with a representative sample of 682 passenger journeys made on Centro's Midland Metro line between Birmingham Snow Hill and Wolverhampton St George's.

Passengers in the West Midlands were found to be generally more satisfied with trams (90% overall journey satisfaction) than they were with equivalent local train (86%) and bus services (79%). The same applies to value for money among farepayers; 63% were very or fairly satisfied, against 50% for bus and 61% for train.

Over half of tram journeys (57%) are made to or from work or education. In one respect it may be said that Midland Metro is a victim of its own success, with just three-quarters of passengers getting a seat for their whole journey. Measured by "availability of seating or space to stand" (74% satisfied)

and "provision of grab rails to stand/move" (70%), tram is outperformed by bus (78% and 77% respectively), although the new trams coming with the extension of the line to Birmingham New Street may help to address these issues.

And while 85% of passengers are satisfied with the tram journey time (indeed 47% are very satisfied), there are nevertheless a few spontaneous suggestions for an express service that doesn't call at every stop.

The fact that Centro trams operate with conductors is probably reflected in higher ratings for personal safety on board (84% satisfied) and lower levels of observed anti-social behaviour (7%) than on other modes. The fact that Midland Metro operates a single route results in "limited number of destina-

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tions" (53%) being mentioned as the biggest barrier to greater tram use.

That said, it is worth noting the suggestion that tram is a "gateway mode", helping to attract car drivers to public transport, with tram cited as "more convenient than the car" (16%) and "cheaper than the car" (10%), as well as "the best way to get where I am going" (30%) and "quicker than other transport" (30%).

As in all our passenger surveys, information provision comes out as a critical issue. 67% of tram passengers used the digital display at the tram stop to tell them when the next tram would arrive and for "informa-

tion provided at the stop" tram achieves 79% satisfaction against bus's 70%.

Once on board the tram, passengers are much more likely to note the route map, audio announcements and next-stop digital displays than is the case on buses. Nevertheless, staff come in for criticism for not being able to provide more useful information when things go wrong and the service is disrupted or suspended.

The West Midlands pilot has been well received by the industry and we are looking to secure match-funding for the introduction of the Tram Passenger Survey over England's other tram systems. A national survey will provide cross-system comparisons, allowing operators and transport authorities to benchmark their performance against other systems, as well as providing a cross-modal comparison of passenger satisfaction levels against bus and train locally.

We also used the pilot to try out optional online completion of the questionnaire. The results were positive for a "mixed-media" approach, offering passengers the choice between taking a paper self-completion questionnaire or providing their e-mail address to receive a link to the online survey.

This approach boosted participation among younger passengers while retaining good numbers of the older, non-internet generation. This means a representative sample can be achieved with lower weighting factors, making the data more robust (although adding the online option increases costs a little). We plan to test this methodology further on the rail National Passenger Survey and Bus Passenger Survey in an effort to boost response rates.

**Anthony Smith is chief executive of Passenger Focus.**

Passenger Focus carried out a pilot survey on the Midland Metro

