

# Survey points the way to successful bus services

The latest Passenger Focus bus passenger survey gives operators a benchmark of how they are doing and helps many of them to plan improvement and track progress from year to year



**“R**educe journey time. 30 minutes is tiring”...“Less heavy use of brakes by the driver”... “Would like a bit more leg room behind the seats”...

There is nothing like the great British public for telling it how it is. These are just a few of the thousands of comments we gathered during the latest Passenger Focus Bus Passenger Survey.

Overall, bus passengers continue to report good levels of satisfaction. In a survey of more than 47,000 passengers, around nine in ten were satisfied (88% in the English areas covered and 92% in the four Scottish areas covered). In England value for money and punctuality scores both rose.

York, Nottinghamshire, Norfolk, Suffolk and Tyne and Wear were the top areas for satisfaction. Oxford Park and Ride, Anglian Bus, Konectbus, Stagecoach in Nottinghamshire and Wilts & Dorset were the top five operators. It can be done: good quality bus services are to be found all over the country.

What does satisfaction depend on? On-bus journey time and punctuality stand out. This mirrors what we have found in other research. Safety and smoothness of driving and value for money also underpin satisfaction.

This is just the tip of the iceberg. There is a wealth of useful data to be mined. That should be easier because we have just launched a data explorer tool that makes it far easier to search the results. Go and have a look and experiment with the charts here: <http://data.passengerfocus.org.uk/bus/>

When bus companies act on the findings in the survey it has a direct result for passengers. We have followed up the results with over 50 meetings with local authorities and bus companies. We discussed the results, plans for improvement and how we can help.

For example, my colleague David Sidebottom recently attended the launch of new services on the Isle of Wight. Southern Vectis/Go South Coast listened to what passengers said in our research, and put new, bigger buses on its Route 1 as well as cutting some fares. First Bus in the West of England Partnership area scored 61% for value for money – an increase from 33% two years ago. Again our survey underpinned this change. First Bus has said it saw an increase in bus use as a result.

Value for money has risen in the Greater Manchester area. Driver standards have gone up in the West Midlands after Centro and Travel West Midlands acted on our last set of results. Digital bus stop displays and automatic

**There was no agreement on the way to get more passengers on board**

vehicle location have improved passenger satisfaction with bus stops in Nottinghamshire, up 9 percentage points from 2012. In Scotland, First Aberdeen identified value for money (low satisfaction) and driver training to improve interaction with passengers as areas for action.

The survey picks up improvements and allows effective tracking over time. This also ensures high levels of passenger satisfaction are maintained. Having been top for overall satisfaction in England in the 2013 Bus Passenger Survey, Reading Buses has seen a fall in the latest survey. The company has already reacted to this by producing a short leaflet intended to explain the results, and the action plan for improvement. This shows how important the survey is for benchmarking passenger satisfaction year by year.

We launched the results this month in Manchester. As well

as an overall presentation from our head of research Ian Wright, which can be found on our website, we had a panel made up of Baroness Kramer, Gordon Marsden MP, First UK Bus managing director Giles Fearnley and Transport for Great Manchester chief executive Jon Lamonte. You can see some interviews from the day on the website.

There is broad agreement that the Government and the industry find the results and the benchmarking powerful; broad agreement that the results are pretty good; and broad agreement that it is clear what is underlying current users' satisfaction.

However, there was no agreement on the way to get more passengers on board. The debate over franchising, partnership and collaboration was fierce with no real sign of a third way emerging. As one of Cromwell's generals said (I paraphrase): "All men claim God is on their side – God must sometimes wonder who is on his." Everyone claims to be on the side of passengers, but passengers must sometimes wonder who really is really rooting for them. Let's hope some clarity emerges in this debate after the election.

In the meantime we are doing work this year on demand-responsive transport, punctuality, passengers' relationships with the bus industry and local authorities and much more on smart ticketing. Let's keep the next 12 months focused on transport users.

- Passenger Focus spoke to more than 47,000 passengers to measure passenger satisfaction with their local bus service. Fieldwork was carried out in autumn 2014, with responses from 38 areas in England and four in Scotland.

**Passenger Focus becomes Transport Focus on 30 March. Read more here: [www.passengerfocus.org.uk/road-users](http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/road-users)**

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