

Good showing for trams in latest passenger survey

Tram travellers are generally happy with the service they receive, though there appears to be some dissatisfaction with disruption due to networks being enlarged and with fare levels

The results from the Transport Focus tram passenger survey are out. This is the second year it has been run. Over all networks in the survey, satisfaction with the tram journey remains at the high levels seen in 2013 (90%). This compares favourably with the same measure from autumn 2014 on the national rail passenger survey (81%) and the bus passenger survey (88%).

Manchester Metrolink is rated less highly than other networks, but nevertheless overall satisfaction among commuters has improved significantly since 2013. The lower satisfaction may reflect the level of disruptive work going on as the network is extended.

The newest system, in Edinburgh, has one of the highest levels of satisfaction, at 95%.

Among all fare-paying passengers surveyed, 61% were satisfied with the value for money of their journey, compared with 46% for rail passengers and 63% for bus passengers in autumn 2014.

When evaluating whether their journey represented value for money, passengers' views depended mainly on the distance travelled or the cost of making the same journey on other forms of transport. The cost of using the tram compared with other modes was the main reason for dissatisfaction and has increased significantly since 2013.

Over eight out of ten tram passengers were satisfied with the punctuality of the specific service on the day of interview, although 9% experienced some delay to their journey. This was slightly higher than average in Manchester (13%) and lowest in Nottingham (2%), Blackpool (3%) and Edinburgh (3%). Although the reasons for delays varied by network, planned engineering works had increased this year, particularly for Manchester (reported by 22% of delayed passengers) and Birmingham (21%). Evaluating trams generally,

almost eight in ten passengers (79%) were satisfied with punctuality, a significant increase on 2013 (due to improved opinions of Manchester Metrolink, and the high rating for Edinburgh Trams).

Although overall journey satisfaction was high, 35% of tram passengers spontaneously suggested improvements that could be made to their journey. These mainly concerned crowding issues, especially for passengers on Manchester Metrolink. Other improvements which passengers wanted to see were more reliable services and fewer delays, improvements to the interior of the tram (for example more seating) and cheaper tickets. Only 5% of passengers were troubled by anti-social behaviour, a significant decrease compared with 2013.

The profile of tram passengers continued to be quite young: a third were aged 16 to 25 (similar

Dissatisfaction with the cost of using the tram has increased significantly since 2013

to 2013). This was true for all networks except Blackpool which had an older profile. Half the passengers were travelling to or from work (40%) or school or college (10%). Only 14% were travelling on a 60+ concessionary pass. The equivalent figure for bus passengers was 24% in autumn 2014.

Overall these are good scores from tram passengers. Clearly, how extensions or rebuilding are done is a key factor: food for thought as Edinburgh contemplates expansion.

These figures, though, are the tip of the iceberg: much more data is available. For example, the weather influences passengers' views of the journey: there are many statistically significant differences between scores for

dry and wet weather. Overall satisfaction was 90% across the board, but 91% on days when the weather was good and just 84% on bad weather days.

Passengers' comments concerned the need for "greater frequency of service or advertised schedule of specific tram times", passengers feeling "claustrophobic as the tram can get very full during rush hour" and a "lack of information" at stops and on board trams. With this feedback I will continue to work closely with operators on behalf of tram passengers.

Finally, many of you may have seen that Passenger Focus recently became Transport Focus, having added the responsibility of being the consumer watchdog for the users of England's main roads to our existing remit of rail, bus, coach and tram passengers. Transport Focus will continue its predecessor's aim to make a difference based on three principles: focusing on what users experience and want; being useful to those who make the decisions about transport services; and basing our work on evidence.

In about 12 months' time I will be asking road users if we are useful and making a difference. We are very excited about this challenge and hope you are too. Please feel free to make contact with ideas, thoughts and suggestions on my new twitter: @AnthonySmithTF.

Transport Focus asked 4,962 passengers about the journey they had just made. Interviewing took place between 28 October and 15 December 2014 in Blackpool, Birmingham and Wolverhampton, Edinburgh, Manchester, Nottingham, and Sheffield.

Anthony Smith is chief executive of Transport Focus. Passenger Focus became Transport Focus on 30 March when, in addition to representing passengers, it took on responsibility for representing users of the strategic road network in England.

