What passengers want from Customer Reports

March 2015

Passengerfocus
putting passengers first

1. Introduction

1.1 Research background

Our research on *Passenger Power!*[1] has demonstrated that rail passengers desire a greater voice in franchising decisions and more information about what winning bidders have promised. The Department for Transport (DfT) now requires any new franchisee to issue a Customer Report upon commencement of its contract and to provide updates on this on at least an annual basis. A Customer Report should set out the franchisee's plans for the railway and its commitments to passengers.

To help establish an understanding of how these documents might best meet passengers' needs and to provide examples of good practice, Passenger Focus has commissioned research to obtain passenger feedback on Customer Reports issued by three Train Operating Companies (TOCs):

- **Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR)** – the first operator required to issue a Customer Report following the launch of its franchise on 14 September 2014; it operates the Thameslink, Great Northern and, come July 2015, Southern routes.
- **c2c** – its Customer Report was launched in November 2014, following the renewal of its contract to run the service out of Fenchurch Street until 2029.
- **Abellio Greater Anglia (AGA)** – while not a formal requirement of the franchise, AGA chose to issue a first report in June 2013. It published another in June 2014 when it was awarded a further contract to operate rail services in East Anglia until October 2016.

1.2 Research objectives

The overall aim of the research has been to gather passenger feedback on Customer Reports issued by new franchisees or franchise renewals. The research set out to establish whether, and to what extent, the reports are in line with passengers' expectations. In this way it has helped establish what constitutes best practice for future Customer Reports from these and other TOCs.

1.3 Research methodology

The programme of research for each TOC was as follows:

Govia Thameslink Railway – eight focus groups were conducted across three locations (London, Brighton and Stevenage). The locations were chosen to ensure inclusion of Thameslink South, Thameslink North, Great Northern and Southern passengers, including both commuters and business/leisure travellers. Those attending the groups discussed their experiences of the previous franchise and their awareness and expectations of the new franchisee. They were then asked to review *connections*, the GTR Customer Report. This

[1] Giving passengers a voice in rail services, Passenger Focus, April 2013

research was conducted by Illuminas; for the full slide deck for this project and to view a copy of *connections* please see: http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/research/publications/govia-thameslink-railway-customer-report-and-research-presentation

c2c – focus groups were conducted in central London with commuters and business/leisure users of the c2c service. Two focus groups were held prior to the new franchise commencing and the publication of the Customer Report. These assessed passenger experiences of, attitudes towards, and aspirations for, the c2c network. Those attending the groups were tasked with subsequently reading the c2c Annual Customer Report and providing their feedback in two reconvened groups two weeks later. This research was also conducted by Illuminas; for the full slide deck for this project and to view a copy of the c2c Annual Customer Report please see: http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/research/publications/c2c-customer-report-and-research-presentation

Abellio Greater Anglia – 12 focus groups were carried out in London, Norwich, Ipswich, Cambridge and Chelmsford as part of a project to explore passengers' expectations of the new East Anglia franchise to be awarded in 2016. As part of these discussions, passengers were also briefly shown AGA's Annual Report to Customers and asked for their initial reactions to it. This research was conducted by AECOM; for the slide deck summarising this part of the project and to view a copy of the AGA Annual Report to Customers please see: http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/research/publications/abellio-greater-anglia-customer-report-and-research-presentation

2. Key findings

2.1 Reactions towards the notion of Customer Reports

Overall, passengers approve of the notion of a Customer Report and regard it as positive that TOCs are now required to issue one. The key perceived benefit of a Customer Report is that it demonstrates transparency on the part of the operator in communicating its plans for the future of the network.

Passengers' previous experiences with their local operator affect how much they trust what is set out in a Customer Report. Those with a broadly positive attitude towards their TOC as a result of their travelling experiences and interactions are more likely to trust what is set out in the report. Passengers with a less positive attitude towards their TOC tend to be more sceptical. In the research conducted by Illuminas, c2c passengers were broadly positive about their TOC whereas Thameslink/Great Northern/Southern passengers were not. Accordingly, c2c passengers were more positive about c2c's Customer Report and more likely to believe that the promises contained in it could be delivered than were GTR/Southern passengers.

All passengers, regardless of their feelings towards an individual TOC, felt that Customer Reports are a step in the right direction, enhancing the relationship between TOC and

passenger. However, passengers also argue that simply producing a report does little to change attitudes; the ultimate 'test' is seen as being the extent to which TOCs keep to the commitments they make and report honestly on any failings and the reasons for these.

It should be noted that passengers' views are based on their being prompted to read the reports as part of the research. Many said they might not have given the documents such careful consideration had they simply encountered a copy during their journey. Any report needs to be visually appealing to attract attention and invite passengers to pick it up and read it. Reports should be widely available in both printed and electronic forms. They might usefully be promoted, or key content summarised, with posters (at stations and on trains) and through social media inviting passengers to 'dig deeper' should they so wish.

2.2 Producing a Customer Report – a prescription from passengers

Each of the Customer Reports was assessed against four key criteria: content, presentation, availability and credibility.

2.2.1 Content

In terms of content, the general principles passengers expect from a Customer Report are:

- use of plain language that is readily understandable by a lay person, avoiding technical jargon or 'railway speak'
- a straightforward and non-patronising tone of voice
- 'less is more' to minimise the amount of reading required; optimum length seen as being around 10 pages
- summary versus detail – provide only highlights within the report and signpost more detailed information elsewhere
- ensure that issues addressed in the report are ones that are relevant and of concern to passengers.

Passengers universally welcome the message from the Managing Director (MD) which opens all three reports. They respond positively to the MD being presented as the face of the company and taking ownership of the commitments promised by the franchisee (see Figure 1).

Passengers also respond positively to summary details of the various commitments to be delivered by the franchisee. They are particularly interested in details relating to routes and stations relevant to their own journeys. Figure 2 illustrates an example of well-received content from the GTR report, although passengers did feel that it should be placed in a more prominent position within the document.

Figure 1: Message from the Managing Director (from AGA Annual Report to Customers)

A message from the Managing Director

It gives me great pleasure to write the introduction for our latest Annual Report to Customers, just a few weeks after joining Abellio Greater Anglia as Managing Director.

I am immensely proud to lead the team. My aim is to build on the achievements of the last two years, to further improve performance and customer service standards. In doing so, we will be looking to engage even more effectively with our customers and stakeholders, to help us meet their aspirations. I'm especially keen to embed a positive, customer-focused ethos throughout our business, including enhanced customer communication and more benefits from our alliance with Network Rail, to deliver a better service for customers and communities on a consistent basis.

With that in mind, I'm glad to update you on how we are progressing on the issues that matter to customers and stakeholders across our network.

The past year has presented its challenges, notably when train service performance was adversely affected by the Autumn storms. However, as I hope you will see from the content in this report, we have continued to invest in improvements to your services. And as we approach the end of the current short franchise in July this year, our commitment and resolve to you, our valued customers, will continue to inspire us to carry on doing all we can to deliver consistent, reliable and improving train service performance and excellent customer service.

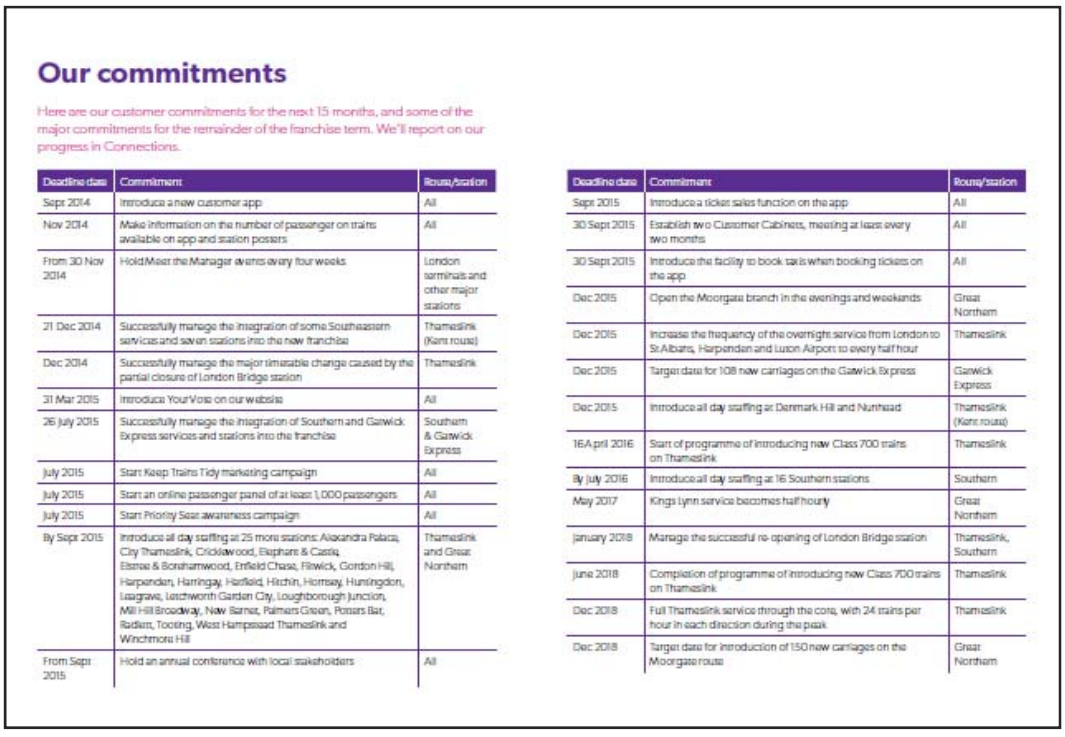
Looking further ahead, we recently agreed a Direct Award contract with the Department for Transport (DfT) to continue operation of the Greater Anglia franchise until October 2016. After listening to your feedback and consulting with our stakeholders about the Direct Award, I am really delighted that we have been able to agree the implementation of a number of positive customer benefits that form part of the new franchise, including improvements to rolling stock, new and additional train services providing extra capacity and further investment in customer service.

The DfT intends to let the long Greater Anglia franchise from October 2016 and as the pathway towards the longer franchise is developed, we will engage and consult with stakeholders and our customers about the priorities for the future. We are also firmly committed to maintaining our pivotal role in making the case for major upgrades to East Anglia's rail network in the longer term.

I hope you will find the annual report useful and informative and I would welcome your comments and feedback.

Jamie Burles
Managing Director
Abellio Greater Anglia

Figure 2: A clear timetable for when improvements are set to come into effect (from *connections*, the GTR Customer Report)



Our commitments

Here are our customer commitments for the next 15 months, and some of the major commitments for the remainder of the franchise term. We'll report on our progress in Connections.

Deadline date	Commitment	Route/station
Sept 2014	Introduce a new customer app	All
Nov 2014	Make information on the number of passenger on trains available on app and station posters	All
From 30 Nov 2014	Hold Meet the Manager events every four weeks	London terminals and other major stations
21 Dec 2014	Successfully manage the integration of some Southeastern services and seven stations into the new franchise	Thameslink (Kent route)
Dec 2014	Successfully manage the major timetable change caused by the partial closure of London Bridge station	Thameslink
31 Mar 2015	Introduce YourVoice on our website	All
26 July 2015	Successfully manage the integration of Southern and Gatwick Express services and stations into the franchise	Southern & Gatwick Express
July 2015	Start Keep Trains Tidy marketing campaign	All
July 2015	Start an online passenger panel of at least 1,000 passengers	All
July 2015	Start Priority Seat awareness campaign	All
By Sept 2015	Introduce all day staffing at 25 more stations: Alexandra Palace, City Thameslink, Cricklewood, Elephant & Castle, Elstree & Borehamwood, Enfield Chase, Flitwick, Gordon Hill, Harpenden, Haringay, Hatfield, Hitchin, Hornsey, Huntingdon, Leagrave, Letchworth Garden City, Loughborough Junction, Mill Hill Broadway, New Barnet, Palmers Green, Potters Bar, Radlett, Tooting, West Hampstead Thameslink and Winchmore Hill	Thameslink and Great Northern
From Sept 2015	Hold an annual conference with local stakeholders	All

Deadline date	Commitment	Route/station
Sept 2015	Introduce a ticket sales function on the app	All
30 Sept 2015	Establish two Customer Cabinets, meeting at least every two months	All
30 Sept 2015	Introduce the facility to book taxis when booking tickets on the app	All
Dec 2015	Open the Moorgate branch in the evenings and weekends	Great Northern
Dec 2015	Increase the frequency of the overnight service from London to St Albans, Harpenden and Luton Airport to every half hour	Thameslink
Dec 2015	Target date for 108 new carriages on the Gatwick Express	Gatwick Express
Dec 2015	Introduce all day staffing at Denmark Hill and Nunhead	Thameslink (Kent route)
16 April 2016	Start of programme of introducing new Class 700 trains on Thameslink	Thameslink
By July 2016	Introduce all day staffing at 16 Southern stations	Southern
May 2017	Kings Lynn service becomes half hourly	Great Northern
January 2018	Manage the successful re-opening of London Bridge station	Thameslink, Southern
June 2018	Completion of programme of introducing new Class 700 trains on Thameslink	Thameslink
Dec 2018	Full Thameslink service through the core, with 24 trains per hour in each direction during the peak	Thameslink
Dec 2018	Target date for introduction of 150 new carriages on the Moorgate route	Great Northern

Table 1: Key content requirements

Key requirements for the content of individual sections are as follows:

Section	Requirements
Front cover	• clear indication of what is contained in the report, for example, *Customer Report: a guide to what you can expect from your train company* • clearly addressed to the customer or passenger, for example, Customer Report not Annual Report • clear TOC branding • date included for reference
Introduction/ Message from MD	• brief introduction to and history of the TOC, its ownership, other routes operated • message from the Managing Director • brief and reasonably succinct • presented in an easily readable format • reference to the key messages and commitments • contact details for TOC such as email, Twitter, telephone number
Commitments/ Areas for improvement	• prominence given to commitments that address passengers' key areas of concern • clear timetable with dates for meeting targets (see Figure 2) • detail specific to individual routes/areas • short and longer term commitments, for example, one year and five years
Franchise targets	• provide context for targets by making comparable data available, such as previous year results, other TOC scores • operator/route specific targets where appropriate, for example, Thameslink North, Thameslink South and Southern, not GTR as a whole • understandable measures and terms used • short and longer term targets, for example, one year and five years.

2.2.2 Presentation

In terms of presentation, passengers expect the following general principles in a Customer Report:

- use of bullet-points where possible, rather than dense blocks of text
- use of sub-headings to signpost different sections within blocks of text
- different colour text for headings/sub-headings and main text
- large spacing between words and lines
- a clear, legible font of a readable size
- colours that are bold, relevant to the TOC and consistent with other material
- a combination of real-life pictures and icons/graphics.

Many passengers hold the view that key information from a Customer Report should also be made available via social media and as a shorter, poster version at stations and on trains (see Figure 3). Web links or QR codes should be provided linking to more detail for those interested in exploring further.

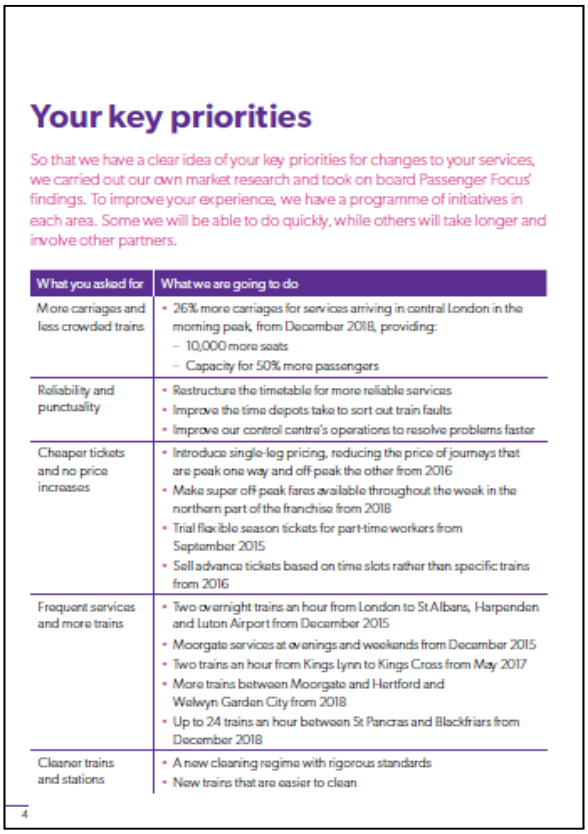
Figure 3: An example of a potential poster format (from a c2c staff publication)

Table 2: Key presentation requirements

Key requirements for presentation of individual sections are as follows:

Section	Requirements
Front cover	• 'real-life', realistic picture that clearly depicts passengers • bold text and bright, eye-catching colours • consistent branding with other material produced by the TOC
Introduction/ Message from MD	• use bullet-point text where possible • use sub-headings to signpost any clear sections, for example, history of TOC, initial plans, giving feedback • appropriate picture of Managing Director (not over-prominent)
Commitments/ Areas for improvement	• bullet-point commitments • use pictures to show what improvements might look like • use table to layout priorities; 'what you want, what we will do' style (see Figure 4) • detail of each topic kept to a single or double page • placed as close to the beginning of the report as possible • summary versus detail – list improvements and signpost where more information can be found
Franchise targets	• use infographics where appropriate (see Figure 5) • use bar-charts and pie-charts • infographics and charts to be representative of the size of the number they are displaying • don't over-emphasise marginal improvements.

Figure 4: Presenting TOC priorities for improvement (from *connections*, the GTR Customer Report)



Your key priorities

So that we have a clear idea of your key priorities for changes to your services, we carried out our own market research and took on board Passenger Focus' findings. To improve your experience, we have a programme of initiatives in each area. Some we will be able to do quickly, while others will take longer and involve other partners.

What you asked for	What we are going to do
More carriages and less crowded trains	• 26% more carriages for services arriving in central London in the morning peak, from December 2018, providing: – 10,000 more seats – Capacity for 50% more passengers
Reliability and punctuality	• Restructure the timetable for more reliable services • Improve the time depots take to sort out train faults • Improve our control centre's operations to resolve problems faster
Cheaper tickets and no price increases	• Introduce single-leg pricing, reducing the price of journeys that are peak one way and off-peak the other from 2016 • Make super off-peak fares available throughout the week in the northern part of the franchise from 2018 • Trial flexible season tickets for part-time workers from September 2015 • Sell advance tickets based on time slots rather than specific trains from 2016
Frequent services and more trains	• Two overnight trains an hour from London to St Albans, Harpenden and Luton Airport from December 2015 • Moorgate services at evenings and weekends from December 2015 • Two trains an hour from Kings Lynn to Kings Cross from May 2017 • More trains between Moorgate and Hertford and Welwyn Garden City from 2018 • Up to 24 trains an hour between St Pancras and Blackfriars from December 2018
Cleaner trains and stations	• A new cleaning regime with rigorous standards • New trains that are easier to clean

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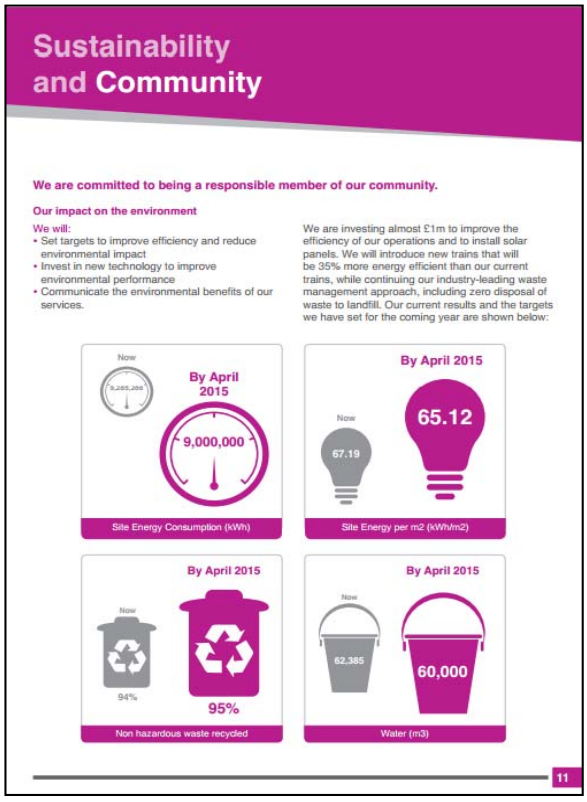
Figure 5: Infographics to display data (from c2c Annual Customer Report)



Sustainability and Community

We are committed to being a responsible member of our community.

Our impact on the environment

We will:
- Set targets to improve efficiency and reduce environmental impact
- Invest in new technology to improve environmental performance
- Communicate the environmental benefits of our services.

We are investing almost £1m to improve the efficiency of our operations and to install solar panels. We will introduce new trains that will be 35% more energy efficient than our current trains, while continuing our industry-leading waste management approach, including zero disposal of waste to landfill. Our current results and the targets we have set for the coming year are shown below:

Now
By April 2015
9,000,000
Site Energy Consumption (kWh)

By April 2015
Now
67.19
65.12
Site Energy per m2 (kWh/m2)

By April 2015
Now
94%
95%
Non hazardous waste recycled

By April 2015
Now
62,385
60,000
Water (m3)

11

Note that passengers criticise the size of individual graphics not being proportionate to the numbers they represent.

2.2.3 Availability

Ideally, passengers want a report or a summary to be made available both in print and electronically, and accessible via a range of channels:

- at the station
- on the train
- on the TOC website
- via the TOC Twitter account
- e-mailed directly to regular passengers.

Passengers want a report to be publicised or physically handed out at stations in order to help them notice it and pick it up. They also suggest that copies should be left on trains or placed visibly within stations (see Figure 6). Posters that highlight the key purpose and points of a report are also seen as a useful method of promotion.

Figure 6: A display stand drawing attention to the report (GTR)

Passengers do not expect full versions of a Customer Report to be re-published every six months, nor necessarily every year (although it would seem sensible to do so where significant changes warrant explanation). Instead, they desire a summary document that highlights the key targets that have been met since the last edition of the report (Figure 2 shows an example that could be used as a template). This should also attempt to explain why any target had not been met and what the TOC will do as a result of not hitting the target.

This summary document should be provided as an electronic version together with posters at stations and on trains. Most passengers do not expect, nor desire, an individual paper copy of an update.

2.2.4 Credibility

As indicated earlier, the extent to which passengers find a report credible is significantly influenced by their previous experiences of the company. The more positive they feel towards a TOC, the more likely they are to believe the commitments set out in its Customer Report. Regardless of passengers' previous experiences with a TOC, credibility is enhanced by:

- ensuring that passengers' key areas of concern are addressed
- avoiding any suggestion of the TOC attempting to hide any 'bad news'
- being open and honest on all subjects even if the news may not be positive (for example, fare increases)
- providing detail relevant to specific routes and/or stations
- making it clear that independent bodies will be monitoring its promises.

3. Conclusions and Passenger Focus recommendations

Customer reports are a welcome additional channel for passenger engagement. The clear statement of promises addresses passengers' desire to understand what a new franchise will deliver and what they can expect over the months and years to come. The sense of personal accountability of the MD is reassuring.

Customer Reports should focus on passengers' key concerns and provide a commentary on plans and achievements. Where necessary, they should provide explanations when progress does not go according to plan.

The documents should be succinct and clearly laid out. Bullet points, summaries, pictures and infographics should be used to present information in an 'at-a-glance' style. Links or signposting should indicate further material that can be accessed if desired. There should be provision for the Customer Report to be available in other formats for people with particular needs.

Details should be available for specific areas, stations or routes to improve the relevance to individual passenger interests.

The existence of the report should be promoted widely, with references to it in any electronic communications, and by using summary posters on trains and at stations.

Overall we see the introduction of Customer Reports as a positive step towards TOCs building a meaningful relationship with passengers and generating trust in their operations. The 'acid test' will be in delivering the promises contained in the documents, how any shortcomings are communicated, and how passengers react to such news.

The DfT should carefully consider the findings from this research and how the passenger reaction to these recently issued Customer Reports can be reflected in the publication requirements specified for future franchises.

TOCs should look to learn from others' approaches to the concept of a Customer Report and how these have been received by passengers. These first iterations have been well received, but passenger feedback shows there are improvements that can be made.

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Passenger Focus is the operating name of the Passengers' Council