



Passenger experiences of overcrowding on routes in the Bristol area

March 2007

Passenger Focus is the independent national rail consumer watchdog. It is an executive non-departmental public body sponsored by the Department for Transport.

Our mission is to get the best deal for Britain's rail passengers. We have two main aims: to influence both long and short term decisions and issues that affect passengers; and to help passengers through advice, advocacy and empowerment.

With a strong emphasis on evidence-based campaigning and research, we ensure that we know what is happening on the ground. We use our knowledge to influence decisions on behalf of rail passengers and we work with the rail industry, other passenger groups and Government to secure journey improvements.

Our vision is to ensure that the rail industry and Government are always

‘putting rail passengers first’

This will be achieved through our mission of

‘getting the best deal for passengers’

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Executive summary

This report summarises the journey experience of 17 commuters who kept daily records of their weekday travel for a period of four weeks in June 2006 across three different routes¹.

The main objective of carrying out this piece of work was to identify if there were issues with overcrowding on trains using cross-Bristol routes where train units of two carriages or less were used during the morning peak period. Some of the key findings include:

- 60% of all journeys were recorded to have passengers standing on board the train
- 8% of the total journeys left passengers behind due to overcrowding. A majority of those journeys was made up of two carriage trains
- The route with the most recorded overcrowding was route two with 30% of its journeys recorded to have passengers standing aboard trains, followed by route one (20%) and route three (10%)
- 90% of trains running on route two had the correct train length, followed by 88% on route three and 69% on route one
- 42% of trains running during the morning peak on route two comprised of four carriages, compared to only 16% on route one and 3.9% on route three. However despite this, route two was recorded to have the highest number of passengers standing or left behind
- Route three had the least overcrowding and the highest commuter satisfaction scores with their journey (72%)
- Delays² were recorded on all three routes; in total over the course of four weeks 14 hours and 49 minutes of delays were recorded
- 25% of commuters travelling on routes one were fairly or very dissatisfied with their journey experience, followed by 19% on route two.

¹ Route one - Westbury/Oldfield Park/Bristol Temple Meads route
Route two - Worle/Nailsea and Backwell/Yatton/Bristol Temple Meads route
Route three - Yate/Bristol Temple Meads route

² A delay in this context is when a train leaves its departure station five or more minutes after its scheduled time

Introduction

This report summarises information collected from seventeen commuters about their daily rail journeys to/from Bristol Temple Meads over a period of four weeks on three routes to and across Bristol. A map detailing the routes used within this survey can be found in **Appendix 1**.

The project was initiated in response to passenger complaints received on the Bristol routes where a high incidence of short-formed trains had been reported. It was reported that on occasions where train lengths had been reduced to two-car units, passengers were left behind at some intermediate stations due to the reduced capacity. It was also rumoured that First Great Western would be running many of the peak services along the identified routes as two-car units with the introduction of the new timetable in December 2006.

The key purpose of the survey is to highlight current shortcomings with the services when short-formed trains are used and other issues in respect of capacity and to use the information to inform future discussions with the company and Department for Transport representatives regarding future service provision. It was also hoped to identify key services which may require strengthening if a high incidence of passengers being left behind were evident.

The survey was aimed specifically at the morning-peak period on all three routes but did allow for free text comments to be submitted in respect of the return evening peak journey. This additional information was also found to be extremely useful in identifying issues with the December 2006/May 2007 timetable with Cardiff services leaving Bristol in the evening-peak which may not otherwise have been identified until after the introduction of the new timetable.

Methodology

The research was carried out by seventeen passenger volunteers who filled in a survey card for their journeys everyday (Mon-Fri) over a period of four weeks starting from 4 June until 30 June 2006. All the volunteers were regular commuters and were selected on the basis that they travelled on one of the three main routes as below:

Route one - commuters travelling on the **Westbury/Oldfield Park/Bristol Temple Meads** route

Route two - commuters travelling on the **Worle/Nailsea & Backwell/Yatton/Bristol Temple Meads** route

Route three - commuters travelling on the **Yate/Bristol Temple Meads** route

The passengers were recruited as a result of direct contact on the station platform. A copy of the survey card used to collate the required information can be found in **Appendix 2**.

In total 680 single journeys were made by the volunteers and we received a total response of 645 completed survey forms from the commuters, equalling a 94.8% response rate to the survey. This is a very high response rate compared to other forms of research methodologies and clearly demonstrated the strength of feeling of the participants in wishing to highlight the drawbacks of the short formation trains that they were travelling on.

Survey Findings

1. Overall route comparisons

- 60% of all journeys undertaken had passengers standing aboard the trains
- This shows that route two had the highest number of journeys where passengers were standing (30%) followed by route one (20%) and route three (10%)
- 8% of all journeys left passengers behind due to overcrowding. Nine out of ten times this occurred when the trains were formed of only two-cars

Chart 1 shows the percentage of passengers standing broken down by number of carriages:

- All three routes show that overcrowding was at its worse when the trains were formed of two carriages

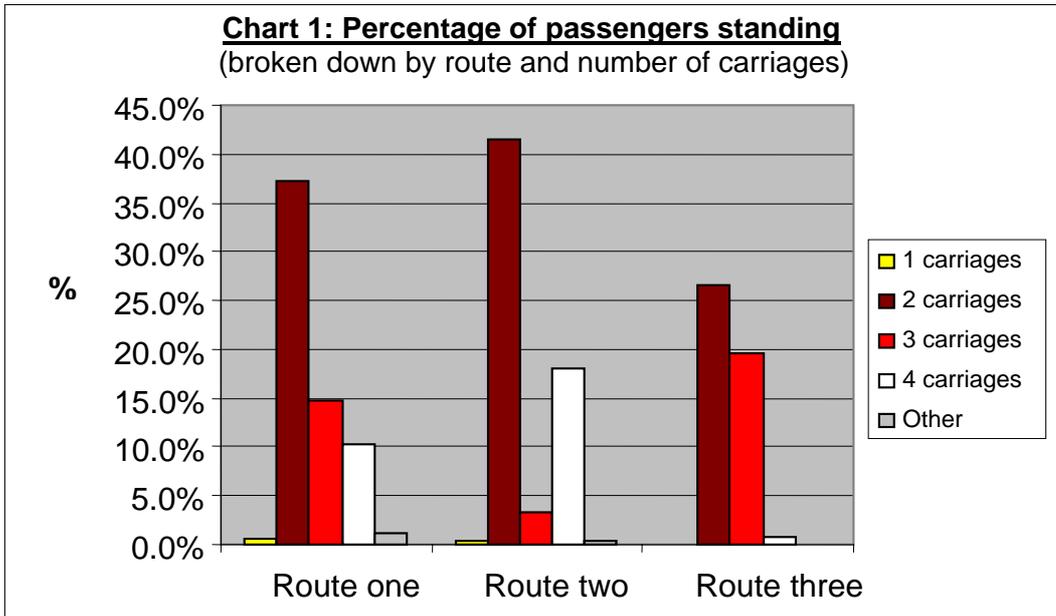
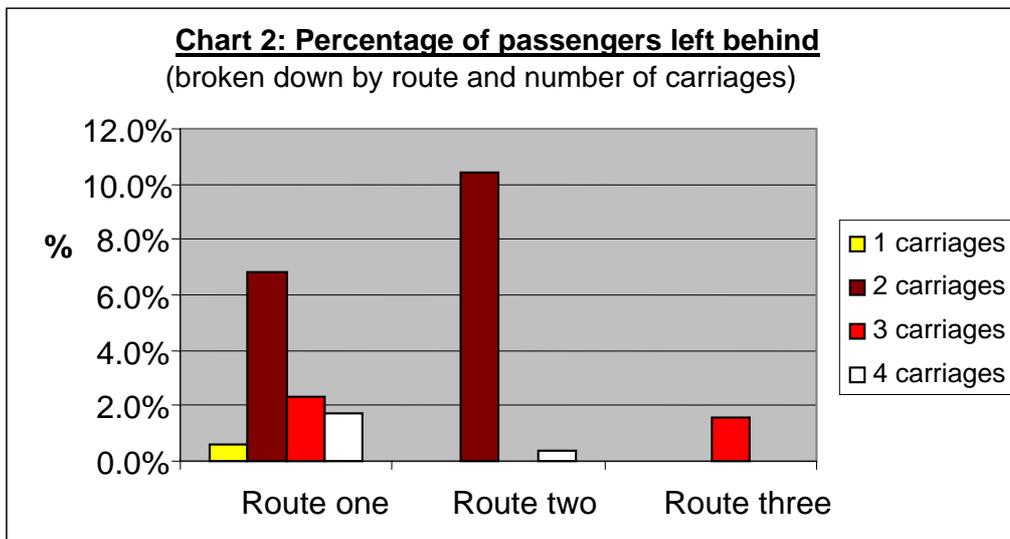


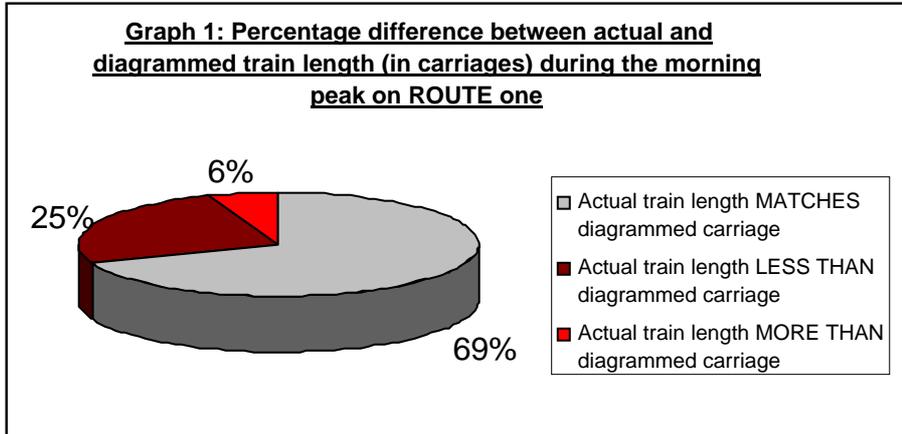
Chart 2 below shows the breakdown of passengers who were left behind on each route due to insufficient carriages



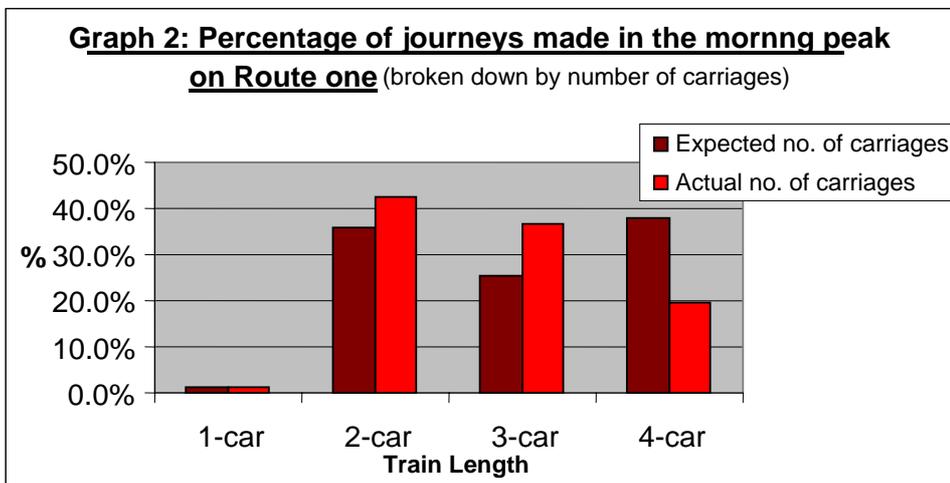
2. Route One findings

Commuters travelling on the Westbury/Oldfield Park/Bristol Temple Meads route

2.1 Journeys made during the morning³ peak



- One in four trains had fewer carriages than diagrammed during the morning peak
- Only 69% of the trains in the morning peak had the correct diagrammed train carriage formations
- However 6% of trains had more carriages than what it should have



- There were more two- and three-car trains in operation on route one than what was diagrammed in the morning peak
- However when it came to four-car trains, there were 8% fewer trains used on this route than what was diagrammed

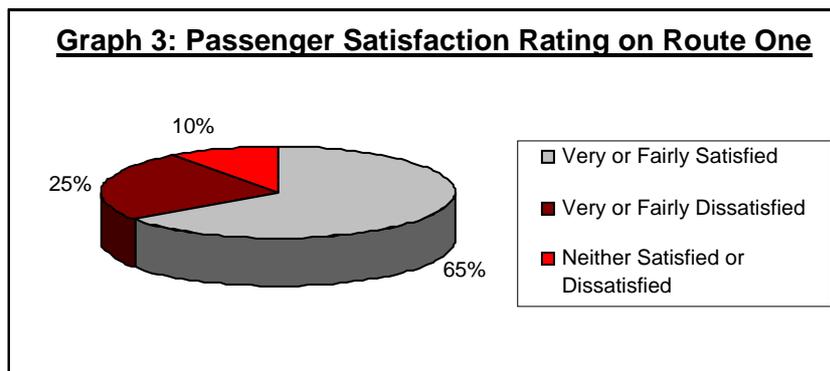
³ Morning peak within the context of this report means any journey which leaves the departure station between 0730 and 1000 hours

2.2 Overall Route One findings

Delays

- One in eight trains was delayed by five or more minutes before leaving the departure station
- over the course of four weeks, trains were delayed by **393 minutes** (i.e. six hours and 33 minutes)

- 64% of all journeys made during the morning and evening⁴ peak on route one had passengers standing
- Passengers were recorded to be standing from Oldfield Park and Keynsham station in the morning peak and from Bristol Temple Meads station in the evening peak.
- The highest number of standing was recorded when the train was two-car (37%), followed by 15% on three-car trains and 10% on four-car trains
- 11.3% of all journeys undertaken on route one left passengers behind due to the overcrowding aboard and 6.8% of those journeys were due to the train comprising of two carriages



- Commuters on route one were **fairly or very dissatisfied** with 25% of their journeys

Comments from commuters on route one

"Not been told why we were delayed..."

"Train was overcrowded and delayed"

"No ticket man all week at Oldfield Park had to queue at Bristol Temple Meads for 20 mins!"

"caught the 08.25 train cause the 08.19 was full and left 35 people behind"

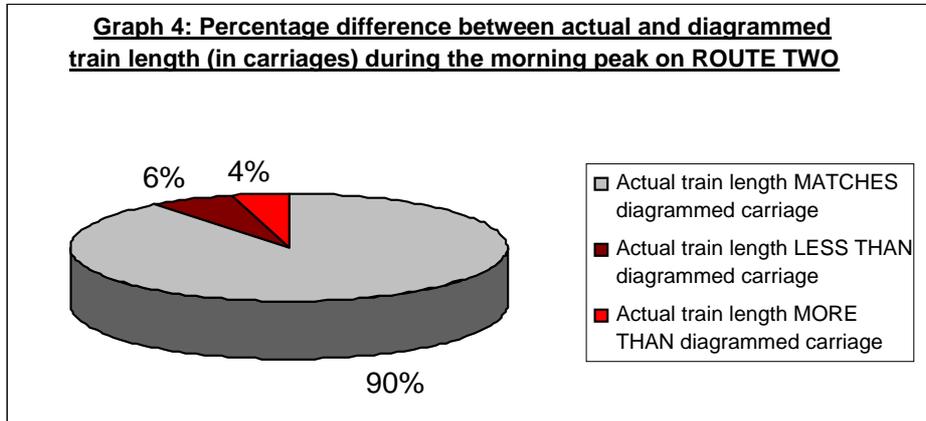
"People who boarded Oldfield Pk got off at Keynsham due to overcrowding"

⁴ Evening peak within the context of this report means any journey which leaves the departure station between 16.30 and 18.00 hours

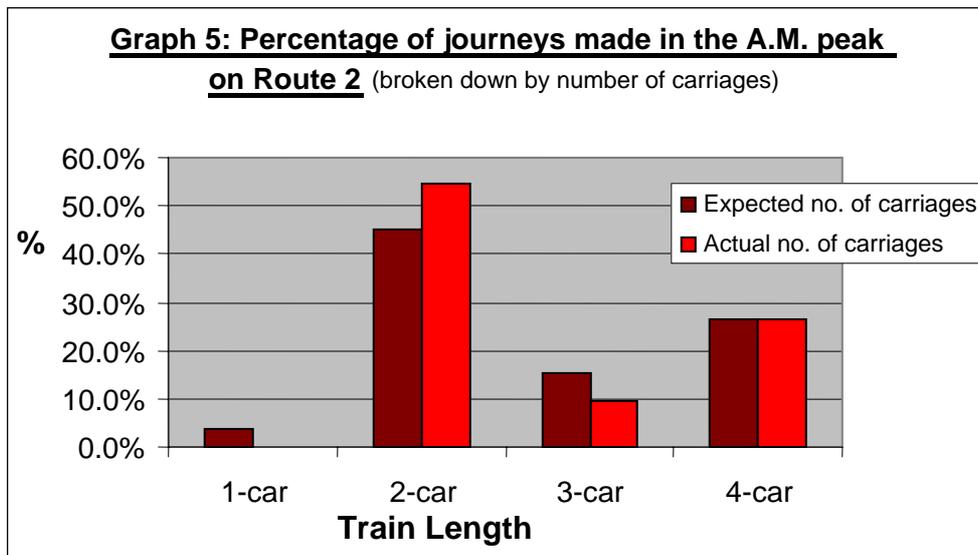
3. Route Two findings

Commuters travelling on the Worle/Nailsea & Backwell/Yatton/Bristol Temple Meads route

3.1 Journeys made during the morning peak



- Route two had the highest number of trains (90%) arriving with the diagrammed train carriage formations compared to the other two routes.



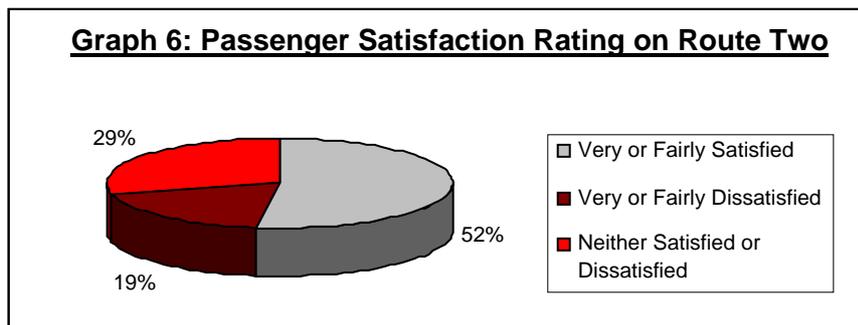
- Even though route two had the highest percentage of journeys made up of four-car trains (26%) in the morning peak, it was the route with the highest level of overcrowding of the three routes
- 54% of all trains comprised two carriages and there were fewer three-car trains in use than diagrammed

3.2 Overall Route Two findings

Delays

- same as route one, route two also had one in eight trains delayed by five or more minutes
- over the course of four weeks, trains were delayed by **332 minutes** (i.e. five hours and 32 minutes)

- Despite having the highest percentage of four-car trains in use during the morning peak, overcrowding was still an issue on route two
- 64% of all journeys during the morning and evening peak on route two had passengers standing
- The highest percentage of standing was recorded on two-car trains (42%) and four-car trains (18%)
- Passengers were found to be standing from Yatton, Nailsea & Backwell and Worle station in the morning peak and from Bristol Temple Meads station in the evening peak
- Almost one in 10 trains running on route two had left passengers behind due to overcrowding aboard. This occurred only when the trains consisted of two carriages.



- Commuters were **fairly or very dissatisfied** with 19% of their journeys

Comments from commuters on route two

"2 coaches are not acceptable"

"People were crammed in like sardines"

"Earlier train cancelled due to overcrowding"

"It is unfair that the daily commuter has to put up with this disgraceful service"

"Disgraceful overcrowding of a busy commuter train"

"Ticket office at Worle was closed due to overcrowding"

"Conductor couldn't get round to everyone needing tickets at Worle"

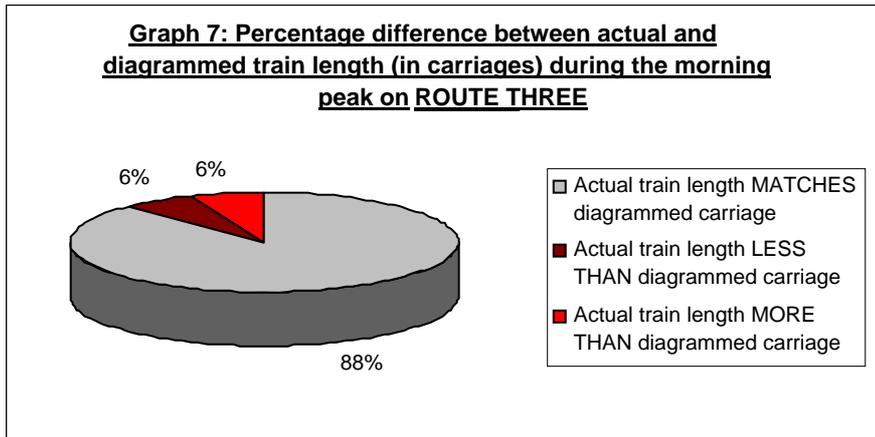
"Train late, no-one at the ticket office at Worle so had to queue at Bristol Temple Meads for tickets so was more late for work"

4. Route Three findings

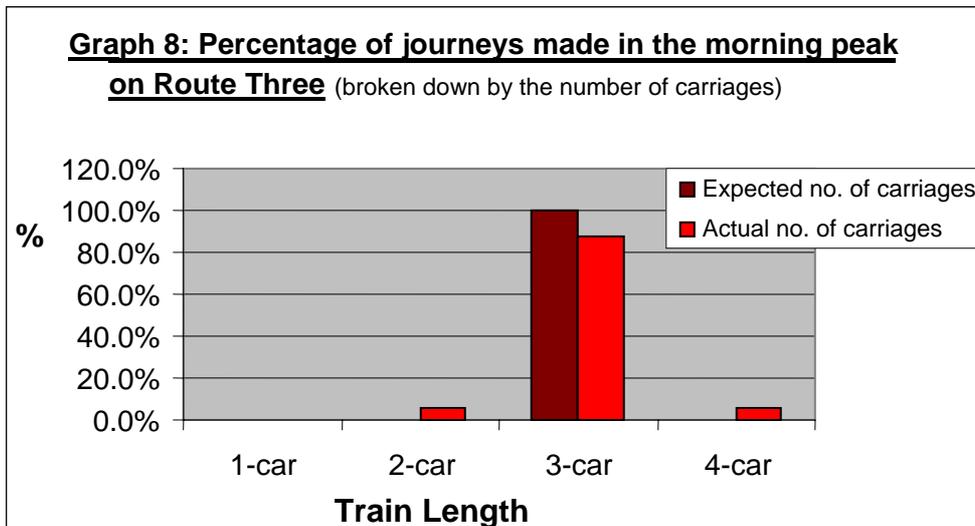
Commuters travelling on the Yate/Bristol Temple Meads route

4.1 Journeys made during the morning peak

- With 88% of trains arriving with the diagrammed train carriage formations, route three was least overcrowded



- The majority of the trains on this route were made up of three-cars (88%)



4.2 Overall Route Three findings

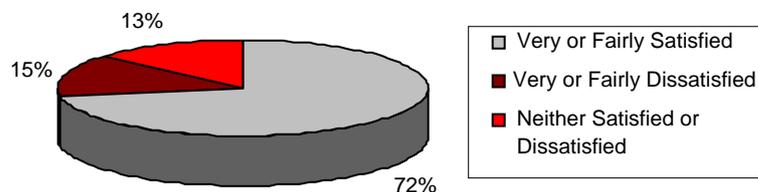
- 47% of the journeys made on route three had passengers standing, which was the lower than route one and route two. Only 1.6% of journeys left passengers behind
- Passengers were found to be standing from Bristol Parkway and Yate station in the morning peak and from Filton Abbey Wood and Bristol Temple Meads station in the evening peak
- Route three had the lowest recorded figures for overcrowding compared to the other two routes.

Delays

- 14% of journeys on route three were delayed by five or more minutes
- over the course of four weeks, trains were delayed by **164 minutes** (i.e. two hours and 44 minutes)

- Route three had the highest percentage of passenger satisfaction, with commuters being **fairly or very satisfied** with 72% of their journeys

Graph 9: Passenger Satisfaction Rating on Route Three



Comments from commuters on route three

"Train was overcrowded ..."

"Air con did not work, too hot on train"

"We had a 4 carriage, made the journey very nice, easy and pleasant"

"Hot, overcrowded, felt like I was on an Indian train without the people on the roof"

"Doors on train kept jamming thus delaying departure at Yate"

Conclusion

This exercise was never intended to produce an authoritative resume of service provision on the three selected routes to and across Bristol but more to explore passenger perception of severe overcrowding, particularly in the morning peak when trains were formed of two-car units instead of their diagrammed three or four-car units.

What the exercise has demonstrated is that there is a high probability that passengers will be left behind on some intermediate stations having to wait for the following train which in some cases may mean a long wait and subsequent disruption to their working or school day.

This report has indicated that of the three routes studied, route two between Weston-Super-Mare and Bristol Temple Meads suffers the largest degree of overcrowding and highest probability of being left behind when two-car units are in operation on both the morning and evening peaks. Of the three, this particular route has had the least adjustment made to it since the introduction of the timetable in December 2006. The numbers of complaints being received would suggest that urgent action is required to resolve the overcrowding issues that are evident.

This has been a useful exercise which tends to support the view that the numbers of passengers wishing to access services across all three routes has been underestimated when rolling stock was considered for allocation to this part of the franchise.

The report hopefully will encourage First Great Western to conduct further in-depth studies of the passenger market across the three routes to help them better understand the actual peaks and passenger numbers accessing the services at various segments of the three routes during the morning and evening peaks. This should then lead to a more appropriate allocation of rolling stock to alleviate some of the excessive overcrowding issues currently being experienced, particularly on the Weston-super-Mare route.

Contact Details

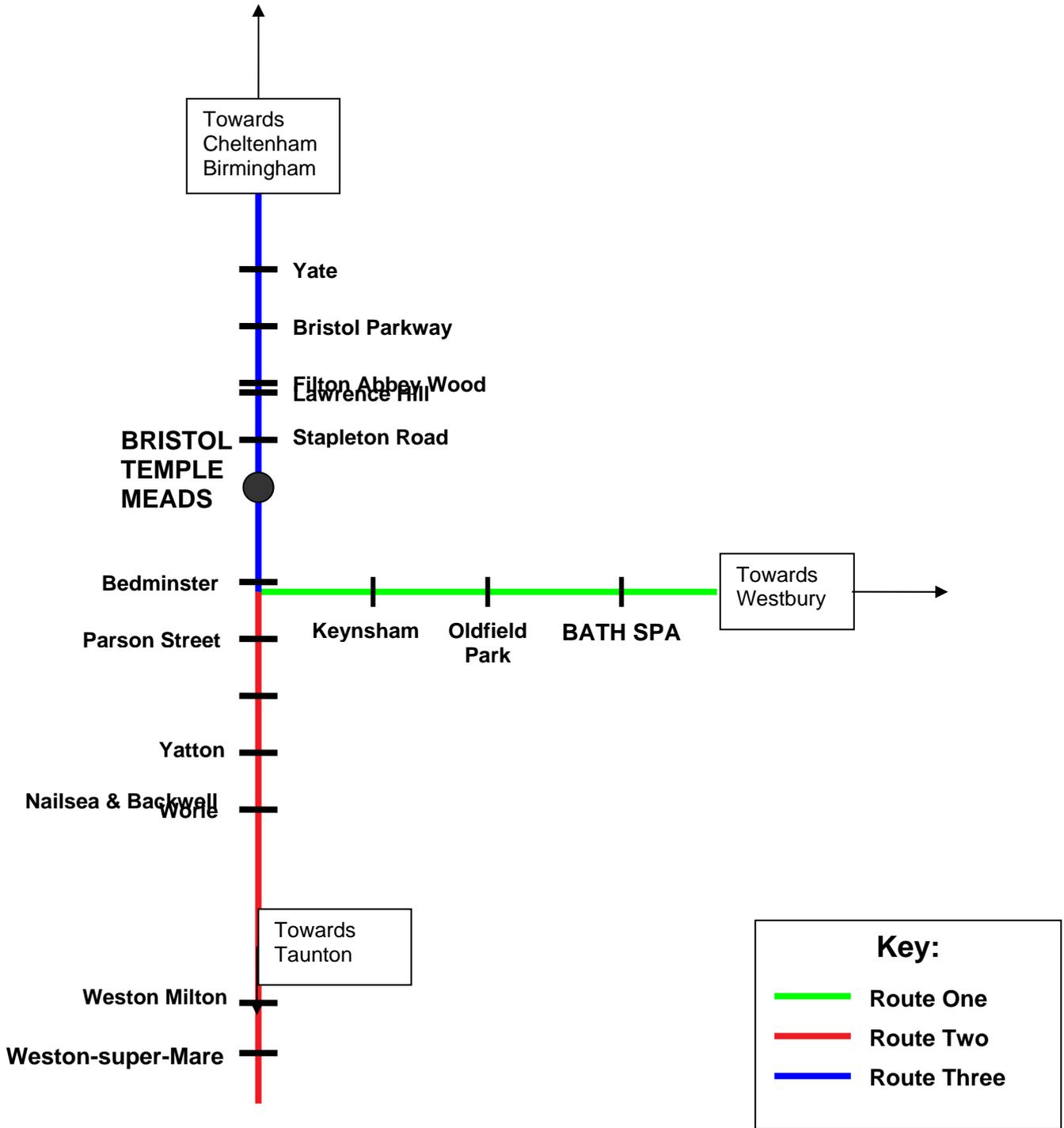
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To find out more about the work of Passenger Focus or to obtain information and advice contact: www.passengerfocus.org.uk or 08453 022 022.

Appendix 1: Route Map



Appendix 2: Survey card

Outward Journey

Surveyor Ref:

Date:

Scheduled Outward Departure Time

Time of Departure?

Number of Train carriages:

Did you get a seat? Yes / No

During the course of your journey did you observe other passengers having to stand due to unavailability of seats?
Yes / No

If yes, at which station did this first become evident?.....

Did you observe passengers having to be left behind due to overcrowding? Yes/No

If yes, at which station did this first become evident & approx numbers?
.....

Overall satisfaction with journey: Very satisfied / Fairly satisfied / Neither satisfied or dissatisfied / Fairly dissatisfied / Very dissatisfied (Please indicate)

Any other comments:.....
.....
.....
.....

Return Journey



Scheduled Return Departure Time

Time of Departure?

Number of Train carriages:

Did you get a seat? Yes / No

During the course of your journey did you observe other passengers having to stand due to unavailability of seats?
Yes / No

If yes, at which station did this first become evident?.....

Did you observe passengers having to be left behind due to overcrowding? Yes/No

If yes, at which station did this first become evident & approx numbers?
.....

Overall satisfaction with journey: Very satisfied / Fairly satisfied / Neither satisfied or dissatisfied / Fairly dissatisfied / Very dissatisfied (Please indicate)

Any other comments:.....
.....
.....
.....



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