

Independent national passenger watchdog

Passenger Voice Rail



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East Midlands

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Car-park price and spaces are key

Car-park prices, a better chance of finding a space, the machines to pay your parking fee and safety after dark are what passengers most want to see improved at station car parks.

Passenger Focus has published research investigating passengers' satisfaction and use of station car parks in the East Midlands and on the route into London St Pancras from Bedford. Passenger Focus's research looked at satisfaction with 15 car parks on the Sheffield to London St Pancras line and included an audit of car and bicycle-parking at 42 stations.

In this research 72% of passengers were satisfied with finding a space, but 11 of the 42 stations audited had car parks that were at least 90% full by 9am on weekdays. Only one in 10 passengers was satisfied with value for money and just 17% with the machines provided to pay the parking fee. Although 84% of passengers said they feel safe in the car-park area during the day, this drops to 53% after dark. Passenger Focus has also stressed the need for more bicycle and blue-badge parking spaces at particular stations.

Guy Dangerfield, Passenger Focus manager, said: "Passengers tell us that car parks at many of the region's stations are nearly full by 9am and that the price to park at a railway station is an issue". He added: "It is positive to see that the rail industry embraced the need for more spaces in its East Midlands strategy – passengers now need to see them delivered".

Improving stations

Passenger Focus has welcomed news that East Midlands Trains and Network Rail are to spend another £500,000 to further improve Derby Station.

The scheme, being carried out as part of the National Station Improvement Programme (NSIP), will include new toilets on platform one, the main concourse will be refurbished and the station footbridge improved. The additional works follow a £21-million scheme completed last year.

Passenger Focus's National Passenger Survey shows that passengers have observed improvements at the station, with satisfaction with the overall station environment at 73% in the Spring 2010 survey, up from 49% in Spring 2009 and 42% in Spring 2008. Also good news is East Midlands Trains' recent announcements that it will be investing in better facilities for passengers at Sheffield and Lincoln stations.

Charge for East Coast's internet

Commenting on the introduction of charges for Wi-Fi on East Coast trains Guy Dangerfield, Passenger Focus manager, said: "It's disappointing that East Coast is abandoning National Express's commitment to make Wi-Fi on the east coast route free throughout the journey and for all passengers. If passengers are going to be paying in future, East Coast will have to work hard to

ensure the Wi-Fi system is more reliable than it's historically been."

All standard-class passengers will be entitled to 15 minutes' free access to the Wi-Fi system per journey. Thereafter, access will be charged at £4.95 for 60 minutes or £9.95 for 24 hours. First-class passengers can access the service free of charge.

Timetable criticism



Passenger Focus remains highly critical that the rail industry has not yet put the latest drafts of the East Coast Main Line May 2011 timetable in the public domain. Guy Dangerfield, Passenger Focus manager, said: "It is unacceptable that there has been no feedback since the consultation ended in the Spring and that the Saturday and Sunday drafts are still not in the public domain".

High-speed a step closer

The Government has announced that it will consult early next year on building a 'Y'-shaped high-speed rail network with separate legs from London to the West Midlands then Manchester and Leeds. A 'Y'-shaped route would allow the East Midlands and South Yorkshire to be served by the high-speed rail network, as well as Leeds, Manchester and the North West.

Ashwin Kumar, Passenger Focus rail director, said: "Passengers who have campaigned for a high-speed connection to east-coast destinations will welcome this latest development.

"All forecasts show that Britain's railways are only going to get busier. Government and industry must continue progress on this important project as new high-speed lines are critical to relieving overcrowding in the future. Putting longer-distance journeys onto these new lines will allow more trains to serve commuters and middle-distance passengers on the current network.

"Wherever this new line is built, there will be winners and losers. It is important that the Government and industry discuss the implications of this decision with affected communities and addresses concerns."

Ticket gates at stations

Passenger Focus has asked passengers their opinion of ticket gates at the stations.

In its National Passenger Survey, Spring 2010, Passenger Focus asked passengers whether they thought ticket gates were easy to use.

Overall, 80% of passengers said they thought they were, but there were big variations between stations. While 93% of passengers at St Albans said ticket gates were easy to use, only 43% of passengers at Norwich station gave the same answer.

Those passengers reporting problems with the gates raised concerns around bottlenecks at peak times, issues at gates when carrying luggage, valid tickets being rejected by gates and staff being unhelpful.

In an ideal world there would be no need for ticket gates at stations, but they have an important role to play in reducing ticketless travel and can help improve passengers' personal security on the railway. While not opposed to ticket gates, Passenger Focus believes new installations must be looked at on a case-by-case basis, with design, reliability and compatibility with tickets all taken into account. Gates must be easy to use, and benefit passengers as well as the train companies. For further information about this research or for more about Passenger Focus's work in the East Midlands, see www.passengerfocus.org.uk



News roundup

New rail services

A rail link to Duffield is on course to reopen next year following the completion of work by volunteers to restore the line.

A group of volunteers is behind the restoration of the Ecclesbourne Valley Railway between Wirksworth and Duffield, and has plans to start running passenger services from April 2011.

Guy Dangerfield, Passenger Focus manager, said: "This is a wonderful example of the community recognising the value and benefits of having a passenger railway. We wish them every success."

Tidy trains

Passengers have been making complaints to Passenger Focus about cleaning on East Midlands Trains.

Reviewing the problem, Passenger Focus identified a number of areas for improvement and has made recommendations. Working with the watchdog, East Midlands Trains has developed an action plan to address passenger issues and will be implementing these changes over coming months. A further review will be completed later in the year to assess East Midlands Trains' progress.

East Midlands acts on complaints

East Midlands Trains has developed an action plan to address Passenger Focus's recommendations on improving how the train company responds to passengers' complaints.

Passengers should start noticing changes over the next six months. Passenger Focus will undertake a further review later this year to assess East Midlands Trains' development.

Disruption handling

Passenger Focus continues to share feedback from its disruption panel to East Midlands Trains (EMT) to help the train operator improve the way it handles periods of disruption.

Passenger Focus set up its disruption panel, comprising of about 1000 rail users nationwide, to report back on passengers' experiences of disrupted journeys. The feedback is used to campaign at national and local level for improvements in the way train operating companies handle disruption.

The feedback continues to emphasise the vital role EMT staff play in keeping passengers properly informed when disruption occurs, highlighting the importance of staff training in making consistent and timely information available to those using its services.

CrossCountry passengers not online

Passenger Focus is disappointed that CrossCountry has not met its deadline to provide passengers with Wi-Fi on its trains.

Passenger Focus's research shows that over a third (37%) of business passengers identified one of the benefits of using the train is having the ability to continue their work while travelling. They also said it is a less stressful form of transport (33%), 28% said speed of journey

is a benefit and 21% appreciated the fact it eliminated parking problems.

Mike Greedy, Passenger Focus manager, said: "Having Wi-Fi onboard is important to passengers, particularly to those on long-distance journeys who wish to use it to work. Delivering Wi-Fi was a specific commitment in their franchise, so we urge CrossCountry to deliver this service as soon as possible."