

**Executive summary of our response to Network Rail's Sussex
Route Utilisation Strategy Draft for Consultation**



August 2009

Executive summary

The number of people travelling by rail has been increasing, with further substantial growth predicted. Performance on the railways is steadily improving and passenger satisfaction is rising. Passenger Focus expects the programme of Route Utilisation Strategies (RUSes) across the rail network to build on this; to allow for continued passenger growth, to further improve performance and to improve passenger satisfaction.

The RUS objective is defined as “*the effective and efficient use and development of the capacity available, consistent with funding that is, or is reasonably likely to become, available.*”¹

Passengers will want to know what the RUS offers to those who use the railway – and who will pay for it. Do the options provide benefits? Do they offer solutions to difficulties or shortcomings in the present service? Will they match passengers’ priorities and:

- improve journey times?
- improve punctuality?
- improve stations?
- increase connectivity?
- increase frequencies?
- increase reliability?
- increase the number of seats?

Passenger Focus has a wealth of research material regarding what passengers want, and adds to this as the RUS programme rolls out across the network. This evidence informs our input to specific RUS consultations at route level. Drivers of passenger satisfaction change over time, but punctuality and reliability have been the main drivers of passenger satisfaction since the National Passenger Survey (NPS) began in 1999. The ability to get a seat is an important driver of passenger perceptions of value for money², and issues such as facilities for car parking, frequency of train services and connections with other train services have also been clear factors in overall satisfaction ratings. Passenger Focus expects RUSes to address the link between passenger satisfaction and the development of capacity.

Our response draws on an extensive research base, including a detailed study of the needs of 6,251 passengers using Southern services, looking from the passenger viewpoint at the options proposed for inclusion in the final RUS, as well as generic issues regarding the passenger viewpoint on fares, satisfaction and wider rail issues. It also uses National Passenger Survey satisfaction scores for Sussex and Coast routes, and First Capital Connect Thameslink services.

Passenger Focus believes that the draft RUS clearly recognises the existing and future pressures on the Sussex route and sets out a strategy that, if fully implemented, will go some way towards addressing many of the significant challenges that must be tackled in the period to 2019. However, there are a number of areas that we highlight for additional consideration, as we believe that some aspects of the draft RUS require further development if the key passenger needs from the rail network are to be adequately addressed.

¹ Extract from ORR Guidelines on Route Utilisation Strategies (April 2009)

² Fares and Ticketing Study Final report, Passenger Focus (February 2009)

Priority Issues

On the basis of the evidence and feedback from passengers, Passenger Focus considers the key factors that the RUS must address are:

- **the punctuality and reliability of the trains**
- **the delivery of sufficient capacity, particularly sufficient seats and minimal overcrowding**
- **an adequate frequency of trains to meet passenger needs, including during the later evening and at weekends**
- **journey time improvements.**

Passenger Focus highlights some aspects of the draft RUS that we believe require further development if the key passenger needs from the rail network are to be adequately addressed.

- **a further review of demand should be undertaken, looking in detail at the key development locations in the South East Plan**
- **the early implementation of enhancements to infrastructure and operational practices to improve performance**
- **further detailed work on stations, access, car parking and interchange should be agreed between Network Rail and Southern, with a coherent and meaningful plan to take work forward set out in the final Sussex RUS**
- **proper attention to capacity at times other than the peak**
- **a fundamental review of the Brighton Mainline timetable is considerably overdue and should be carried out at the earliest opportunity**
- **faster adoption of the principles of a seven-day railway**
- **development work on a new alignment must be taken forward with the utmost urgency.**

Passenger Focus commends the opportunities for involvement provided to other interested parties through the structure of Wider Stakeholder Group meetings held at key stages in the RUS process. We note, however, that some groups seek further opportunities to engage in more detail as the development work is carried out.

Recommendations

Our key recommendations for inclusion in the final RUS are:

- **all possible opportunities to enhance capacity must be taken**
- **capacity should match demand when it is actually required, not at some proposed date**
- **proper analysis of demand for stops at East Croydon and Clapham Junction by peak hour trains from Brighton and the Coastways**
- **faster services on the Arun Valley and the East and West Coastways**
- **comprehensive improvements for all aspects of stations**
- **early enhancements of infrastructure and operational practices to improve performance**

Passenger Focus is aware that recent global financial turmoil and the impact of the downturn in Britain inevitably place pressures on the funding available for rail. However, we make no apologies for having an aspirational vision of the future of the rail network in Sussex and emphasise that, as the draft RUS itself recognises, increases in passenger demand will undoubtedly continue. Any short-term falling off in rates of growth provides a real opportunity to catch up with demand that has outstripped provision over recent years, by investing in infrastructure that will assist with a fuller, faster recovery. This is particularly significant on this network which plays a major role sustaining the economic powerhouse that is London and the South East.



Copies of our full response to Network Rail's Sussex RUS Draft for Consultation (and this executive summary version) are available from the Passenger Focus web site at:

<http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk>

Passenger Focus contacts:

sharon.hedges@passengerfocus.org.uk

john.sears@passengerfocus.org.uk

Or telephone 0300 123 2140.

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