



A passenger focused franchise?

What passengers want from South Central

Executive summary

April 2008

Passenger Focus – who we are and what we do

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’

Background

In the 2007 rail White Paper, *Delivering a Sustainable Railway*, Passenger Focus was offered an enhanced role within the franchise specification process.

Since last autumn, we have been meeting regularly with the Department for Transport (DfT) to discuss the South Central re-franchise. We also commissioned bespoke research into passenger views on eight routes across the franchise. This information, together with existing research findings and our agreed policy positions, formed the basis of a submission to the Secretary of State in April 2008.

This document contains the introduction and executive summary from our submission, including a listing of all our recommendations.

Our full submission contains considerable background analysis that underpins the advice we have provided. We have also published a volume containing summary reports of the individual route based research findings.

Both documents are available on our website: www.passengerfocus.org.uk or hard copies can be obtained on request from 08453 022 022

1. Introduction

Passenger Focus warmly welcomes the opportunity to respond to the invitation to provide a passenger perspective on the content of the specification for the re-franchise of South Central rail services.

We commend Ministers and the Department for Transport (DfT) for recognising the importance of a better understanding of passenger needs and this new attempt to place these, alongside other factors, at the heart of the franchising process.

We believe that Passenger Focus, as an evidence-based organisation with a track record of extensive engagement with rail passengers both across the country and, specifically, on the network services under consideration, is able to provide a structured and informed input into the re-franchising process and a clear indication of the issues that are of importance to those who will use the future services. We are pleased that our expertise and our commitment to informed dialogue with decision makers for the industry have been recognised and will play a role in determining the early decisions on the content of the next franchise.

We have worked closely with the Department's franchise specification team from the outset and appreciate the opportunities we have had to explore with them the parameters for the franchise. This early engagement has, significantly, allowed us to commission bespoke research to inform our input and given us a valuable understanding of the context in which the re-franchising process will be taken forward.

In developing our submission Passenger Focus has aimed to add value to the existing elements of the franchising process by bringing an enhanced understanding of passenger needs to all the parties involved. This submission is based on an informed consideration of the factors that will drive the next franchise and will highlight the issues we have identified from our research as significant for passengers.

The input we provide here, however, remains that of an independent consumer body and our perspective reflects our drive to represent the needs of all passengers who will use the rail network. We have neither been engaged in the detailed background analysis or the financial modelling and assessment that the DfT has undertaken, nor, ultimately, will we be party to the complex funding and strategic considerations that will determine the final decisions on the letting of the franchise. We do, though, wish to remain engaged in dialogue as the bidding and assessment process goes forward and hope that the promise of this early consideration of passenger needs is matched with appropriate weighting of these factors as the procurement concludes.

We note that there are three elements to the franchising process:

- **plan** – the specification of what the franchise should include and what the Government is prepared to buy
- **buy** – the procurement process of franchise bidding
- **do** – the day to day management of the franchise contract.

Whilst our principal focus at this stage is on the specification and affordability, Passenger Focus will also comment on aspects of the procurement and ongoing management of the franchise where we believe we can play a further role, providing additional input to improve the responsiveness to passenger needs over the whole life-cycle of the franchise.

2. Executive summary

Priorities, content of the submission and recommendations

The top priorities we identify for the franchise are set out below, followed by a short synopsis of the content of our submission. A full listing of all our recommendations concludes the executive summary.

Priorities for the franchise

- 1. The key priority over the life of the franchise must be significant and sustained investment, creating increased capacity by providing more trains and more services to respond to demand from passengers.**
- 2. The specification should ensure sufficient and suitable rolling stock (above and beyond the 106 new carriages included in the DfT's Rolling Stock Plan) to operate all peak services at maximum possible length throughout the entire peak and, where there are specific needs, in the off-peak.**
- 3. Performance should be one of the main priorities for improvement. The franchise specification should include a target to achieve a Public Performance Measure (PPM)¹ of 93% by 2014, with a minimum of 90% for each individual route.**
- 4. The franchisee must have the ability and capacity to effectively plan and manage the change and disruption from major projects, consulting and communicating clearly with passengers.**
- 5. Bidders should set out how they would aim to deliver the frequency of service sought by passengers, with particular reference to the demands for more weekend and later-evening services.**
- 6. Fare structures should be transparent, simple to understand and include proposals to promote value for money and social inclusion. There should be no increases significantly above inflation for off-peak fares and the ability to flex individual regulated fares should be conditional on the quality of service delivered to passengers.**
- 7. Passenger demands for quality information, primarily at stations, about train times and platforms should be addressed. The franchise specification should seek improvements in information provision, particularly in terms of consistently reliable technology, backed up by well informed staff.**
- 8. The needs of passengers who value staff at ticket offices must be a consideration in bidders' retailing proposals. Alternative forms of ticketing must not be used as an excuse to eliminate staffing from stations.**
- 9. The Invitation to Tender (ITT) should require bidders to demonstrate their commitment to continuous improvement in every area of activity and to be able to show how their organisational structure and practices will drive and support such improvement through the life of the franchise.**
- 10. Whatever the length of the awarded contract, there should be a series of defined, passenger focused targets and objectives that have to be met in order for the franchisee to remain in place.**

¹ PPM is a measure of the punctuality and reliability of train services

Background to the franchise

Our submission identifies key strategic issues that will impact on the delivery of future rail services on South Central. We note the demand growth anticipated on the routes and support the Network Rail enhancement strategy which will go some way towards providing the capacity the franchise will need. We believe that there will be a need for the franchisee to work with Network Rail to plan and implement further capacity enhancements beyond those specified and committed for Control Period 4 (2009 – 2014).

We emphasise the importance of provision of sufficient numbers and types of rolling stock suitable for the different purposes for which they will be used. We recommend that the specification should actively encourage bidders to propose additional vehicles over and above the 106 new carriages announced in the Rolling Stock Plan and that the DfT funding plan should be ready to accommodate this additional investment.

The likely impact of a range of major projects on the franchise is considered and we note the importance of the organisational and communication capabilities that will be required of the appointed franchisee. We recommend that the fares and compensation regime should reflect the disruption that is likely to occur.

The need for a balance between the needs of Greater London and the outer areas is noted.

We comment on the importance of continuous improvement and effective monitoring and transparent reporting. We seek a role for Passenger Focus in the 18 month franchise review.

We note the challenging agenda for the franchise and the high expectations that passengers anticipate will be met. We set out the expectation that the industry will apply maximum efforts to deliver an effective and responsive service.

Objectives for the franchise, length of contract, reviews and extensions

We emphasise the need for the franchise objectives to be framed positively and highlight the need for these to include:

- a reduction in crowding, with targets for Metro, outer suburban, Main Line and other services
- a recognition of the role of the railway in the wider economy and to promote the concept of equitable maximisation of value for money for both taxpayers and passengers
- a proactive, passenger focused approach to major projects with an emphasis on consultation and communication with passengers
- improvements in the alignment of services and service quality with the aspirations of all stakeholders and in the accessibility of South Central services and stations
- an emphasis on the need for the integrated development of train and other public transport services in the South of England and beyond
- the requirement for an appropriate balance between Metro and longer distance services
- recognition of the need to work with Network Rail and others to plan for future investment for a rail service that meets the demands of the 21st century
- a commitment to a proactive and sustained approach to working in partnership with key stakeholders.

We recommend that, whatever the length of the awarded contract, there should be a series of defined passenger focused targets and objectives that have to be met in order for the franchisee to remain in place. At any review or potential extension there needs to be a clear framework against which delivery can be assessed and a rigorous analysis of performance undertaken.

Gathering the evidence and framing the recommendations

Our submission is predicated on the principle that we will provide evidence-based input on what passengers want from the new franchise and suggest how these should be addressed in the franchise specification.

We have drawn on a wide range of sources to establish the evidence base for the submission, including specific new research into the priorities of passengers on eight different Southern routes². We were also informed by the views of passengers and stakeholders.

We identify that what passengers buy is a **package**, with overall passenger experience derived from the sum of all the parts and no one element of the rail service sufficient in isolation. We stress that the **overall aspirations** of passengers must be a material consideration for the DfT and bidders.

Our new route based research identifies the importance that passengers place on various elements of the rail experience:

Importance ranking - route based research - all routes total	% ranking very important or important
Punctuality/reliability of the train	82
Provision of information about train times/platforms	81
Frequency of the trains on the route	80
Length of time the journey was scheduled to take	78
Value for money for price of ticket	77
Being able to get a seat on the train	76
Ticket buying facility	75
Personal security – stations	73
Personal security – train	73
Ease of getting to and from the station	70
Connections with other forms of transport	66
Not having to change trains	66
Ease of getting on/off train	62
Sample size : 6251	

Specific issues for the specification

In the main body of the report we examine specific themes, considering an array of research evidence, policy information and passenger/stakeholder feedback to highlight the significant issues for passengers and then draw conclusions and frame our recommendations for the franchise specification, including improvements to the measuring, monitoring and reporting of performance.

Finally, we look beyond the franchise specification and make some observations about the potential for Passenger Focus to add value to other stages of the process.

² Summary reports of the findings from each of the eight routes are available in an accompanying volume – “Route based research – identifying what passengers want from South Central”, Passenger Focus April 2008.

Full listing of recommendations

Over-arching issues

- a. On the basis of current passenger usage, ongoing demand and stakeholder feedback it is our view that the current level of services (including those of the Redhill – Tonbridge services to be taken over from Southeastern) and the existing service standards of both Southern and Gatwick Express should be taken as a minimum starting point for the re-franchise, regardless of whether or not they are required commitments in the current franchises.
- b. The key priority over the life of the franchise must be significant and sustained investment, creating increased capacity by providing more trains and more services to respond to demand from passengers.
- c. There should be a requirement for the franchisee to work closely with Network Rail to plan and implement further capacity enhancements, beyond what is specified and committed in Control Period 4.
- d. The franchise specification should not constrain potential bidders from proposing additional rolling stock (above the 106 new carriages included in the Rolling Stock Plan), but should actively encourage them to do so to meet demand growth and alleviate overcrowding. Bidders should be invited to identify and propose provision of additional vehicles, and the DfT's funding plan for the franchise should be ready to accommodate this additional investment.
- e. The ITT should specify that any proposals for procurement of new trains should also state how Passenger Focus, London TravelWatch and other relevant groups will be consulted at an early enough stage for their views to be taken fully into account.
- f. The ITT must require bidders to address the implications of major projects in detail and to show how they will build an organisation with the resources to provide passengers with assurance that performance and reliability will not be sacrificed to promises of future improvement.
- g. We consider there is a strong case for requiring bidders to think innovatively and to propose fares and compensation regimes that recognise the nature of the performance downsides for passengers during extended major works, and the fact that not everyone will benefit once those works are complete.
- h. The ITT should make clear that bidders are expected to propose improvements to their trains and stations to enhance facilities, increase personal safety, improve accessibility and encourage more passengers to travel – and should show the organisational capability to remain focused on delivering those improvements.
- i. We recognise the need for enhancements in Greater London and also beyond: our view is that service quality and service standards should be progressively equalised upwards and that there should be no detriment to reasonable expectations for longer distance and non-London routes, including ensuring an equitable balance when service development requires timetabling changes.
- j. The ITT should require bidders to demonstrate their commitment to continuous improvement in every area of activity and to be able to show how their organisational structure and practices will drive and support such improvement through the life of the franchise.

k. The ITT should highlight that monitoring is not just about having suites of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in separate activity boxes, but also about reporting transparency and ensuring the passenger perspective is an integral part of the monitoring process. In addition, bidders should be required to demonstrate how their internal processes and structures will ensure that monitoring contributes to a virtuous circle of continuous improvement.

l. Whatever the length of the awarded contract, there should be a series of defined passenger focused targets and objectives that have to be met in order for the franchisee to remain in place.

m. At both the 18 month review stage and at any point at which a potential extension to the original franchise term is considered, a clear framework against which delivery can be assessed should be set out and a rigorous analysis of performance undertaken. Input from Passenger Focus, particularly in relation to National Passenger Survey (NPS) satisfaction scores, should be sought as an integral part of this process.

Operational performance

1. In line with the the High Level Output Specification (HLOS) target for London and South East, and by staging incremental increases around major infrastructure works, the franchise specification should include a target to achieve 93% PPM by 2014. A minimum of 90% should be set for each individual route.

2. A decentralised 'route-management' approach to performance should be adopted, with specific responsibilities for this allocated to identified individuals.

Monitoring and reporting should focus on developing disaggregated PPM by route or at the lowest reporting level that can be achieved and making this data available to Passenger Focus and passengers.

Management of delays

1. The ITT should establish a franchise target to reduce 'significant' delays (of over 30 minutes) in line with HLOS requirements, applying the sector target of a 21% reduction, staged in incremental improvements to 2014.

2. The ITT should also require bidders to set out a strategy detailing how they intend to address/minimise delays caused by disruption (both planned and unplanned).

The strategy on managing delays should include a monitoring regime.

Passenger compensation in the event of delays

1. It has been confirmed that a delay–repay compensation regime will be included in the South Central franchise on the same basis as recent franchises. We firmly believe that, **in addition** to the delay- repay element, the franchise must require the implementation of a 'safety-net' compensation scheme for season ticket holders should they experience frequent delays.

2. Bidders should be required to demonstrate a commitment to a proactive policy of informing people of their right to claim in any given situation and to set out the procedures that would be adopted to make it easier to claim e.g reply paid cards distributed.

The measurement, monitoring and reporting of passenger compensation in the event of delays should include monitoring the promotion of rights to claim, publication of the number of claims for compensation under both delay-repay and the 'safety-net', the value of rail vouchers issued and redeemed, and the level of cash compensation paid to passengers.

Capacity and service patterns

1. The specification should ensure sufficient and suitable rolling stock to operate all peak services at maximum possible length (subject to evidence of passenger demand) throughout the peak and, where there are specific needs, in the off-peak, where a maximum loading rule of 70%³ should apply. Bidders should be required to have a rolling stock plan that facilitates this, utilises vehicles appropriate for the services for which they are used and allows for sufficient spares to operate the required maintenance programme and respond to any instances of train failure.
2. The franchise specification should require bidders to set out how they would aim to deliver the frequency of service sought by passengers, with particular reference to the demands for more weekend and later-evening services.
3. The particular issues relating to capacity and connectivity on the Brighton Main Line, the origin and destination for West London Line services, enhanced services at Redhill and limited restoration of services at Three Oaks and Winchelsea should be addressed in the base timetable for the franchise.
4. Our view is that service frequencies should be commensurate with the location and size of station, the local population served, identified passenger demand (existing and suppressed) and should provide meaningful opportunities to travel at relevant times of the day. The available resources should be applied equitably in relation to the basis above, regardless of whether the station is within the (TfL) London boundary.
5. The specification should set out requirements for Saturday services to continue to be as close as possible to weekday frequencies in order to match passenger requirements for a six day railway. Changing social patterns mean that the next franchisee should be required to work with Network Rail to identify how demand for services on Sundays and bank holidays can be met.
6. The specification should address the demands for later-evening services and require bidders, in conjunction with Network Rail, to identify how these can be delivered. If the desire for later-evening services conflicts with the need for engineering possessions, consideration should be given to prioritising later services for Thursday to Saturday evenings (i.e. traditionally the more popular days to socialise).
7. The demand for earlier morning services should be further explored with a view to introducing additional early services if warranted.
8. The DfT and bidders should conduct a structured dialogue with passengers and stakeholders to understand how specific aspirations for all routes can be evaluated and addressed from as early a stage in the franchise as possible.

³ Paragraph 4.20 of the White Paper 'Delivering a Sustainable Railway' notes that with an average load factor of about 70%, some passengers will be travelling in conditions that are crowded

Weighing technology should be required in all new rolling stock so that an accurate picture of crowding can be built up, maintained and published.

Fares

1. The application of the fare regulation framework should be changed. Should the basic RPI+1% formula for regulated fare baskets should remain as established (and we see this as a maximum conceivable level of increase) then the ability to flex individual regulated fares by the currently allowed +/-5% should be made conditional on the quality of service delivered to passengers. The quality of service measures should include PPM on a route by route basis and NPS scores.
2. The franchise should allow for implementation of the new fare structure⁴ but require a commitment to no increases significantly above inflation for off-peak fares. Bidders should be required to provide transparency about off-peak fare levels by setting out their proposals in the bid.
3. The ITT should require bidders to set out proposals for improving value for money and social inclusion by introducing and actively promoting the benefits of new products/services including:
 - annual season ticket direct debit payment scheme
 - carnet
 - child level fares for 16-18 year olds in full time education while travelling to/from school/college.
4. Bidders should be asked to consider 'early/late-bird' schemes that incentivise passengers to travel at less busy times – especially in relation to any smartcard ticketing scheme. At the very least bidders should be required to build such provision into any new smartcard scheme structure.
5. Bidders should commit to work with employers to establish interest-free loan schemes and also flexible working times to allow passengers to travel outside peak hours.

Ticketing

1. The needs of passengers who value staff at ticket offices must be a consideration in bidders' retailing proposals. Alternative forms of ticketing must not be used as an excuse to eliminate staffing from stations.
2. Ticket Vending Machines (TVMs) – bidders should demonstrate how they will extend the range of tickets available for purchase, including extension tickets and all available walk-up discount/GroupSave tickets. Bidders should also introduce a facility to collect internet or telephone purchased tickets free of charge.
3. Bidders should indicate how they will translate the Ticketing and Settlement Agreement (TSA) requirement to apply their 'reasonable endeavours' to meeting queuing time standards into effective action and what remedial action they would take should evidence demonstrate failings in this area.
4. We expect smartcard proposals to be included as with other recent franchises but believe that this should also include the requirement to not only accept but also retail Oyster (subject to appropriate arrangements agreed through TfL for commercial protection).

⁴ as set out in Table 10.1 page 98 of the White Paper 'Delivering a Sustainable Railway'

5. Bidders should be asked to outline a retailing/ticketing strategy with particular emphasis on Metro area, Coastway East and West routes and smaller D/E/F category stations.

Measuring, monitoring and reporting requirements should include an emphasis on monitoring and reporting of queuing times (both at the ticket office and for TVMs), TVM reliability and adherence to ticket office retailing hours. The results of the Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC) mystery shopping exercises monitoring the accuracy and impartiality of the ticketing process should also be published – the aim being to build up levels of trust among passengers.

Revenue protection

1. Passenger Focus expects that the ITT will require bidders to set out their proposals for a revenue protection policy firmly linked to provision of adequate ticket purchase facilities and that ensures fare collection is maximised and ticketless travel is minimised.

Station environment

1. The specification should invite bidders to propose a target for improvement of the overall station environment satisfaction scores on NPS within the first two years of the franchise. These should, as a minimum, bring franchise stations up to the national average of 65%.

2. There should be an investment programme for provision of new toilets at Coastway and Metro stations particularly. This should be focused firstly on stations with higher footfall and include a clear commitment to ensure facilities are open for use during all times that the station is staffed.

3. Bidders should be required to set out proposals for a general raising of station standards through the Service Quality Management System (SQMS) regime, which should, at a minimum, cover:

- lighting
- cleanliness
- provision of seats
- how quickly graffiti is removed
- maintenance targets (e.g. lifts etc)
- opening times and cleanliness of toilet facilities.

Bidders should be required to indicate what internal targets they intend to set, what the monitoring regime will be, how they will use internal benchmarks to drive up standards, and what they consider the acceptable standards to be to help achieve a significant improvement in NPS ratings.

4. The franchise specification should set out requirements for an improvement programme at Metro stations aimed at bringing them as close as possible to London Overground standards whilst ensuring value for money in relation to the resources available for this and other franchise needs.

5. The franchise agreement needs to make clear provision for the allocation of responsibility for all property and buildings and ensure that appropriate budgets are set for upkeep, improvements and repair for those parts allocated to the franchisee.

Passenger information at stations

1. Passenger demands for quality information at stations about train times and platforms should be addressed. The franchise specification should seek improvements in information provision, particularly in terms of consistently reliable technology, backed up by well informed staff.

2. The franchise specification should ensure that any gaps in provision of electronic information at stations are remedied as a matter of priority, with particular attention to the provision of reliable information at stations that are unstaffed for all or part of the day. We believe that virtually every station should have modern visual passenger information technology, although we acknowledge that it may be appropriate to specifically exempt this requirement for a few particularly lightly used stations in order to ensure best use of limited resources.

3. Bidders should demonstrate how they propose to make all reasonable endeavours to adopt practices in the National Rail Enquiries good practice guides on passenger information, documents developed by the train companies in conjunction with Passenger Focus.

4. Reliability and availability of information screens should be routinely monitored as part of the SQMS regime and bidders should be required to demonstrate that they have processes in place to deal quickly and effectively with any defects, including any inconsistencies with PA announcements.

Station security

1. Staffing is the best way to reassure passengers about their personal security while waiting for a train. Bidders should be required to set out their strategy for adequate staffing of stations at all hours that trains run. There should be no presumption that reduction in station staffing is acceptable.

2. The station investment programme should include CCTV and linked help-point provision at all stations that do not currently have these facilities. Where stations are currently unstaffed during any part of the day when trains operate, they should be priorities for such investment. We believe that virtually every station should have appropriate technology to enhance personal security, although we acknowledge that it may be appropriate to specifically exempt this requirement for a few particularly lightly used stations in order to ensure best use of limited resources.

3. The required target for the secure stations accreditation should be increased from 80% of footfall to 90%, with credit given for any bidder who proposes a higher target with evidence as to how it will be achieved. Bidders should also be required to provide evidence that they have covered all stations that are crime hot-spots, whether or not those stations are within the 90%. Consideration should be given to applying specific targets to stations on the Sussex Coast, whether that be in terms of footfall or station category, to overcome the fact that the high footfalls in the Metro area tends to concentrate attention within London with proportionately less coverage of the areas outside.

4. Bidders should be required to show an effective plan for ensuring secure car park accreditation at all A-D category stations with a car park by the end of year three of the franchise at the latest, with credit given to bidders who demonstrate a commitment to extend this to other station car parks during the life of the franchise.

5. Bidders should be required to propose a target increase in passenger satisfaction with personal security and to demonstrate how they will monitor the success of measures they propose, in terms of making passengers feel more secure. This should include improving satisfaction scores for the NPS.

Getting to the station

1. Additional car parking spaces, particularly where existing provision is over-subscribed, must be a key priority for investment and bidders should be required to develop plans which maximise additional spaces, especially on the Uckfield line.
2. At least the same number of additional secure cycle parking spaces should be provided as additional car parking spaces.
3. There should be a requirement for bidders to commit to pilot station travel plan schemes in the first year of the franchise with rollout more widely from year two and throughout the life of the franchise. Pilot stations should include a range of station types, and Passenger Focus should be consulted about which stations would be most appropriate.
4. The 18 month franchise review should establish a target for the percentage of stations to be covered by an implemented station travel plan by the end of the franchise.
5. Bidders should be required to demonstrate how they will work with local authorities, transport providers and other agencies to improve accessibility to stations by all modes. Where identifiably beneficial schemes for passengers can be delivered by other partners, they should be both encouraged and their future assured. The franchise should accommodate commitments to the future operation of any facilities provided.

Trains – personal security

1. New trains should have good security built into the specification, with high-quality evidence standard CCTV and designs that facilitate movement and communication through the train, including connections between carriages and the facility for staff to make announcements.
2. Bidders should be required to consider security issues holistically and, in particular, to set clear standards and expectations for on-board staff, where, for example, regular ticket checking can provide passengers with a sense of security, as well as providing revenue protection benefits. Frequency of through-train patrols and on-train announcements should be part of the SQMS regime and could potentially also be monitored through mystery shopping exercises.
3. Bidders should be required to demonstrate that their staff training plans equip on-train staff with the skills and technology they need to be able to provide the proactive presence that will enhance passenger satisfaction with personal security.
4. Bidders should be required to propose targets for improved NPS scores in relation to on-train security. Metro scores in particular should be targeted for improvement to at least the current average of 70%, with an aspiration to reach at least 78% overall by the end of the franchise. Bidders should receive credit for proposing higher targets, provided they give robust evidence of how those targets will be achieved.

Trains - on-board facilities

1. Bidders should demonstrate that they are taking a targeted approach to the on-train environment which takes into account different journey purposes and different lengths of journey.

2. Where new rolling stock is acquired bidders should give consideration to improvements to luggage space, reliability of toilets and inclusion of power points and Wi-Fi facilities. Passenger Focus, London TravelWatch and other relevant groups should be consulted on design plans at an early enough stage for views to be taken fully into account.

The SQMS regime should cover both availability and cleanliness of train toilets. There should be a requirement to publish statistics about the frequency of train toilet 'failures' and the length of time taken to bring them back in to service.

Accessibility

1. Bidders generally should be required to make a commitment to comply with industry codes of practice and best practice and to facilitate train travel by passengers with a disability or other access needs, including making information readily available in different formats.

2. Improvements need to be made to existing arrangements to ensure that assistance booked actually arrives. This includes putting robust measures in place to measure and monitor provision and potentially establishing a database of passenger details to reduce likelihood of errors made in booking and the need for frequent repetition of basic details, which is especially useful for regular journeys.

3. Bidders should also be required to commit to:

- A rigorous staff training programme to cover awareness across the whole range of disabilities, as well as safe and appropriate ways to help. In particular, staff should be trained to be alert to the needs of vulnerable passengers at times of disruption and the franchisee's service recovery plan should cover those issues specifically.
- Maintain an accurate and up-to-date database of station details to make it easier for passengers with a disability to plan their journeys.
- Ensure that priority seating areas are much more clearly labelled and that the purpose of such seats is much more clearly displayed, along with better policing of occupancy.
- Ensure that rail replacement bus services are capable of carrying wheelchair using and mobility impaired passengers or that special alternative arrangements are made for such passengers. This will be particularly important given the scale of infrastructure works planned for the franchise.

External engagement and identity

a. Bidders for the South Central franchise should be required to make a commitment to genuine and meaningful engagement with passengers and stakeholders. The specification should require details of what elements of the business and services any successful bidder would consult upon and/or provide information about and the range of mechanisms that they would use for these purposes.

b. The franchise specification should seek details of the bidders' proposed mechanisms for dealing with passenger complaints and concerns and bidders should be appraised upon their committed intentions to honour the spirit of any obligations or requirements, not just meet the minimal requirements.

c. A clear mechanism – with ring-fenced funds attached – should be established for the handling of any complaints or appeals that have not been resolved by the time the new franchise commences.

d. The ways in which franchise names are owned and utilised in the future should be reviewed and, where possible, ongoing consistency should be maintained.



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