

Independent national passenger watchdog

# Passenger Voice Rail



Spring 2011

Great Britain

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## Autumn 2010

Train company	Overall satisfaction
Great Britain	84%
Arriva Trains Wales	87%
c2c	91%
Chiltern Railways	90%
CrossCountry	84%
East Coast	89%
East Midlands	88%
First Capital	76%
First Great Western	82%
First Hull Trains	93%
First TransPennine Express	87%
Grand Central	95%
Heathrow Connect	92%
Heathrow Express	93%
London Midland	86%
London Overground	85%
Merseyrail	93%
National Express East Anglia	79%
Northern Rail	82%
ScotRail	86%
Southeastern	80%
Southern	82%
South West Trains	87%
Virgin Trains	90%
Wrexham & Shropshire	96%

## Five out of six passengers happy, but survey reveals wide variations

Passenger Focus's latest research shows 84% of passengers are satisfied with their journey, but a breakdown of satisfaction scores reveals wide variations. On the best routes almost every passenger is satisfied, compared with only 72% on the lowest scoring.

For the first time, the independent passenger watchdog has published a breakdown of passenger satisfaction scores for routes within each train company with the launch of the latest National Passenger Survey (NPS). Since publication, Passenger Focus's research team and passenger managers have been travelling across Britain to present the results to industry, highlight to train companies where practice is good and identify where improvements need to be made.

Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief executive, said: "Passengers continue to say they are satisfied or very satisfied with the vast majority of their train journeys. However, breaking the NPS results down by routes marks a huge step forward in accountability and transparency. Passengers can now get a much better idea of how their train services compare with others run by their company, as well as those across Great Britain.

"The rail industry should be congratulated for agreeing to take this step. We can now move forward to discuss how the industry's main punctuality figure, the Public Performance Measure, can also be broken down by routes which will help give passengers a much richer picture of how their services compare."

The research found the best routes are Grand Central, Southeastern's high-speed, Virgin Trains North Wales route and the impressive turnaround of the East Midlands Trains' Norwich – Liverpool service, which has improved substantially. The lowest scores were observed on First Capital Connect's London-Bedford route, ScotRail rural services and National Express East Anglia main line routes (not including intercity services).

## News roundup

### National Passenger Survey

If you want to know more about the results in the latest National Passenger Survey, go to [www.passengerfocus.org.uk/nps](http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/nps)

### Passenger Focus blog

Passenger Focus chief executive Anthony Smith regularly updates the Passenger

Focus blog at <http://passengerfocus.blogspot.com/> It includes his views on Great Britain's rail services and England's buses.

### Cuts to bus services

Passenger Focus has contacted all local authorities to ensure that bus passengers are represented as tough budget decisions are made about future services.

To learn more about Passenger Focus's bus, coach and tram work happening across England, see [www.passengerfocus.org.uk](http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk)

### On the move

Passenger Focus's Manchester office has moved. We can now be found at Passenger Focus, 7th Floor, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD.



## If HS2 is the answer what is the question?

Britain's railways are attracting more passengers again. All the long-term predictions show that the use of rail is likely to increase. We all want to continue to move around as we do now, have choices about where we live and work and reduce the effect of this mobility on the environment. In order to do this there needs to be a step-change in the space on the rail network for more trains. So the start of the consultation on the new line between London and the West Midlands is welcome. It will create many more seats on the new line and release space on existing lines so other communities can be better connected. The time savings seem like a useful by-product of what perhaps ought to be better dubbed 'big rail two', not HS2.

Sceptics of this major project argue such an expensive investment will choke off funding for the rest of the railway. Construction of HS2 and the spending of large sums of money are many years away. In the meantime the Government's welcome commitment to, among other things, more electrification and new trains will help solve more immediate capacity issues in many parts of the country. This welcome investment should continue if railway is going to keep pace with forecasts – more and more passengers want to use the railways.

However, there lurking inside all this success is the costs bug – the ballooning costs of running the railway that threaten to soak up the new money. We will be keeping a close eye on the conclusions of the Government's value for money review. We will make sure that the value of the railways is kept in focus as well as the cost. Also we will watch for signs of how ticket prices might rise even further. We already have a costly railway compared with our European counterparts and the trick now is to ensure we have a successful and value for money railway – good for both the taxpayer and passengers.

**Anthony Smith, Chief Executive**

## Helping disabled passengers

Passenger Focus is eagerly awaiting the development of a new and improved system to help disabled passengers use the railway safely and confidently.

Earlier this year Passenger Focus launched the findings of its mystery shop reviewing the rail industry's current service – the Assisted Passenger Reservation System (APRS). The independent passenger watchdog's research found that some disabled passengers are still being left stranded on the train or waiting on the platform without help, despite booking assistance from rail companies.

Mystery shoppers found that since the passenger watchdog's last review in 2008, the industry has made efforts and improvements to the central booking service and delivery of assistance. However, some passengers continue to face problems getting the right information and help from the industry.

Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief executive, said: "The industry has woken up to the problems with the system intended to help disabled passengers use the railway. We're pleased that promises have been made to develop a new booking system which should improve communication and overall services delivered to disabled passengers.

"Our mystery shoppers experienced excellent examples of customer service and observed some improvements in the delivery of the booked assistance. But there are still cases where staff are not being adequately trained, people are being left stranded without help and, in some cases, not being treated in a decent or dignified way. These problems must be sorted out for today's passengers and those who will be putting the service to the test during the Olympics and Paralympics in 2012."

Passenger Focus's research included all train companies, with mystery shoppers using both Network Rail and train company-managed stations. Passengers with mobility impairments, wheelchair users and visual disabilities undertook nearly 200 journeys.

On the back of the research, Passenger Focus has further developed its Best Practice Guidelines and is presenting these and the research findings to train companies. Positively, the Welsh Assembly Government has already made promises for improvements including introducing a formal measure of APRS quality in its next franchise. It has also committed to improving station accessibility.



## More trains down the track

Passenger Focus has welcomed the Government's investment in new trains, electrification of the line between London and Cardiff and plans to explore the potential of electrification of the railway in the Valleys.

Ashwin Kumar, Passenger Focus rail director, said: "Many of the inter-city trains running on the East Coast and Great Western main lines are over 30-years-old and more modern trains will be desperately needed in the near future as passenger numbers continue to rise.

"Passenger Focus has been working with the Department for Transport (DfT) and the bidders to ensure the internal layout brings extra benefit and facilities for passengers. We would encourage the DfT and the Agility Consortium to build mock-ups of these trains as soon as possible

so we can further test the layouts and help deliver a train which sets new high standards for passengers."

Passenger Focus also welcomed electrification plans between London and Wales.

"After much speculation and uncertainty, passengers using services between London and Cardiff are set to benefit from an electrified network which will improve reliability, cut passengers' journey times and reduce costs. If the plans come to fruition, passengers travelling in Wales could also benefit from the electrification of Valley lines. However, this announcement will be disappointing for those passengers campaigning for further electrification of the line to Swansea and we hope that as the economy recovers, further electrification of the network will be put back onto the table."



## Passengers reveal how they spend their time on the train

Passenger Focus's National Passenger Survey (NPS) has posed the question 'how do passengers spend their time on the train'.

Just under 31,000 passengers responded to the NPS and popular activities that passengers listed included reading for leisure (50%), catching up with friends and family on the phone (29%) and working or studying (25%). Nearly half of business passengers said they took the opportunity to work during their journey.

Additionally, the NPS found there are mixed results when comparing satisfaction between the sexes as the NPS shows women are more satisfied (86%) with their overall journey than men (81%). Women feel they get better value for money (51%, men 46%) but are less satisfied with how easy it is to get on and off the train. The most satisfied passengers, however, are those aged over 60 who had a 91% overall satisfaction rating and leisure passengers (90%).



## West Coast rail franchise

Passenger Focus has called on the Government to ensure that the new West Coast rail franchise is based on passengers' needs and priorities.

Passenger Focus manager Robert Samson said: "It is important that this process produces a deal that puts passengers' interests at its heart and builds on the high levels of satisfaction passengers currently report."

Passenger Focus has undertaken research to understand what existing West Coast passengers using Virgin Trains think needs to be improved. The findings will form the basis of Passenger Focus's discussions with the Government and companies vying to operate West Coast services from 2012 onwards for a minimum 14 years.

## Improving stations in Wales

Passenger Focus is calling for real-time information at every unstaffed station as a minimum standard, waiting area improvements and encouragement of community-station partnerships following passenger research in Wales.

The independent passenger watchdog, with the Wales Transport Research Centre, has investigated why passenger

satisfaction with stations in Wales is consistently lower than the Great Britain average. Passenger Focus has discussed its findings with the Welsh Assembly Government and has welcomed its recent promises to address information and accessibility issues, particularly as part of future franchise considerations. However, the watchdog is pushing for action to be taken sooner rather than later.



## Taking a closer look at 'on-time' trains

The NPS shows that punctuality is the biggest driver of passenger satisfaction – the key to keeping passengers happy is to run trains on-time.

Yet it remains the case that most industry punctuality statistics are only published at a 'whole train company' level. For the passenger frustrated by what they consider to be frequent delays on their line, these global averages feel like a recipe for having their concerns ignored. The main published punctuality figure records the proportion of trains arriving at destination within five minutes of booked time, or 10 minutes for long-distance services.

Passenger Focus has recently published new research into the relationship between passenger satisfaction and train lateness. With the help of CrossCountry, National Express East Anglia and Northern Rail, we have analysed how passenger satisfaction with punctuality shifts when trains are late.

The findings reveal that commuter satisfaction with punctuality starts to drop as soon as a train is one minute late and then drops by as much as five percentage points per minute of additional delay. Business and leisure passengers are a little more tolerant, being prepared to wait between four

and six minutes before their satisfaction is affected.

The study also found that passengers' experience of delays tends to be greater than that recorded by the industry. Trains may be late at stations along the route, but make up time towards the end of the journey and arrive at the final station according to the timetable. However, many passengers commuting home in the evening have got off the train long before it reaches its destination.

So the passenger experience of delay suggests a desire to understand whether trains arrive on time, rather than just within five or 10 minutes, and to understand what happens along the journey, not just at the destination. Clearly the first is easier to solve – simply publish the right-time arrival statistics that are already produced and distributed widely within the industry.

The second issue is harder to address and there is a discussion to be had about the most effective measure of punctuality at intermediate stops. But if we are to reflect passengers' experience of their journey in published statistics, these discussions need to bear fruit.

**Ashwin Kumar**  
Rail director

## Performance scrutiny

Since the timetable changes in December 2009, Southeastern's performance has been on the decline to the point where in December 2010 it only narrowly avoided dropping below the 82% punctuality target on its 'High-speed and Mainlines' routes. Passenger Focus is disappointed that its overall punctuality score is propped up by good performance on the high-speed line and believes the distinct high-speed service should be separated from the other main line routes.

Passenger Focus has successfully called for Southeastern to publish the results of an independent audit reviewing the company's punctuality statistics to demonstrate to long-suffering season-ticket holders why compensation had been avoided. Under the compensation arrangements, passengers on Southeastern's 'High Speed and Mainlines' routes looking to renew their season tickets at the end of last year would have been entitled to a five percent discount if punctuality fell below 82%. According to industry figures, Southeastern's punctuality for these routes was 82.04%.

The audit has revealed that 'High speed and Mainlines' punctuality was above 82% because of good results on the high-speed line.

The Government has since announced Southeastern's franchise has been extended after meeting performance targets.

Tunde Olatunji, Passenger Focus manager, said: "The announcement confirming the two-year extension of Southeastern's franchise will be received with mixed feelings by those passengers who have seen a deterioration in performance, sharp fare increases and little or no compensation for the delays.

"However, the silver-lining for passengers who have felt aggrieved about the failure to get compensation last year is that the franchise extension has now included a consultation on changing the compensation arrangement to a system known as 'delay repay', where passengers are entitled to compensation for every journey delayed by more than 30 minutes.

"The extension of the high-speed service to Maidstone West is also welcome news."

## Treating passengers fairly

Passenger Focus's advice team has now secured more than £59,800 in compensation for passengers this financial year.

Where a passenger and a train company cannot resolve a complaint, the watchdog's passenger advice team will mediate, where appropriate, in an effort to get a better outcome for the individual. While passengers were offered just £9250 originally, after Passenger Focus stepped in and negotiated with the train company, it was able to get an extra £50,600 for passengers between April 2010 and January 31 2011.

The passenger advice team meets with each train company on a regular basis in a bid to resolve passengers' issues, secure 'goodwill gestures' and provide feedback to customer service teams on how they can better respond to passenger complaints.

Passengers can get help from the passenger advice team by emailing [info@passengerfocus.org.uk](mailto:info@passengerfocus.org.uk) or calling 0300 123 2350.



Visit [www.passengerfocus.org.uk](http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk)