

Independent national passenger watchdog

# Passenger Voice Rail



Summer 2010

Great Britain

**In this issue:** • Difficult choices • Value for money still top priority • Passenger focused franchises

## 83% of Britain's rail passengers are satisfied

The largest survey of Britain's rail passengers has revealed value for money satisfaction scores have increased a record eight points to 48% following the price freeze on season tickets and many other fares last January. Low inflation in mid-2009 meant that many fares were frozen or fell slightly in January 2010. Passengers are now waiting for the July 2010 inflation figure to see how much their fares will rise next year.

Commenting on the release of the National Passenger Survey (NPS), Passenger Focus said more than 31,000 rail users had participated in the Spring 2010 survey. Five out of six passengers (83%) reported they were satisfied overall with their last rail journey.

Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief executive, said: "As more trains arrive on time, Britain's rail passengers are

becoming more satisfied. However, the gap between the good and weaker performers remains wide – MerseyRail, Chiltern and c2c, among others, have all built on already strong performances. St Pancras continues to be voted passengers' favourite (94% satisfied) of Britain's busier railway stations.

"Some train companies have really started to show improvements – London Midland, East Midlands Trains and Southeastern passengers have started to notice the difference. Southern is now only one point behind South West Trains, the top commuter operator south of the Thames. However, train companies' overall scores do mask big differences in passenger satisfaction for the individual routes the train companies run."

Continued on page 3



### Spring 2010

Train Company	Overall satisfaction	Improvement in % satisfied or good since Spring 2009	Decline in % satisfied since Spring 2009
Great Britain result	83% (up 2%)	Value for money (8%)	Cleanliness of the outside of the train (2%)
Arriva Trains Wales	88%	Facilities for car parking (8%)	Cleanliness of the outside of the train (9%)
c2c	91%	Provision of information during the journey (7%)	No significant decline
Chiltern	91%	Value for money (8%)	Station facilities and services (8%)
CrossCountry	85%	Value for money (6%)	Train toilet facilities (7%)
East Coast	88%	The availability of staff on the train (5%)	No significant decline
East Midlands Trains	86% (up 5%)	How well the train company handles delays (14%)	No significant decline
First Capital Connect	76%	Value for money (7%)	How well the train company handles delays (10%)
First Great Western	83%	How well the train company handles delays (9%)	Cleanliness of the outside of the train (5%)
First TransPennine Express	87%	Value for money (9%)	No significant decline
Grand Central	94%	First time included in the Spring survey	-
Heathrow Connect	88%	Station facilities and services (10%)	How a request to station staff was handled (10%)
Heathrow Express	93%	Helpfulness and attitude of staff on the train (6%)	No significant decline
London Midland	86% (up 8%)	Punctuality/reliability (11%) Value for money (11%)	No significant decline
London Overground	72%	Upkeep and repair of the train (20%)	Overall station environment (9%)
Merseyrail	93%	The helpfulness and attitude of staff on the train (18%)	No significant decline
National Express East Anglia	77%	Value for money (8%)	Cleanliness of the outside of the train (6%)
Northern Rail	82%	Value for money (6%)	Connections with other forms of public transport (6%)
ScotRail	90%	Value for money (6%)	No significant decline

# Difficult choices to be made on the railway



Anthony Smith  
Passenger Focus chief executive

Passenger satisfaction is slowly increasing. As shown by the Spring 2010 wave of the National Passenger Survey, satisfaction, driven largely by more trains arriving on time, is continuing to rise. The key driver of passenger dissatisfaction, based on a much smaller sample, remains how delays are dealt with. This is the rail industry's Achilles heel. The fares freeze and drop in price for many fares, brought about by last year's low inflation figures and the effect on the fares regulation formula, saw a significant shift in that most stubborn area – value for money. Passenger Focus will now work with the train companies and Network

Rail to drive more improvements on the back of this comparative benchmarked survey.

The power of investment is clear in these results. New trains, new services and new timetables are keeping existing passengers happy and attracting more people to the railway. But has this success been brought at too high a price? The joint Department for Transport and Office of Rail Regulation review into industry value for money may help bring about changes to industry structure and practice that may, in time, help keep the lid on costs. However, Passenger Focus will keep a very close

eye on fares. We already know we have some of the most expensive tickets in Europe, especially in London and the South East.

Future spend on the railways must be carefully targeted on the issues passengers prioritise and will notice. We know from our recent passenger research that the key priorities for rail passengers remain value for money, punctuality and sufficient services. We are now going to do more work on what passengers would prioritise in difficult economic times – we must make the right choices now as they will reverberate down the line for future passengers.

## Passenger research to help make a difference

As well as the launch of the National Passenger Survey Spring 2010, over the coming months Passenger Focus will be publishing passenger research looking at various aspects of rail companies' performance.

This summer, Passenger Focus will launch research on ticket vending machines (TVM) and queuing times at stations, which look at the benefits and shortcomings of the technology and asks why passengers continue to queue at the ticket office when TVMs stand idle. Also in the pipeline is research looking at the East Midlands region car-park facilities; passengers' needs from new trains in Scotland; and a project aimed at improving the experience of rail passengers using unstaffed stations in Wales.



Among its other research projects, later in the year the watchdog will be publishing a major piece of work looking at the Assisted Passenger Reservation System which is a mystery shop of the service for passengers with disabilities. Fieldwork for the Autumn National Passenger Survey will commence in September and Passenger Focus will be launching the report of findings from the disruption panel before the end of the year. Finally, Passenger Focus is currently working with train companies on research looking at the link between punctuality and passenger satisfaction.

Keep an eye on the Passenger Focus website [www.passengerfocus.org.uk](http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk) for research updates.

## Unplanned disruption

With summer already upon us, the winter's cold-snap may seem a long time ago, but the disruption caused by snow is still fresh in Passenger Focus's minds. Especially those Eurostar passengers caught up in the Christmas chaos.

Passenger Focus's rail director Ashwin Kumar has given evidence to the Department of Transport as part of its Winter Resilience Review. Ashwin spoke on passengers' experiences during the disruption and what the industry should do to help passengers during these unplanned-for events.

Passenger Focus has also established an online disruption panel with around 1000 passengers across Great Britain acting as reporters to give the industry constructive feedback and work immediately on short- medium- and long-term solutions to improve disruption handling.

On a different topic, but related to disruption, many people who had not been on a train for years were grateful for the extra services laid on by long-distance operators during the disruption to flights as a consequence of the Iceland volcanic explosion.

Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief executive, com-

mented: "There are always lessons to be learnt from these incidents. How can staff help passengers stuck in ticket office queues get the information they need and their train tickets quicker? How can industry websites better handle the surge in visits from passengers desperate for information? How can we deliver passengers an integrated transport system so that those stranded on the ferry dock or returning to their station aren't waiting an unreasonable amount of time for the next bus or train? These are all issues which need to be tackled and will help the industry improve the management of disruption generally." The National Passenger Survey consistently shows that passengers have low levels of satisfaction with disruption handling (35%) and improvements are needed.



# Value for money still top priority

New research shows that value for money fares, punctual trains and more services are Great Britain's rail passengers' priorities for improvement.

While the National Passenger Survey shows that passengers are broadly happy with rail services it is important to understand what their priorities for improvement are as the industry plans its services and investment.

Passenger Focus asked over 3000 passengers to rank their priorities for improvement. The results are broken down for London, Scotland, Wales and all the English regions as well as for passenger groups including commuters, leisure and business passengers. The research should help the rail industry and government target and plan future railway spending.



Ashwin Kumar, Passenger Focus rail director commented on the findings: "Value for money remains the key priority for improvement for Britain's rail passengers. When saying this, passengers are talking about the price of the ticket as well as punctuality, getting a seat and how disruption is dealt with. Passengers expect train companies to get these right when they buy a ticket.

"The priorities research should help Government and industry spend on and invest in the areas passengers say are the most important."

Rail passengers were also asked to rate where services exceeded their expectations and where they did not. Exceeding their expectations were the attitude and helpfulness of staff, how requests for information were handled and personal security at the station. However, facilities for car parking, security of cycle parking and availability of staff at the station fell short of passengers' reasonable expectations.

## Priorities report

Passengers' top priorities	2010 ranking	2007 ranking
Price of train tickets offer excellent value for money	1	1
At least 19 out of 20 trains arrive on time	2	3
Sufficient train services at times I use the train	3	2
Passengers are always able to get a seat on the train	4	4
Company keeps passengers informed of train delays	5	5
Information on train times/platforms accurate and available	6	7
Maximum queue time no more than two minutes	7	6
Trains consistently well maintained/excellent condition	8	8
Seating area on the train is very comfortable	9	9
Station staff are available whenever required	10	17

## 83% of Britain's rail passengers are satisfied thanks to on-time trains - continued

- Southeastern's new high-speed services are loved by those who can afford them – 95% overall satisfaction, with a good rating for value for money. However, this magic dust has not settled on all of Southeastern's services with metro services scoring 78%.
- First Capital Connect's 76% overall score masks big variations – 81% overall satisfaction on Great Northern routes but Thameslink South services, starting from stations between London Bridge and Brighton, trail behind at only 66% satisfied
- Northern Rail's 82% overall score spans 87% scores on

West and North Yorkshire services and 74% on the crowded routes in and around Manchester and Liverpool

- First Great Western's longer-distance services score 86% but the commuter services in the Thames Valley are lower at 81%
- Virgin Trains' overall score is good but there is a variation between some routes. For example, passengers travelling between London and North Wales are very happy overall (94%) while those using the London to Birmingham and Wolverhampton routes scored 88%.

Passengers continue to have concern with the industry's handling of delays with no changes

in passenger satisfaction (35%). Mr Smith concluded: "The NPS is one of the most cost effective ways of driving improvements for passengers. The results allow

valuable comparisons between routes and train companies and Passenger Focus uses this to work with industry, planning how to boost satisfaction."

### Spring 2010 - continued

Train Company	Overall satisfaction	Improvement in % satisfied or good since Spring 2009	Decline in % satisfied since Spring 2009
Southeastern	81% (up 5%)	Helpfulness and attitude of staff on the train (18%)	No significant decline
Southern	84% (up 4%)	Value for money (10%)	No significant decline
South West Trains	85%	Value for money (7%)	Overall station environment (5%)
Virgin Trains	90% (up 4%)	Punctuality/reliability (10%)	No significant decline
Wrexham and Shropshire	99%	First time included in the Spring survey	-

# Passenger Focus on buses, coaches and trams too!



Passenger Focus now represents bus, coach and tram passengers in England outside London. We have recently published the Bus Passenger Survey which includes the views and opinions of around 18,000 bus passengers in 14 areas across England.

To learn more about the work Passenger Voice is doing around the country subscribe to Passenger Voice Bus, Coach and Tram or visit our website [www.passengerfocus.org.uk](http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk)

## Passenger focused franchises

As an independent consumer watchdog, Passenger Focus has been asked by Government to ensure passenger views are sought early so they can be included in plans for future rail franchises.

Over recent months Passenger Focus has spoken with around 13,000 passengers who currently travel on c2c, National Express East Anglia, East Coast and TransPennine Express services. It is using this feedback to make recommendations to Government about what passengers want from new operators. When the list of bidders is announced, it will present the research findings to each applicant and ensure passenger views are central to the deal.

The Government has since postponed decisions on franchises out to tender while it reviews the franchise process. Guy Dangerfield, Passenger Focus manager responsible for work on behalf of East Coast and National Express East Anglia passengers, commented: "Passengers will probably not be surprised that the new Government wishes to review franchising policy before letting any new rail contracts. Whenever the process restarts, passengers will want to see the new operators incentivised to focus on improving the things that matter to them. Namely, value for money for the price

they pay; punctuality and reliability; frequency of service; journey speed; and their ability to get a seat. Passenger Focus will be pressing for early action on these issues, whoever is running Great Britain's trains."

Passenger Focus used the results of its research with over 6000 passengers to influence the design of the new South Central franchise and was pleased to see many of our recommendations included in the franchise agreement. Passengers have been promised less crowding, better information, new cycle and car-parking facilities, improved security and later-evening trains. Southern, the train operator appointed, has also pledged to deliver on its recommendation for a more transparent fare system.



## Pushing for better passenger services

The independent passenger watchdog has outlined its plans to push for a better value-for-money fares system, more punctual services and giving passengers improved information – especially during disruption.

Passenger Focus will be asking more than 120,000 passengers over the next year to give their views on Great Britain's public transport and identify where work should take place as a priority. It will use this research to lobby the industry and governments for improvements.

The independent consumer watchdog for Great Britain's rail passengers and bus, coach and tram passengers in England (outside of London), has launched its 2010-2011 work plan. The watchdog's plan is based on feedback it has received from passengers to date. To view the plan, see [www.passengerfocus.org.uk](http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk)

## News roundup

### Passenger Focus 2009-10

Passenger Focus's annual report and accounts have been laid before Westminster and Scottish Parliaments. The report can be viewed at [www.passengerfocus.org.uk](http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk)

### Improving punctuality

Passenger Focus's research has found a clear relationship between punctuality and passenger satisfaction. Passenger Focus, with the help of National Express East Anglia, found that commuters judge lateness from the first minute the train arrives at the destination after the scheduled time. For every minute that a train is late, passenger satisfaction drops by two percentage points. Passenger Focus is calling for a system which reports to passengers whether trains are arriving on time rather than within five or 10 minutes.

### Welsh Language Scheme

Passenger Focus has launched its Welsh Language Scheme following approval from the Welsh Language Board. It outlines how it meets the needs of people who wish to communicate with the independent rail consumer watchdog in Welsh.

Passenger Focus has also responded to a consultation from the National Assembly for Wales about proposals for new Welsh-language legislation.

### Passenger Focus move

Passenger Focus's London base has moved from Islington to Pimlico. The new address is 2nd Floor, One Drummond Gate, Pimlico, London, SW1V 2QY.

### Meeting in public

Passenger Focus's Board regularly meets to discuss rail, bus, coach and tram passenger issues.

Members of the public are able to observe the next Passenger Focus Board meeting at the London office on 15 September.

Agenda and Board papers will be made available on the Passenger Focus website.