



Passenger Focus response to the  
Department for Transport's consultation on  
the replacement of the Intercity East Coast  
franchise

February 2007

Passenger Focus is the independent national rail consumer watchdog. It is an executive non-departmental public body sponsored by the Department for Transport.

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’**

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## Introduction

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Passenger Focus, the national consumer organisation for rail passengers in Great Britain, makes the following comments in response to the Department for Transport's (DfT) consultation on the replacement of the Intercity East Coast (ICEC) franchise. They are made in the order in which issues are raised within the consultation document. There then follows an **Appendix** setting out Passenger Focus generic policy in respect of passenger franchises.

## Executive summary

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### Key passenger issues

First, Passenger Focus wishes to highlight the following:

- that commitments made by GNER as part of the 2005 franchise must be carried forward to the new operator, including station investment schemes
- that the new franchise must represent value for money for passengers, striking a balance between prices charged and the level and standard of service provided
- that current standards of customer service experience, including onboard facilities, must be regarded as a minimum
- that the existing passenger timetable, plus the additional London-Leeds/Leeds-London trains, must be the minimum service level
- that firm proposals are required to deliver increased car parking capacity at ICEC stations
- GNER's commitments about car park pricing between 2006 and 2015 must be honoured
- that there should be an obligation on the operator to develop proposals to minimise crowding as demand grows during the franchise term.

### Value for money

The level of franchise premium secured as part of this replacement franchise must be consistent with the operator delivering a value for money service in the eyes of passengers. Through this process we urge DfT to ensure that:

- Quality of service builds on that currently provided by GNER. Recent research by DfT shows that 10%<sup>1</sup> of passengers making long distance rail journeys chose to do so because they can do other things while travelling. The opportunity to do those other things, which would include using wi-fi internet and eating on the move, must remain.
- The business plan of the successful bidder is not predicated on its exploiting *de facto* monopoly markets. There is clear evidence that recently-let franchises have impacted heavily on passengers where there is no price control (e.g. the First Great Western 12%+ price increases on Standard Open Return tickets).

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<sup>1</sup> Public experiences of and attitudes towards rail travel, Department for Transport, September 2006

# Response to DfT consultation document

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## Section 2 – Process and Timescales

**2.1** While acknowledging the desire to return to a franchise agreement as soon as possible, we are concerned that in proposing a late Autumn 2007 start for the new franchise, DfT is reducing the opportunity for the recommendations of the East Coast Main Line (ECML) Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS) to be incorporated into the franchise at its outset. Unless there is reason to believe that the RUS will not be formally established in December 2007/January 2008 as expected, the ICEC franchise process should be delayed by a few months.

## Section 3 – The ICEC Franchise

**3.1** While acknowledging that this paragraph is giving an overview, we are concerned that by referring only to Doncaster and points north, bullet two ignores the role ICEC plays in business travel between London and Peterborough, Grantham and Newark. The railway is vital to the economy of the East Midlands and Peterborough areas: ICEC is not performing a solely commuter function at these stations.

## Performance

**3.2** This section refers to the 90% Public Performance Measure (PPM) in the current GNER franchise, to be achieved by 1 January 2010 and then maintained. Given that the Class 91/Mk IV and High Speed Trains (HSTs) will have been re-engineered and fully refurbished by early 2009, DfT should examine the case for incremental improvement beyond 90% – the Strategic Rail Authority's objective of 16/17 trains arriving on time should not be forgotten. However, any increase in the target must be achieved through real improvements – not by adding additional minutes to schedules to hide poor underlying performance. DfT should also examine how a commitment to work with Network Rail to reduce the number of major incidents that affect large numbers of passengers could be contractualised. Bidders' proposals for Thunderbird (rescue locomotive) arrangements should be closely examined.

**3.3** GNER's commitment in the current franchise to make a financial contribution to increasing the reliability of the Overhead Line Electrification (OLE) equipment should be carried forward to the new franchise. OLE defects are hugely disruptive to passengers: there should be no let-up in the drive to reduce the incidence of failure. By way of illustration, in Period 5 2006/07 OLE problems accounted for 22.8%<sup>2</sup> of overall delay to GNER trains.

**3.4** This section says 'the single biggest impact for GNER on performance is its fleet'. This is not correct: the single biggest cause of delay to GNER trains is attributed to Network Rail, 60.2%<sup>3</sup> (Period 9 2006/07 Moving Annual Average).

## Rolling stock

**3.5** It is essential that the Invitation to Tender (ITT) is clear that bidders are expected to complete the refurbishment of Mk III coaches and re-engineering of HST power cars – including the two additional sets required to implement Leeds half-hourly in May 2007.

**3.6** The ITT should ask bidders to demonstrate how they will maintain the standard of on train presentation throughout the franchise, including in-service rubbish clearance. It should be noted that the Mallard interiors will be 10 years old by 2015 and could, if not maintained and cleaned

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<sup>2</sup> Source: Network Rail delay attribution, Period 5 2006/2007

<sup>3</sup> Source: Network Rail delay attribution, Period 9 2006/2007

effectively, by then look very shabby – the 10 year old interiors of the GNER HST fleet illustrate the challenge.

- 3.7** The HSTs will have 21 fewer First Class seats than a Mallard. Given the importance of ICEC services to the business community, the ITT should highlight that careful diagramming is required, particularly at peak times, to ensure that there is sufficient capacity in First Class on key business trains.
- 3.8** The current refurbishment of the Mk III coaches is incorporating improved designs following in-service experience with Mallard coaches. The ITT should seek proposals from bidders to retrofit Mallard coaches with these design improvements. Issues to be addressed are ceiling light reliability, discolouration of armrests and failure of the First Class seat recline mechanism.

### **Additional comments**

- 3.9** Connections. The document is entirely silent about the role that ICEC plays in delivering one leg of a longer journey. Its role in providing connections with, *inter alia*, East Anglia via Peterborough; Boston and Skegness via Grantham; Lincoln via Newark; various Yorkshire destinations via Doncaster, Leeds and York; destinations on Teeside, Tyne and Wear and in County Durham; and stations in Scotland via Edinburgh, in particular Aberdeen and Inverness. It should be clear in the ITT that the successful bidder will have an explicit duty to plan the business making all reasonable endeavours to facilitate connectivity with services on routes with which there is an interface. This is doubly important given that DfT does not, we understand, intend that there is such a clause in either the East Midlands franchise or the new Cross Country franchise.

### **Section 4 – Objectives for the ICEC franchise**

- 4.1** Value for Money. It is crucial that DfT considers whether the bids it receives are consistent with the operator delivering value for money to passengers. It should be noted that in the National Passenger Survey (NPS) Autumn 2006 wave just 55% of GNER passengers were satisfied or very satisfied with value for money of the ticket price paid – a statistically significant fall on the Autumn 2005 figure, despite the introduction of Advance Singles during that period. A bid predicated on generating large premium payments through above-inflation price increases in unregulated parts of the market will act against passengers' interests and lead to a worsening of value for money ratings.
- 4.2** Overcrowding. At present, GNER has a smaller proportion of passengers dissatisfied with "sufficient room for all the passengers to sit/stand" than all other long distance operators. The ITT should require bidders to prepare a plan, once the RUS has been established, that demonstrates how they intend to prevent crowding emerging as a problem – particularly important given the level of growth expected in Peterborough and the East Midlands.
- 4.3** Safety and security on trains and at stations. GNER has installed CCTV at all its stations, including in car parks, during the course of the original franchise and its two year extension. At a number of locations, however, the systems are entirely passive – recording images for subsequent use by the Police if needed. The ITT should require that CCTV systems at all 12 ICEC-run stations become actively monitored, either through a Train Operating Company-run centre (e.g. that at Paisley Gilmour Street) or by link to a local authority-run centre.
- 4.4** We are intrigued by the reference to a reduction in subsidy profile over the franchise term, given that ICEC receives no subsidy.

## Section 5 – The DfT base case specification

### Fares

**5.1** While we note that commuter fares and currently-regulated fares will remain subject to an RPI+1% regime, we remain alarmed about the impact on passengers using open single and return fares if the franchise that is awarded on the basis of a large premium payment. A return ticket from York to London to arrive before 10.20 is already £177 in a market without effective competition from air or road. Please see our comments in 4.1 above regarding value for money.

### Catering offer

**5.2** Passenger Focus believes that it is inappropriate for decisions about the catering offer to be wholly at the discretion of bidders. We believe that the ITT should require:

- a buffet car on all ICEC services throughout the journey
- an at seat trolley service on all ICEC services throughout the journey in standard class
- an at seat service on all ICEC services throughout the journey in first class
- a restaurant car service on no fewer than 85 trains per day, Mondays to Fridays. This number, the minimum GNER is required to operate, should be regarded as the minimum requirement for the new franchise.

Passenger Focus believes the ICEC restaurant service is highly valued by first class and standard ticket holders and is one of the factors which influence passengers to choose rail over air, where that choice exists.

The ICEC restaurant service should be available to First and Standard Class ticket holders. The provision of “free” food in a higher First Class ticket price should not be introduced on ICEC: as a matter of principle passengers should have the choice not to pay for food.

### Service pattern

**5.3** Passenger Focus supports the DfT’s intention to regard the current timetable, plus the additional London-Leeds/Leeds-London trains due to be introduced in May 2007, as the base case for the new franchise. We wish to make the following points:

- the indicative service pattern set out in Figure 4 represents a significant departure from the current timetable. For example, no Anglo-Scottish trains appear to call at Stevenage or Peterborough. Also, Grantham, Newark and Retford – key stations serving the East Midlands – are shown as having only occasional calls. The ITT must be clear that the base case is the existing timetable plus the addition Leeds services, unconfused by inaccurate graphical representation
- DfT should make it explicit in the ITT that bidders should assume that the current quantum of services to/from Bradford, Harrogate, Hull and Skipton, together with those to/from Aberdeen, Glasgow and Inverness, will be contractualised. It should be made clear to bidders that variations without these services will not be considered
- Passenger Focus supports the encouragement of journey time improvements and we would highlight, in particular, the opportunity to increase market share *vis a vis* air between Newcastle and London by offering improved journey times (*it should be noted that there are currently 13 weekday flights from Newcastle to London airports, in comparison with*

Leeds Bradford with only 6). While Passenger Focus advocates achievable timetables, we note that it is now common for ICEC trains to arrive early enough at intermediate stations to stand for 3 or 4 minutes before departure – we feel this is the other extreme. Please note that improving end to end journey times by reducing the service frequency at intermediate stations would be unacceptable.

- Passenger Focus hopes that the following will be addressed by the ECML RUS. DfT should nevertheless signal via the ITT that it wishes to see proposals to:
  - enhance service frequency/improve regularity of calling patterns at Grantham, Newark and Retford
  - enhance service frequency/improve regularity of calling patterns at Morpeth, Alnmouth, Berwick and Dunbar. DfT should use the unexpected letting of the Cross Country and ICEC franchise to the same timescale to specify a combined timetable that dovetails the trains of each TOC and provides a more effective service at these stations overall. As a minimum, each station should be served each hour in each direction. To illustrate the inadequacy of the present calling pattern, please note that there is no reasonable London to Dunbar journey opportunity departing Kings Cross between 14.00 and 17.30.
- notwithstanding comments in 5.4 regarding timetable consultation, DfT must itself carefully scrutinise changes – however apparently minor – to ensure there is no detriment to particular groups of passengers. Important throughout the day and at all stations, there is a particular risk in relation to peak calls at the less well-served stations, e.g. Retford, Northallerton, Morpeth, Alnmouth, Berwick and Dunbar.

### **Timetable consultation**

**5.4** Having championed the argument that TOCs have a duty to consult their customers about proposed timetable changes, Passenger Focus welcomes the requirement that the successful bidder consults passengers. While this process should be owned and delivered by the operator, DfT should specify that consultation takes place with Passenger Focus and London TravelWatch regarding the methodology and delivery of that public consultation.

### **Engineering access and disruption management**

**5.5** Passenger Focus believes that the current balance between engineering access and the ability to run passenger trains is not appropriate. The successful bidder should be required to make reasonable endeavours to challenge, *inter alia*:

- the Saturday evening service close down – 20.30 is unacceptably early for the last train from London
- the closure of the route on Sunday mornings for several months of the year: 12.11 as the first ICEC arrival in London is unacceptably late
- the occasions when the Newcastle to Edinburgh route is closed at weekends – it was nine consecutive weekends in 2006.

**5.6** The Rail Passengers Council publication “Passengers’ Attitudes towards engineering works”, August 2003, shows passengers prefer to have a train throughout their journey than a bus or coach for part of it, even if the journey time is extended as a consequence. We therefore believe that the ITT should ask bidders to develop alternative transport arrangements based on the minimum use of buses and coaches, i.e. using diversionary routes wherever possible. It should

be noted that ICEC will in future have more HSTs and that ETS-fitted Class 57s may be available for hire at certain times.

- 5.7** We urge DfT to look closely at how bidders will ensure that their train crews maintain route knowledge via current diversionary routes, in particular the Hertford loop, and should examine the merits of ICEC train crew 'signing' other diversionary routes (e.g. Peterborough-Ely-Cambridge-Hitchin and Peterborough-Sleaford-Lincoln-Newark/Doncaster) to increase options in the event of planned or unplanned disruption.

### **Car parking**

- 5.8** Passenger Focus notes that DfT does not intend to regulate car park pricing on the replacement ICEC. Passenger Focus believes strongly that the new franchisee should be bound by the commitments GNER gave at the time it virtually doubled prices in July 2006. Namely, that for the remainder of the franchise period car parking prices would be frozen for 18 months (i.e. until 1 January 2008) and then increased annually by RPI only. Leaving aside whether the wider application of price controls on car parking charges is desirable, we believe the ITT should require that commitment to be honoured.

- 5.9** Capacity. Section five of the consultation document, and the objective relating to promotion of integrated transport solutions and social inclusion in Section four, make no explicit reference to DfT seeking proposals to expand car parking capacity at ICEC stations. We welcome proposals to improve cycle-rail integration: additional capacity to park bicycles is required at a number of stations. Given the demand growth predictions for ICEC services, and given the large hinterlands its stations are serving, we believe the ITT should be explicit that bidders must demonstrate how they will deliver car park capacity improvements in the replacement franchise. Car is an important element of integrated transport and many GNER car parks are full on most weekdays, giving no opportunity for off peak business or leisure passengers to park. Recent research carried out for Passenger Focus in the East of England, to be published in March 2007, suggests that if passengers find parking at the station difficult the following behaviours are likely to materialise:

- some will get family members to drive them to the same station – doubling motorised journeys and using more carbon fuels (assuming that they are picked up again later)
- some will drive to another station – using more carbon fuels and potentially adding to congestion
- some will drive all the way instead of catching the train – again, using more carbon fuels and potentially adding to congestion
- some will travel earlier in order to secure a space in the car park at their station – potentially moving the high peak for rail demand earlier than at present.

It should be noted that in the Autumn 2006 NPS results GNER scored only 48% satisfaction with facilities for car parking.

### **Minor works fund**

- 5.10** As part of the SRA's consultation prior to issue of the ITT for the current GNER franchise, our predecessor organisations successfully lobbied for the proposed £250,000 per annum budget for minor accessibility works to be increased to £500,000 per annum. We regard the latter as the minimum sum that the ITT should require a new franchisee to commit in this area.

## Stations

**5.11** Investment set out in the 2005 Franchise Agreement. The current franchise committed GNER to invest £25 million in station developments and we note that formally committed works will proceed. The status of uncommitted schemes, including the Newcastle redevelopment, pedestrian access improvements at Peterborough, ticket gating schemes, car park extensions and additional cycle parking provision is not clear from the consultation. It is essential that DfT includes in the ITT the delivery of schemes that passengers and local stakeholders are expecting to be delivered, whether or not they were formally committed on the date GNER went onto a Management Contract. Passengers should not be deprived of improved facilities as a result of the franchise being re-let.

**5.12** New Investment.

- Wireless internet (wi-fi) access at stations. There is a key gap in the current provision: few ICEC stations are equipped as a 'hotspot', other than GNER's first class lounges. DfT should require bidders to bring forward proposals to provide internet access, using wi-fi or a subsequent technology, at all ICEC stations within at least the Standard lounges/waiting rooms.
- Small scale enhancements at stations. At a number of ICEC stations small scale tactical investment would substantially improve the quality passengers' experience. For example, at Peterborough passengers are sheltered from the elements along approximately one quarter of the length of the main London-bound platform (Number two) and none of the alternative London-bound platform (Number 3). This is not acceptable at a station in the top 75 most used in the country and in the top 40 for passengers changing trains. We note that DfT has contracted with FirstGroup to deliver tactical station enhancements of this nature at some First Capital Connect stations and believe bidders for ICEC should be asked to make similar proposals.

**5.13** Quality. Passenger Focus notes that GNER's scores for station quality factors in the National Passenger Survey are below those for on train factors. Although there have been recent improvements, there remains significant scope for a new franchisee to lift the quality delivered to passengers, particularly in respect of cleanliness and upkeep of buildings. Approximately one in four GNER passengers were not satisfied with the upkeep/repair of station buildings and platforms, station cleanliness and station overall environment in the Autumn 2006 NPS. Despite its drive for quality in other areas, GNER – like much of the industry – is too tolerant of poorly-presented station facilities and poor at insisting that its landlord maintains and renews station assets, despite the large sums it pays in lease charges.

**5.14** Ticket office queuing times. DfT should require robust monitoring of queuing times at ICEC-run ticket offices, including at windows where enquiries and advance purchase transactions are handled, with action plans agreed if non-compliances are identified. Passenger Focus welcomes the choice many passengers now have to buy tickets other than from a booking clerk at a station - however the interests of those without credit cards, internet access, a mobile phone that can receive a bar code etc. must be protected.

## On train wireless internet

**5.15** The implementation of wireless internet (wi-fi) access onboard GNER trains is an innovation that, particularly for business passengers, enhances ICEC's product and competitive advantage over road and air. Whether using wi-fi or a subsequent technology, DfT should specify the provision of internet access for use by passengers.

## Section 7 – Bid submissions

- 7.1** Passenger's Charter. We urge DfT to secure a regime as detailed in the **Appendix** to this document
- 7.2** Customer Panel. At the time the management agreement started we were in the early stages of discussions with GNER about establishment of a customer panel or panels. Passenger Focus believes that DfT should specify the establishment of a forum through which the operator can engage with the 'constructively critical' element of its passenger base - a forum that will focus on more strategic, generic issues and augment the feedback obtained from passenger complaints and 'meet the manager' sessions.
- 7.3** Information provision during unplanned disruption. The incoming ICEC franchise must work to improve the flow of information to passengers at times of unplanned disruption. Passenger Focus summarises the challenges for ICEC, and industry as a whole, as follows:
- the delivery of consistent passenger-facing messages to those not yet at a station, whether through its website, the National Rail Enquiries (NRES) website, NRES call centres, TrainTracker, TrainTracker Text and the broadcast media
  - the delivery of accurate, consistent information to passengers waiting at stations, whether through use of Public Address (P.A.) systems, Customer Information Systems (CIS) screen or face-to-face contact with staff members
  - the delivery of accurate, consistent information to passengers onboard trains that will be diverted, terminated short of destination or are/will be significantly delayed.
- 7.4** Customer relations. The ITT should require bidders to present proposals to deliver their customer relations activities in a truly customer-focused way. GNER has a reputation for inflexibility when dealing with passenger complaints. We believe that bidders should be asked to demonstrate how their approach will be consistent with:
- saying sorry when something has gone wrong
  - offering reasonable redress
  - using feedback to prevent a repetition.
- 7.5** Small scale improvements. The franchise should be structured to give incentives to the operator to progress small scale improvements/investments in its business without the need for complex discussions with DfT about variations to the contract.

## Other

### Train and station presentation

Evidence suggests that Service Quality Standards (SQS) based systems, while good at measuring whether toilets have soap, paper etc., or whether information posters are in place on stations, do not adequately measure the overall quality, as experienced by a passenger. It is possible to see SQS scores above the minimum requirement at the same time that the NPS rating for that factor is showing significant dissatisfaction. We recommend that DfT considers how the achievement of increases in passenger satisfaction with train and station presentation can be contractualised.

### Financial stability

Finally, while services are continuing to run and passengers will no doubt experience a seamless transition to the new operator, the re-letting should not have been necessary and passengers will lose out as a consequence. For example, a number of station investment schemes will at the very least be delayed. Passenger Focus calls on DfT to ensure that the financial framework for the new franchise is sustainable throughout its term.

## Contact details

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# Appendix

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## Passenger Focus' policy on franchises – a detailed view

### 1. PERSONAL SECURITY

Passenger Focus accepts that the railway does not operate in a vacuum and suffers from the same problems of crime and disorder as the rest of society. Tackling issues of security on trains and at stations is, therefore, a wider social issue and not just a problem for the railway. Passenger Focus supports initiatives like the Secure Car Parks and Secure Stations Scheme and those which seek to set up local partnerships to tackle local problems. Schemes such as these should be specified in franchise agreements to ensure that they are taken forward.

Research by Crime Concern and Transport & Travel Research (1997)<sup>1</sup> suggests that the introduction of additional safety measures can lead to a significant increase in patronage. In their study, researchers asked respondents to estimate the number of additional trips they would make if further safety measures were introduced on their public transport systems. Using the estimates provided by those reporting a potential increased use of public transport, the researchers calculated a possible maximum increase in trips of 10.5%. The researchers also noted that a significant proportion of these additional trips would be taken in off-peak hours.

#### 1.1 Passenger security on trains

Passenger Focus wants to see train companies carrying out security audits on trains and putting resources into reducing crime or the fear of crime. DfT researched what made people feel safer when travelling<sup>2</sup>. Staff presence when waiting for a train was the first choice of passengers with 35% stating this would make them feel safer. On-train staff presence was also rated as important (27%) as passengers felt reassured by members of staff walking through carriages and checking tickets. Passenger Focus would like DfT to action their own research within their franchises.

#### 1.2 Passenger security at stations

The safety and security of passengers at stations is of paramount importance. If passengers feel unsafe at a station then they will seek alternative modes of transport to make their journey or not make the journey at all. The National Passenger Survey revealed that 59% of passengers were satisfied with security at stations<sup>3</sup>. This shows significant room for improvement to ensure that more passengers feel at ease when using stations.

##### 1.2.1 Staff at stations

Passenger Focus presses for stations to be staffed wherever possible. This is not only to provide ticket sales and direct revenue protection but also to provide a reassuring staff presence for both personal security and information and to act as a deterrent to crime. To achieve this, staff must be visible and conduct frequent patrols. They must be trained in the skills necessary to exercise authority when required and to provide reassurance through their presence, appearance and demeanour. They should be invested with the legal powers (e.g. under the police accreditation

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<sup>1</sup> Source [www.crimereduction.gov.uk](http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk)

<sup>2</sup> DfT's research 'People's perceptions of personal security and their concerns about public transport' was published in May 2004 [www.dft.gov.uk](http://www.dft.gov.uk)

<sup>3</sup> National Passenger Survey - Autumn 2006

scheme) necessary to allow them to discharge this role effectively. Passenger Focus' definition of full staffing covers all times when trains call at the station; the industry's definition is less rigid and obvious: "fully staffed" can refer to a situation where two shifts are covered but where early-morning and late-evening trains, and often all day at weekends, are uncovered.

### **1.2.2 Help Points**

Help Points, capable of both summoning assistance in emergencies and obtaining information at other times, should be prominently available, conveniently sited at stations and maintained in good order.

Passenger Focus' research into passenger perceptions of security<sup>4</sup> revealed that passengers did not understand what Help Points are actually for. Passengers cited the following reasons for the under use of Help Points:

- they are associated with problems/emergencies rather than providing information
- participants in the groups doubted that they would have information on specific trains
- they are considered as too remote to deliver real time information
- only one person can use them at a time.

If the usefulness of Help Points was better understood by passengers, then they could be more effective information system, especially at times of emergency.

### **1.2.3 CCTV**

CCTV systems should be monitored rather than just recorded and be of a standard capable of allowing the successful prosecution of offenders. We would also like to see CCTV systems at stations linked with systems in place outside the station so that any offenders can be tracked once they leave the station. Passenger Focus wants to see an industry-wide standardisation of CCTV systems.

While technology such as CCTV can be effective, Passenger Focus believes the best deterrent is the presence of a member of staff. We are of the view that staff need to be visible and to regularly patrol trains and stations.

### **1.2.4 New technology**

Passenger Focus is aware of the trial of new screening techniques on the National Rail and London Underground network – including the first use on the UK railway of body scanners using millimetre wave technology which enables security staff to check for objects concealed under clothing. Passenger Focus believes that the development of such equipment must be balanced against the need to ensure the smooth operation of the rail network. Airport style security screening - involving tight management of access and security screening – is simple not viable on the rail network. We welcome and await the outcome of this trial with interest.

## **2. PUNCTUALITY AND RELIABILITY**

Punctuality and reliability is considered the highest priority for passengers<sup>5</sup> and has been the main driver for passenger satisfaction in the National Passenger Survey since its inception.<sup>6</sup> This is the

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<sup>4</sup> Passenger Information: what, when, where and how? Published September 2004

<sup>5</sup> Passenger expectation and priorities for improvement – March 2005, Strategic Rail Authority

<sup>6</sup> National Passenger Survey, 1999 - 2006

case regardless of journey type (long-distance, London and Southeast and regional) and passenger type (commuter, business and leisure).

Major efforts have been made by the industry to improve punctuality and reliability in recent years and this is reflected in the results of the National Passenger Survey<sup>7</sup>. Even though improvement has been significant, the industry must focus on maintaining at least the current standard with the aim of achieving an even higher satisfaction level over time. We are concerned to ensure that:

- operators should be incentivised to continuously improve performance and penalised for declining performance
- there should be a swift escalatory procedure for consistently poor performance, with removal of the franchise being the ultimate penalty
- performance figures should be published by line of route to better represent the passenger experience on parts of the network. Passengers should have an indication of the likelihood that they will arrive at their destination on time. This information should be displayed at stations and irrespective of the operator's method of compensating passengers for delays
- delay should be thought of in terms of delay to passengers, not delay to trains. Timetables should be robust, and connections held where appropriate in order not to exacerbate delay to passengers
- short-forming of trains (i.e. providing fewer seats than specified under the train plan) should be considered as partial cancellation of a service.

### **3. PASSENGER'S CHARTER**

Passenger Focus has long been critical of the Passenger's Charter, both in its nationalised and privatised form. The concept of a Charter is good; it is proper that passengers are informed of their rights and of the obligations and aspirations of the train company. However, the central core of the Charter – the establishment of performance targets and compensation arrangements - is flawed.

#### **3.1 A common compensation regime**

Passenger Focus believes that DfT should seek to achieve common compensation arrangements across all train companies over time.

##### **3.1.1 Features of a common compensation regime**

Passenger Focus believes that all new compensation regimes should include the following:

- i. 50%\* refund after 30 minutes' delay (the point at which research conducted for the 2002 compensation working group suggested that non-commuter passengers expect to receive compensation)
- ii. 100%\* refund after 60 minutes' delay
- iii. Passengers should have the choice of taking compensation in cash or National Rail vouchers
- iv. Applicable to holders of any valid ticket, irrespective of type (i.e. including season ticket holders and irrespective of where the ticket was bought)
- v. No exclusions, i.e. entitlement applies irrespective of the cause of delay
- vi. Postage-free claim cards should be made available to passengers
- vii. There should be a proactive approach to increasing passenger awareness of their entitlement.

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<sup>7</sup> 79% of passengers were satisfied with punctuality and reliability – National Passenger Survey Spring 2006

*\* i.e. 50%/100% of the cost of a single ticket, or 50%/100% of the cost of either portion of a return ticket, or 50%/100% of the 'price per day' of a season ticket*

### **3.2 Season ticket holders**

Passenger Focus believes that, in addition to arrangements set out in section 3.1, holders of monthly and longer-validity season tickets should be entitled to compensation if they have experienced frequent delays over ten minutes' duration. This 'safety net' is needed because with a 30-minute trigger, season ticket holders are exposed to the risk that 29-minute delays in each direction every day attract no compensation at all. We believe ten minutes is the appropriate length of delay on which to base arrangements for season ticket holders: research undertaken for the 2002 compensation working group suggested that only 9% of commuters expect to receive compensation for delays of less than ten minutes. Passengers should have the choice of accepting compensation in cash or National Rail vouchers and irrespective of whether they are renewing their season ticket.

We wish to work with DfT and the industry on details to ensure that there is a fit for purpose mechanism to compensate holders of monthly and longer-validity season tickets for cumulative delays under 30 minutes. For example, a means needs to be devised so a season ticket holder who uses a National Rail route suffering poor performance, but who has bought their ticket from another operator (e.g. London Underground Limited), is not disadvantaged.

We do not want further franchises to be awarded on the basis of a Passenger's Charter which is unacceptable to passengers. We hope therefore that DfT will incorporate the Passenger Focus policy set out above into its guidance to bidders for future franchises.

## **4. FARES**

Passenger Focus has maintained the following broad policies concerning fares over a number of years:

- many rail fares do not represent good value for money
- the fare structure is complex and confusing
- it is unfair for today's passengers to pay in advance for future investment
- the industry needs to exploit fares incentives to attract passengers to travel at times when there is greater capacity. However we oppose putting up fares to price off demand
- an affordable turn-up-and-go strategy must prevail, though pre-book low cost fares should be available to those whose journeys are flexible
- the industry must control its costs so that more is not passed on to the passenger in fares
- the industry must ensure it collects the revenue that is due to it.

In 2006 we undertook a programme of qualitative and quantitative research to explore passengers' attitudes to, and understanding of, the current fares structure. The results have reaffirmed our main position. However, the research highlighted other areas that warrant rail industry attention.

- Cost has deterred the majority of passengers from travelling by train at some point. The majority of these people travelled by car instead. Passenger Focus recommends that incentives such as Group Save and family Railcards should be better advertised to show rail as a viable alternative to the car.

- Season ticket holders and non-season ticket holders are not aware of the level of discount this ticket type brings. Many without railcards found the upfront cost prohibitive and could therefore not access the significant discounts of an annual season ticket. Passenger Focus recommends that operators should better advertise the 12-week discount of an annual season ticket, and should consider introducing direct debit payment schemes.
- The majority of passengers knew in advance that they would be making their current journey, yet more than half bought the ticket on the day. Nearly half of these might have booked in advance if they knew the ticket would be cheaper.
- The majority of passengers prefer to buy tickets face-to-face. Ticket machines are not trusted to provide the best ticket for the intended journey.
- Few are aware of how far in advance it is possible to book tickets, though the majority want a four to six week booking period.

#### **4.1 Fare increases**

We are not against using fares to help redistribute train travel – for instance, we support offering lower fares to passengers prepared to travel outside the main peaks. However, we are opposed to raising fares to price off demand in the peaks or to exploit a captive market. Hence we support continued regulation of the commuter market.

Passenger Focus' research shows approximately 40% of people felt they had some flexibility to change their travel patterns<sup>8</sup>. However, they were unlikely to change without a significant financial incentive to do so, and most would not do so regularly.<sup>9</sup> The converse is also likely to be true. If incentives to travel off-peak are removed, for example by putting in unreasonable restrictions on existing discounted tickets, more people are likely to travel in the peak leading to greater crowding.

Passenger Focus is against raising fares in advance to pay for improvements that some of today's passengers may never see; and once those improvements are made, we believe that any fare rises should be modest and spread over several years. However, where there are exceptional improvements, such as the provision of new high-speed routes, there may be a case for higher fares, as long as passengers retain the choice of lower fares on other routes.

Our research clearly shows that the cost of train tickets has acted as a barrier to train travel for leisure journeys. 70% of leisure respondents said they had decided not to travel by train because of the cost of the ticket at least once – 41% had made this choice a number of times. While the vast majority of business and leisure passengers in our research knew in advance that they would be making the journey we were asking them about, over half still waited until the day of travel to purchase their tickets<sup>10</sup>. While we support the availability of discounted advance purchase fares for those who have the flexibility to plan their journeys in advance, we are committed to an affordable turn-up-and-go railway for those who do not.

#### **4.2 Costs and revenue**

Passenger Focus wishes to see the industry continue to work on keeping its costs under control, to continue to grow the off-peak market through marketing initiatives, and to collect revenue owed to it through adequate retailing facilities and checking of tickets. Significant revenue is lost to the industry

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<sup>8</sup> Passenger requirements from rail fares – quantitative findings (Passenger Focus July 2006)

<sup>9</sup> Edge of Peak qualitative research (Passenger focus July 2006)

<sup>10</sup> Passenger requirements from rail fares quantitative findings (Passenger Focus 2006)

through ticketless travel. It is important that the train companies acknowledge the level of loss and make adequate provision for staffing and/or automatic ticket gates.

### **4.3 Other fare and retailing issues**

Passenger Focus would also like the DfT and train companies to consider the following:

- There are many people who work part-time and travel three days a week. It does not pay generally to buy a weekly season and so three daily tickets must be bought. This, in turn, helps to clog up ticket queues. Passenger Focus' research shows that 29% of regular commuters travelled using daily tickets. Of these, almost 60% cite irregular travel patterns as the reason. There was strong support for a carnet-style product. A carnet-style ticket system would allow advance purchase of batches of reduced price tickets, reducing queuing times.
- Smart ticketing technology would allow flexibility and innovation in the fares structure. It would reduce queuing times for passengers and transaction time for train companies, which, as with carnets, should allow the companies to pass reduced ticketing costs on to passengers in the form of discounted fares. Smart technology raises the possibility of integration with London's fares and ticketing system.
- Discount fares for students aged 16-18 in full-time education. Currently sixth form and sixth form college students find themselves suddenly having to pay full fare rather than the half-fare child rate available up to this point, yet they are not considered self-supporting and eligible for student loans.
- Better marketing of Rail Rover tickets.
- Cut-price ticket experiments on certain routes to attract people onto rail.
- The introduction of a national Railcard offering a reduction on off-peak travel across the rail network.
- Consistent application of restrictions on all ticket types.

## **5. STATION STANDARDS**

Stations are the gateway to the rail network for all passengers – and many passengers are dissatisfied with the current state of stations. Despite some of the high-profile major station makeovers in recent years and the modernisation of some other more humble locations, stations still have much catching up to do after decades of under-investment when almost all available funding went into keeping the trains running.

Passenger Focus expects stations to be welcoming and convenient, providing a suitable and pleasant gateway to the railway and to the town/place of destination. They have for too long been the Cinderella of the network, with vital refurbishment funding held back during lean years. There is a considerable backlog of neglect to rectify to bring stations' fabric and facilities up to passengers' expectations and to make them more accessible.

### **5.1 What passengers want from stations**

In June 2005, Passenger Focus commissioned some qualitative research to find out what passengers want from stations<sup>11</sup>. The research highlighted some what passengers see as priorities at stations

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<sup>11</sup> What passengers want from stations – Rail Passengers Council, June 2005

and this differed depending on the type of station. However, the basic needs of passengers highlighted in the report were as follows:

- Passengers need to be able to find the station and find their way around the station
- They need to be able to get to the station and their platform
- They need to feel safe
- They need adequate light and shelter.

Not all stations are meeting these basic needs; poor signage is a major failing.

Differences between passengers' preferences emerge once the basic needs have been addressed. Needs are conditioned by factors such as the time of day when the station is used, the length of time the passenger waits and how familiar passengers are with the journey.

Clear distinctions are also made between smaller and larger stations. There is a good deal of pragmatism about the facilities at small stations; providing real-time information, ticket machines and improved waiting accommodation were the major preferences for medium-sized stations. At the larger stations, there is a good deal more concern about comfort and the availability of catering, amongst other extended facilities.

The table shows station facilities and features based on passengers' overall needs and expectations. Columns 1 and 2 apply to all passenger types and all stations. An asterisk [\*] indicates features which are more relevant to regular leisure or business travellers than to daily commuters.

<b>Basic features</b>	<b>Universal features</b>	<b>Comfort features</b>	<b>Attractor features</b>	<b>Special features</b>
<i>Essential for all stations</i>	<i>Expected by passengers at all stations</i>	<i>Desired at all stations</i>	<i>Attracting passengers to busier stations</i>	<i>Appropriate to specific locations</i>
Reasonably safe and secure	Ramps	Bus stop	Travel info in the waiting area*	Airport-type waiting area
Well lit	Car parking	Taxi rank	Range of shops*	TV with news
Basic shelter and seating	Signs to the trains	Cycle racks	Cash point	Office facilities
Basic signage	Real-time info screens	Signs to facilities*	Nappy-changing facilities*	Luggage trolleys*
	Real-time PA	Station maps*, visual and tactile	Lifts*	
	Timetables	Newsagent*		
	Clocks	Kiosk		
	CCTV	Café*		
	Staff	Vending machine		
	Public telephone	Help point		
	Ticket machines	Booking office		
		Heated waiting room		
		Disabled-access Toilets*		
		Automatic doors*		

Passengers with disabilities expressed additional needs to make them more confident in using stations alone or in using stations unknown to them if staff will be on hand to assist. Concern was recorded about the failure of staff to turn up, even when assistance had been booked.

People with visual impairments and non-wheelchair users found that minor changes, such as the highlighting of the edges of steps, better handrails on staircases and automatic doors could greatly improve their mobility. The same applies to some elderly passengers, those with luggage or with prams and children.

Information provision at smaller stations was found to be poor, regardless of the passenger's abilities or disabilities. Real-time information – both aural and visual - benefits everyone.

## **5.2 Further requirements at stations**

Further to the requirements outlined in 5.1, Passenger Focus would also like to see the following commitments within a franchise:

- commitments to make stations as accessible as possible for all users
- commitment to an audit of staffing requirements for all stations with a view to increasing staff numbers, or longer staffing periods, at a number of stations, even if only on an experimental basis
- commitment to improve integration of other services at the station (see section on integrated transport for more details)
- commitment to the Secure Station and Secure Car Park award schemes
- easy-to-use ticket machines capable of accepting credit/debit cards as this will help to reduce ticket queues.

## **5.3 Information at stations**

Passenger Focus places great importance on the provision of accurate, impartial and timely information, especially in times of disruption. In June 2005 Passenger Focus commissioned a major piece of research into information provision. The report, *'Passenger information: What, When, Where and How'*, set out passenger preferences and perceptions before and during their journey. The following summary suggests actions from passengers to help improve station information:

- use visual and audio displays as complementary sources
- precede time-sensitive audio messages with a distinctive 'beep'
- conduct visibility audits for displays and define minimum standards
- more electronic A to Z displays at major/busy stations
- earlier advertising of departure platform
- more TV displays in waiting areas
- raise awareness of Help Point as information sources
- develop standards for equipment in relation to station types.

As a result of the report, ATOC set up a passenger information working group to consider how the recommendations might be implemented.

## **5.4 Upkeep of stations**

Cleanliness is not just governed by contractual agreements but also by legislation. The 1991 Environmental Protection Act places certain obligations on the industry. Further details can be found

in ‘*Good Riddance to Bad Rubbish*’ - produced by London TravelWatch on behalf of the former RPC network, which provides guidance on how get reluctant operators to clear rubbish from stations (and linesides) within the terms of the Act.

### **5.5 Retailing at stations**

Retailers offering catering and other sundry goods on stations offer a double or even treble advantage: they provide facilities for passengers, and additional revenue accrues from the rents for their premises. Such retail units often provide the only staffed presence on some stations after booking offices close. In some minor station locations, retail premises are taking on the role of booking offices.

### **5.6 Step free access at stations**

Where more than one platform is in public use, a safe means of crossing the lines is required. This usually involves a footbridge or subway. In the absence of step-free access, lifts to/from ground level or negotiable ramps should be provided. At smaller stations, passengers may be required to cross the railway lines at ground level. Such crossings may be accessible to wheelchair users only at times when the station is staffed.

## **6. INTEGRATED TRANSPORT**

Passenger Focus is committed to promoting the development of an integrated transport system. Physical integration is just a part of the broader integration issue, which should include ensuring that transport policy is better linked with wider Government objectives for economic prosperity, environmental protection, health and social inclusion.

### **6.1 Integration of existing rail companies**

Existing services should operate as a network. Co-ordination and co-operation should extend to timetables and connections. For example, Passenger Focus believes that there should be some incentive to hold connecting services in many circumstances - as opposed to what would appear at present to be disincentives via the performance regime.

### **6.2 Integration of modes of transport**

Passengers’ journeys do not usually start and end at a railway station. Passengers arrive at the station and leave from it to their final destination in a number of ways. Railway stations are de facto modal hubs and the rail industry has a part to play in ensuring ease of interchange between modes through physical environment, information, timetabling and through ticketing.

### **6.3 Buses**

Bus travel offers perhaps the greatest opportunity for interchange improvement. There is great scope for tying rail and bus timetables into a tighter, mutually supportive arrangement, especially given the extension Plus+Bus scheme. Train companies should encourage as far as possible improved co-ordination of bus and rail timetables. Where the provider of rail and bus services is the same it is inexcusable if this does not happen. However, joined up thinking should be encouraged between all operators using a station.

There also needs to be a focus on the interchange facilities at stations. For instance, are bus stops provided and are they situated in the optimum position, are the walking routes from the bus stop to the railway station clearly signed, and is the link secure and well lit?

Other possible bus/rail integration improvements include:

- working with bus companies or local authorities to create an extra stop where a bus passes a train station, or to alter routes slightly to ensure buses pass railway stations
- working with bus companies or local authorities to alter existing schedules to help buses meet certain morning and evening peak hour trains (including some guaranteed connections)
- displaying bus information at rail stations and train information at certain bus stops/stations
- combined rail/bus tickets or preferably, travelcard schemes
- examining the potential of park and ride schemes
- creation of bus links between rail-heads to complement the network
- improved facilities for connection between train and bus (e.g. better signing, provision of waiting rooms).

## **6.4 Cars/motorbikes**

It is a fact that for many rail passengers, driving to the station remains the most viable and practical means of travel. The increasing length of a working day and the shift towards a '24-7' week means that it is hard to provide a comprehensive rail-bus service that meets the needs of commuters and/or weekend travellers. Fears over personal security also inhibit the use of alternative transport or walking. For these reasons, car parking facilities at stations remain important.

Passenger Focus has long maintained that the provision of car parking at railway stations should be seen as a separate issue in its own right and not part of wider discussions on car parking in general. In many ways a railway station car park is the original 'park and ride' scheme and it is important that it is acknowledged as such.

### **6.4.1 Access and signage**

It is important that car parks are well signed and easily accessible. The road entrance to every station to ensure signing and access is clear. Improved signage is a low-cost response to a common problem.

### **6.4.2 Security**

Car crime is at the forefront of a driver's mind when parking a car and the risk of theft or break-in deters some people from currently using station car parks. A station car-park should be organised in a way that generates a feeling of security and confidence in the traveller. Parking areas must be well lit and should have highly-visible CCTV systems. A dialogue between train company, local authorities, police and community safety partnerships should be established in order to reassure passengers.

### **6.4.3 Increasing parking spaces**

Scope for enlarging existing car parks should be investigated. There is a need to encourage off-peak travel when there is often ample train capacity, but when many car parks are full by 08.00. Passenger Focus would like train companies to carry out an audit of car park spaces and demand (to be repeated periodically to capture changes in demand throughout the life of the franchise) and then provide additional spaces where required and where practicable.

It is important that the issues raised in recent passenger focus research about car park access to stations are fully considered in all new franchises.

Consideration ought also be given to multi-storey car-parking facilities at stations (even if on a pilot basis) for stations where the audit shows a need for additional spaces and where availability of land makes this practicable; and also for new 'parkway' stations whose primary aim is to absorb traffic from the road.

It is important to ensure that parking spaces at stations are solely for rail passengers rather than town centre visitors. This may become a particular issue if local authorities use road pricing and parking measures to reduce car use. We understand that car parking revenue is important to individual train operators. However, if spaces are being filled by non-rail passengers, then train companies are not addressing the revenue potential that could be made from rail passengers who pay for parking **and** a rail fare. In such cases Passenger Focus favours the type of scheme whereby higher car park prices can be redeemed against the cost of the rail ticket.

## **6.5 Taxis**

Taxis provide important links to and from the railway station, and there should be co-ordination between train companies and taxi firms. This includes discussions with taxis firms when there are proposals for change at stations.

The following are essential for providing effective interchange between taxis and the rail network:

- good signage to the taxi rank
- well marked-out taxi rank
- drop-down kerbs
- list of tariffs for regularly made journeys
- contact details for local taxi firms (for when no taxis are readily available)
- greater publicity for licensed taxi services at stations
- accreditation scheme to give passengers a greater feeling of personal security
- possible discount on production of a valid train ticket
- wheelchair accessible taxis. When taxis are not available, procedures need to be put in place between the station and the taxi rank so that station staff can call for taxis
- covered waiting areas.

## **6.6 Bicycles**

Rail should be seen as the core of an integrated transport system and cycling has to play a part within this system. The SRA's Cycling Policy consultation document stated that only 2% of passengers used bicycles to access stations. This low figure suggests that there is a significant potential for growth.

Cycling to the station helps to reduce road congestion, improves health and is a totally self reliant form of transport. However, to convince people to bicycle, adequate provisions need to be provided at stations and on the approach to stations.

### **6.6.1 Bicycles on trains**

Passenger Focus acknowledges the specific issues of overcrowding associated with carrying bicycles on trains. There are some occasions when bicycles that are stowed by doors do have an impact on

boarding and alighting. However, delays could be reduced by clearly marking carriages (where feasible) and training platform staff to identify and inform where bicycle spaces are located.

Overall, however, the Passenger Focus would agree that there should be no obligation on TOCs to carry bicycles at peak times. Bicycle carriage times determined according to local conditions and demand. However, the lack of such an obligation means that greater efforts must be made elsewhere to reduce the degree of inconvenience to the cycling commuter - for instance, making the provision of adequate bicycle parking compulsory in areas where a peak-time ban is applied.

We recognise the problems faced by the train companies with regards to rolling stock design/space at stations etc, but also the potential hardship for cyclists.

To help alleviate these problems we advocate:

- better bicycle parking and secure facilities at stations – possible inclusion of bicycle lockers
- bicycle-friendly station – provision of ramps, lifts etc
- information – when can bicycles be carried on trains
- better access to stations – including bicycle paths etc
- bicycle lockers
- bicycle hire schemes so that cycling commuters are able to have a bicycle at both the originating and destination stations
- support and encouragement for the use of folding bikes. These can be carried as hand luggage free of charge
- the provision of a flexible space area that has tip-up seats which can be used as either a storage area or a seating area. While this won't remove the conflict in the peak from people wanting to use seats with those wanting to store bikes, it would at least provide more space for bikes in the off-peak and at weekends
- the possibility of introducing free insurance deals for bikes left at stations.

## 6.7 Walking

Train operating companies should work closely with local authorities to ensure that the best possible provisions are in place for pedestrians. Possible barriers to walking to the station include the following:

- the way-marked route to the station may be indirect and therefore unnecessarily long
- walking routes may be poorly maintained
- there could be no pathways to the station
- no crossing provisions on major roads
- the routes could be seen as insecure – poor lighting, secluded etc.
- poor or misleading sign posting
- physical barriers including roadside railings, hedges, etc.

However, the major hurdle in encouraging people to walk to the station is the perception of security as illustrated by the following statement:

*“After dark, 51% of women and 20% of men feel unsafe walking from home to the station, and 61% of women and 26% of men feel unsafe walking from the station to home.”*

**Department for Transport, 2003<sup>12</sup>**

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<sup>12</sup> DfT's research 'People's perceptions of personal security and their concerns about public transport' was published in May 2004 [www.dft.gov.uk](http://www.dft.gov.uk)

Train companies should work with local authorities, the British Transport Police and the local police force to make the station and the surrounding areas secure for passengers.

## **7. ACCESSIBILITY**

Passenger Focus's definition of 'accessibility' covers everyone's ability to use the network with ease. All passengers at some time find themselves encumbered: for instance because of a permanent physical or mental impairment, a temporary impairment (e.g. broken leg), by being accompanied by young children, or simply through carrying luggage. All these factors are an impediment to an easy journey. It is the natural aspiration of all disabled people to travel without assistance.

Improving access and facilities for disabled people will benefit not only those with disabilities but also families with young children and older people with mobility problems. Much of the problem lies in stations that were simply not built with the disabled people in mind and the scale of the problem is such that it may take years to improve access radically and therefore requires long-term commitment.

The EU Technical Specification for Interoperability (TSI) (Subsystem Conventional Rail infrastructure and rolling stock) will probably become law in 2007. This considerably widens the definition of 'passengers with reduced mobility' and we encourage train companies to make suitable provisions to encompass their new legal requirements under this new legislation.

The minimum aim must be compliance with the statutory obligations laid down in the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) with any new works taking place being done in accordance with the Train and Station Services for Disabled Passengers Code of Practice due for update by the DfT.

### **7.1 Accessible stations**

Attention must be focused on enhancing principal stations, reflecting usage levels, by providing ramps and lifts. A significant proportion, however, must be used to ensure a reasonable geographic spread of accessible stations, especially interchanges and those serving hospitals or special schools etc. It may be sensible to give priority to stations served by accessible buses and which have good parking for passengers with disabilities.

This, however, is merely the starting point. In the longer term, as the number of passengers with disabilities using the railways increases, the number of locations and range of facilities available to enhance accessibility must grow likewise. Passenger Focus recognises the inheritance of a Victorian station infrastructure and welcomes the advances in making stations more accessible, especially the provision of step-free access, which eases the going for everyone.

In the meantime Passenger Focus supports the 'hub and spoke' approach: step-free access to be provided at major and regionally important stations with taxi connections, provided at the train company's expense, to and from such places.

### **7.2 Other general accessibility aspirations**

Other passenger benefits that should be included in renegotiated franchises include:

- i. Assisted Passenger Reservation System upgrade**
  - decentralise the process within owning groups

- accelerate the speed of booking
  - reduce or abolish the requirement to give notice in the case of turn-up-and-go traffic. The facility should be retained for those passengers who can and wish to book in advance
  - ensure that the passenger's name and telephone number is included in all communications involving assistance
  - allow online bookings
  - ensure that the details are passed on to-train staff (particularly where staffed stations are concerned)
  - freephone bookings or at least 0845 lo-call numbers given the length of calls make bookings
  - ensure that all operators call passengers after the journey has been made to verify that booked assistance was provided
  - establish a database of passenger details to reduce likelihood of errors made in booking; especially useful for regular journeys.
- ii. Ensure that where no dedicated wheelchair spaces are provided, train companies designate a regular location to convey wheelchairs, ensuring ease of location at detraining point and proximity of the passenger to on-train staff and call to aide alarms.
  - iii. Spread best practice concerning safety notices and other important literature - Braille, large-print formats etc.
  - iv. Ensure that each train company has a suitable handbook for its staff.
  - v. Investigate staff training - level, amount, frequency, suitability etc.
  - vi. Extension of Describe Online and tactile diagramming to larger stations and major interchanges, at least.
  - vii. Ensure that each train company's database of station details is correct and kept up-to-date - compare with Step-free Map.
  - viii. Ensure that train companies are aware of the need to make changes to certain aspects of rolling stock to enhance accessibility and/or improve general usability at refurbishment stage.
  - ix. Persuade train companies that multi-lingual staff, happy to converse in other languages with passengers, should wear badges to that effect.
  - x. Ensure that Priority Seating areas are much more visibly labelled and that the purpose of such seats is much more clearly displayed. Better policing of occupancy would be of benefit on staffed trains.
  - xi. A 'Regular Disabled Traveller' scheme whereby detailed records are kept of regular travellers so that details do not have to be repeated each time assistance is required.
  - xii. Where wheelchair-accessible toilets are provided these are to include baby-changing facilities as well at a height suitable for wheelchair-users.
  - xiii. Portable ramps for wheelchairs to be carried on all trains giving physical access to more unmanned stations.
  - xiv. Bus replacement services to be capable of carrying wheelchair using and mobility impaired passengers or special alternative arrangements to be made for such passengers.
  - xv. Commitment to good quality staff disability awareness training covering the full range of disabilities.
  - xvi. Consultation with groups representing disabled people on other needs.

### **7.3 Disabled People's Protection Policies**

When drafting its DPPP each operator must consider the DfT's DPPP Guidance, which sets out the framework within which train/station operators are encouraged to comply.

Each DPPP typically features subjects such as:

- train companies must provide a Statement of Policy setting out exactly what they are going to do and how
- station list, specifying the features and facilities of each station and its ease of access to passengers with disabilities
- train types and the routes on which they operate
- using trains and stations
- how to arrange assistance
- features and facilities in place on trains and at stations for customers with disabilities
- arrangements for planned and non-planned service disruption.

Franchisees are obliged under the terms of licence to consult with Passenger Focus on their DPPP. Passenger Focus would expect the new DPPP to be no less robust than the previous policy. The new DPPP should incorporate best practice from other train companies' policies and include enhancements in terms of new technologies. Where passengers are transferring from one service to another, train companies must work together to ensure that disabled passengers can move between companies seamlessly.

## **8. SERVICE PATTERNS**

### **8.1 General service patterns**

- Ensure current stations continue to be served adequately; especially stops serving educational establishments (including colleges/universities), hospitals, and tourist destinations and to aid social inclusion where no alternative public transport exists.
- Where possible there should be late evening services from major towns and cities on each main route.
- Sundays: train companies to review service levels with Passenger Focus and other stakeholders, to ensure changing work/shopping demand patterns are met.
- Bank Holidays: train companies to co-ordinate timetables and ensure cross-operator connections are maintained. Ideally, each train company to adopt the same timetable principles, including those days between Christmas and New Year, to ensure passenger confusion is avoided.
- The need to work with local authorities, police and other transport operators to cater for festivals/special events.
- Where possible, any services going to and from airports meet the first and last flights scheduled.

### **8.2 Journey times**

- Journey times not to be significantly extended without demonstrable and identifiable overall benefit to passengers from doing so.
- The number of services disrupted by engineering possessions should be reduced; where passengers do suffer disruption and longer journey times they should be automatically compensated.
- The railway industry should always seek a rail alternative/diversionary route in preference to bus substitution, at times of disruption/line closure for maintenance.
- Incident recovery management procedures need to be refined to minimise passenger delay, without compromising safety; a target of less than one hour should be adopted.

### 8.3 Connections policy

- Train companies should protect advertised/recognised connections between their own services and competitors', using greater discretion locally as necessary. This may require reasonable adjustment to the 'performance regime'.
- The decision to hold a connection, or otherwise, MUST take into account the service frequency, e.g. on a Sunday with an hourly frequency it is important to hold connections for longer.
- Connections should be guaranteed for the 'last train of the day' and on branch lines where the outgoing train's main purpose is to pick up passengers from the main line.

### 8.4 Timetable publications

- All timetables (both pocket-sized and derivatives) should include services of all operators for any joint area covered.
- Timetables should also indicate where disabled access is available by use of the wheelchair symbol.
- The National Rail timetable (and derivative booklets) should also show details of local bus/coach links.

### 8.5 Bus replacement services

- Ensure that late-evening services run as trains rather than substitute buses as a priority, through Network Rail streamlining maintenance procedures.
- Dedicated rail-bus services must be held for an agreed period, to meet late-running train connections or clearly advised/organised alternatives should be provided.

## 9. POSSESSIONS POLICY

We understand that engineering work is a necessity if the rail industry is to deliver its promise of a safe, reliable and efficient rail network. The consequence, though, is disruption to services and inconvenience for passengers. The crux of the issue therefore is achieving a balance between engineering efficiency and passenger requirements.

Decisions on a future possessions strategy cannot be based simply on cost and engineering convenience, important as they undoubtedly are, but must be linked back to the ultimate customer – the passenger. For instance, a policy of decimating evening services may make routine maintenance work more efficient and cheaper but would not be acceptable to passengers.

RPC was concerned that little research had been conducted to determine how engineering work could be planned and managed to cause minimal disruption to passengers. Hence, together with Network Rail, the Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC) and the Rail Safety and Standards Board (RSSB), we commissioned some research into passengers' views. The report discusses what the rail industry could do when planning, managing or executing engineering work, to lessen the effects of disruption to passengers. Key findings of the research were:

- Passengers were more tolerant of planned works that will deliver long-term improvements than unplanned 'patch-up jobs.' Following disruption to services, passengers expect to be shown the benefit of the improvements (e.g. in terms of new platforms or signals or details of how punctuality or reliability has improved). One respondent commented: "They do engineering works all the time

but it makes no difference." In short, passengers are willing to accept periods of disruption if they can be sure they will reap the benefits of an improved rail network afterwards.

- Although 'major' disruptions are rated as inconvenient, there was evidence to suggest that passengers would prefer work to be over as quickly as possible. If notified enough in advance, many passengers can plan around longer blockades or weekend closures – although for commuters the absence of a viable alternative is a real issue.
- Passengers want to make informed choices about their travel plans. Information about alternative arrangements, length of disruption and increased journey time must be available well in advance. The provision and enforcement of T-12 is essential if this is to be met.

The key to all three points is good information – it is essential to tell people: what the work is going to deliver; how to plan alternative journeys in advance and/or on the day; and then explain what has been achieved (e.g. "for this disruption you have now got x").

There is also a need to ensure that possessions are co-ordinated across regions so that adequate diversionary routes are available – passengers would generally rather stay on the train for longer than change to buses.

## **10. MANAGEMENT AND STAFF RELATIONS**

A good relationship between management and staff is the key to a successful service. Poor relationships can have a direct impact upon the travelling public. If communications break down, passengers face possible strike action causing severe disruption to their services. We therefore would like to see a commitment to developing a partnership approach with unions. Dispute resolutions agreements need to be implemented by the incoming TOCs, in co-operation with the unions, to avoid strike action.

Significant investment in staff training should be a condition of the new franchise agreement. A new franchise is an opportunity to develop cultural change to a more passenger focussed organisation that places emphasis on improving overall passenger satisfaction services and improving performance.



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