

Independent national passenger watchdog

# Passenger Voice Rail



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London

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## Passengers spared many ticket-office opening hour cuts

Passenger Focus has declared the Government's decision to keep South West Train's (SWT) ticket offices open a win for many passengers. However, it acknowledged cuts were going to happen across SWT's network of ticket offices which many passengers would find inconvenient and worrying.

The independent passenger watchdog objected to changes to SWT ticket office opening hours at Barnes, Berylands, Christchurch, Farncombe,

Strawberry Hill and Virginia Water as more than 12 tickets are sold an hour. The Secretary of State for Transport has now rejected many of SWT proposals, forcing the company to open offices longer and maintain some Sunday trading.

Analysis shows that the Government has significantly reduced the number of hours that SWT is permitted to close its outlets. On the other hand, Passenger Focus said it was disappointed for those

passengers that will be affected by reduced opening hours, with ticket offices at some stations closing for the entire weekend and early in the afternoon during weekdays. The train company is able to make these changes because fewer than 12 tickets are sold an hour.

Jocelyn Pearson, Passenger Focus manager, said: "Passengers tell us staff at the station is crucial. While many passengers like using ticket machines, our research found

many passengers prefer to queue to speak to staff to ensure they're buying the right ticket for their journey. Ticket-vending machines are important, but while they don't offer all ticket types, nor clearly display ticket restrictions or provide passengers with advice to ensure they are buying the cheapest fares, there will be a need for ticket office staff. We welcome the Government's careful consideration of passengers' concerns and needs when making this very important decision."



## Three stations under review

Passenger Focus, with London TravelWatch, has been exploring how passengers feel about Clapham Junction, Barking and Luton stations with a view to discovering how they might better serve the needs of passengers. The research looked specifically at station access, information, station amenities, safety and security as well as retail outlets.

At Clapham Junction, passengers using South West Trains, Southern or London Overground services to/from the station told the watchdogs their priorities for improvement were reducing congestion in the subway, real-time information, toilet facilities, having canopies over the platforms and better information on platforms.

c2c, London Overground and London Underground passengers using Barking station said their top priorities for improvement were security, station staff, real-time information, toilet facilities and less congestion at ticket gates.

Finally, East Midlands Trains and First Capital Connect passengers using Luton Station said their top five priorities were improvements to the footway linking the town centre to the station, the need for better lighting, waiting rooms, more station staff and toilets.

Passenger Focus and London TravelWatch are now working with the industry to see how the passenger research can feed into plans for station improvements. What is good news is that South West Trains and Network Rail plan to fund £6m of improvements to Clapham Junction Station which will commence during 2011/12. These works will address passengers' key priorities for improvement at the station.

Similarly, Passenger Focus is encouraged that First Capital Connect and Network Rail are working to identify future improvements to Luton Station. Passenger Focus and London TravelWatch will continue to ensure that passenger priorities are considered within the development of these schemes.

# Innovative approach benefits passengers

Passenger Focus has congratulated Southern Railway for its pioneering efforts in helping passengers in need of a seat on busy trains.

Southern Railway won the Putting Passengers First accolade at the National Rail Awards 2010 for its Priority Seat Card initiative. Passenger Focus said the award recognised Southern's efforts to help passengers with a hidden disability, those over 65 and pregnant women to identify their need for a seat to other passengers in a respectful and dignified way.

Passenger Focus supports the Putting Passenger First award and recognised the initiative as a perfect example of a train company talking with its passengers, listening to their suggestions and responding to passengers' needs.

Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief executive and chair of the judging panel for this award, said: "Southern Railway's scheme takes away what can be an awkward situation for both the passenger who needs the seat and the passenger confronted. We encourage other train companies to learn from Southern's innovative approach to helping its passengers."



## Cycling to the station

Passenger Focus is pleased to see continued progress by the industry on improving cycle facilities at Britain's stations.

Passenger Focus is part of the Cycle and Rail Task Force, which was set up to improve bike and rail integration. It includes representatives from the Association of Train Operating Companies, Cycling England, government and Network Rail and the group is responsible for helping the delivery of a £14 million improvement package of cycle facilities at stations.

Currently, Merseyrail, Northern, South West Trains and Virgin are working on improving their cycle facilities as part of a flagship 'Bike 'n' Ride' scheme. Southern has also outlined its plans to upgrade cycling facilities as part of its station travel plans.

Passenger Focus feels that cycling to the station helps reduce road congestion, improves health and is a totally self-reliant form of transport. However, to convince people to cycle, sufficient and secure storage facilities must be provided at the station. This is especially important while trains are overcrowded and passengers cannot take their bike on the train.



Photo courtesy of Southern Railway

## c2c takes top London award



Passenger Focus has congratulated c2c on its efforts in turning around rail services provided to passengers commuting from the East of England to London.

Thanks to investment and a focus on punctuality, the train company this year was successful in taking the London Commuter Operations accolade at this year's National Rail Awards. This accolade finally buries memories of when this service was known as the 'misery line'.

Passenger Focus's National Passenger Survey shows that 91% of passengers are satisfied with the train company's overall performance and 94% satisfied with the punctuality and reliability of trains.

Tunde Olatunji, Passenger Focus manager, commented: "This award is warranted as passengers consistently tell us c2c does well in meeting overall satisfaction. The challenge now is to continue to maintain the very high standards that passengers have come to expect from c2c."

### News roundup

#### New trains should improve rail journeys

Passenger Focus is pleased to see good progress is being made on new trains for Stansted Express and West Anglia services.

After visiting Bombardier's workshops in Derby, Guy Dangerfield, Passenger Focus manager, said: "These trains will transform passengers' experience on the West Anglia route. They give a real opportunity to make a step-change in passenger satisfaction with information provided and Passenger Focus is in discussion with National Express East Anglia."

#### Avoiding website errors

When Virgin redesigned its website in 2009, it did not clearly show restrictions on tickets. Because peak and off-peak services start and end at different times across Virgin services, it is all too easy for passengers to make a mistake in booking a ticket.

Passenger Focus reviewed the website with Virgin and asked them to make such restrictions clear when the mouse cursor hovers over a ticket option. By installing these warnings, Virgin has minimised the risk of passengers finding they have bought the wrong ticket for their journey. Passenger Focus is continuing its work with Virgin to address other online concerns.