



Luton station – What passengers want

November 2010

Management summary

Passenger Focus is the independent passenger watchdog, set up by the government to get the best deal for passengers. London TravelWatch is the official watchdog organisation representing the interests of transport users in and around the capital.

Passenger Focus and London TravelWatch have been working closely with the rail industry in order to understand how Luton station might better serve the needs of passengers and commissioned BRDC Continental to carry out research in order to establish passenger satisfaction with 5 key areas highlighted below and passenger priorities for improvement at the station.

There were four key objectives for this research:

- 1) To understand current passenger satisfaction with Luton station.
- 2) To identify the passenger priorities for improvement at Luton station.
- 3) To determine whether there were any specific differences in the satisfaction/priorities for improvement between passengers using First Capital Connect and East Midlands Trains services to/from the station.
- 4) To undertake the research in such a way that the methodology could be used to assess the impact of any future station improvements on passenger satisfaction.

Key findings:

Passenger profile

- 66% of the passengers surveyed were commuters travelling, on average, 4 times per week. 27% of passengers were leisure passengers with the remainder travelling for business.
- 8% of passengers stated that they had a disability or long term illness. A specific consultation exercise was undertaken to seek the views of disabled passengers.

Access to and from Luton

- The main way passengers accessed Luton was either on foot (60%), by bus (13%) and car (13%).
- Passengers who accessed the station on foot were critical of the footbridge from the town centre and those arriving by bus felt the speed and frequency of the bus service needed the most improvement.
- There was some evidence that more passengers would like to use the bus to travel to/from the station however they felt that improvements to the frequency and routes

of the buses would be needed in order to encourage them to do this.

Passenger information

- 56% of passengers stated that they were satisfied with the information provision at Luton station.
- The key improvement passengers would like to see is to the real time information on the station (noted by 42% of passengers) and this scored significantly higher for passengers who were commuting (noted by 49% of passengers).
- Passengers travelling for leisure/business stated the need for improved information about buses was their highest priority (noted by 37% of leisure/business passengers).

Station amenities/key areas of the station

- Just under half of passengers (47%) expressed dissatisfaction with the station amenities. The key areas which passengers felt needed to be improved were the waiting/seating facilities and the availability of toilet facilities on the station.
- Passenger satisfaction with key passenger areas of the station (which included the main station entrances/exits, booking halls and walking routes around the station), was very low with only 22% of passengers stating they were satisfied.
- 70% of passengers noted the main station entrance required improvement with 68% of passengers wanting improvement to the booking hall. (Passengers were able to select more than one area for improvement)

Safety and security

- A third of passengers (33%) were satisfied with the levels of security on Luton station.
- The key area passengers wanted to be addressed is the visibility of station staff at night, which was the key priority for all groups of passenger. Particular comments were made about beggars being an issue at the station.

Retail outlets

- Passengers were asked about the retail facilities they wanted to see at Luton, regardless of whether those facilities exist. Cash machines and newsagents were the most requested outlets however passengers felt that addressing a number of other issues should take priority (see below).

Passenger priorities

Passengers were given a set of paired statements and asked to select the improvement they felt was most important. The greater the score, the more importance passengers place on the improvement.

Priorities for improvement arising from Stated Preference analysis

	Rank (all passengers)	Commuters	Other journey type
Walkway linking the twin centre to the station	1	1	1
Lighting throughout the station	2	2	2
Waiting rooms	3	3	4
More station staff	4	5	3
Toilets	5	7	5
Real time information	6	4	=9
Canopies covering the whole length of the platform	7	6	=9
Step free access from the booking office to the platform	8	8	6
Ticket selling facilities (ticket office and machines)	9	9	7
Bus links	10	10	8
Interchange facilities (e.g. bus stops/taxi ranks/drop off areas)	11	12	11
Car parking facilities	12	11	13
Interactive help points	13	13	14
Wayfinding and signage to the station	14	14	12

Base: All passengers 432

All groups of passengers highlighted the footbridge linking the town centre and station as the key priority for improvement at Luton.

First Capital Connect Passengers highlighted improvements to lighting and waiting rooms as their second and third highest priorities respectively, whilst East Midlands trains passengers wanted improvements to the waiting facilities and increased visibility of staff.

Research context and objectives

Passenger Focus is the independent passenger watchdog, set up by the government to get the best deal for passengers. London TravelWatch is the official watchdog organisation representing the interests of transport users in and around the capital.

In November 2009 the 'Better Rail Stations' report¹ highlighted a number of areas for the improvement of Britain's railway stations, including a recommendation that ten Category 'B' major interchanges, including Luton, required additional funding in order to bring them to the minimum station standards outlined in the report.

3.4 million passengers used Luton to start or end their journey in 2008/09².

Passenger Focus and London TravelWatch have been working closely with the rail industry in order to understand how Luton station might better serve the needs of passengers and commissioned BRDC Continental to carry out research in order to establish passenger satisfaction and priorities for improvement at the station.

The current economic climate makes it more important than ever that passenger priorities for improvement at the station are considered in the development of any schemes, in order to ensure that these address the primary concerns of those using the station.

There were four key objectives for this research:

- 1) To understand current passenger satisfaction with Luton station.
- 2) To identify the passenger priorities for improvement at Luton.
- 3) To determine whether there were any specific differences in the satisfaction/priorities for improvement between passengers using First Capital Connect and East Midlands Trains services to/from the station.
- 4) To undertake the research in such a way that the methodology could be used to assess the impact of any future station improvements on passenger satisfaction.

¹ Better Rail Stations : An independent review presented to Lord Adonis, Secretary of State for Transport – November 2009

² Office of the Rail Regulator – 2008/9 Station Usage Report.

Methodology and sampling

Passengers using Luton station were approached by a BDRC Continental interviewer at random and asked if they would fill in a self-completion questionnaire about the services and facilities provided at the station. To encourage participation, the interviewer explained the purpose of the survey and the importance of hearing their views.

Those that agreed were given a questionnaire to take away and complete, a pre paid envelope was also supplied to enable it to be returned to BDRC Continental for analysis. A full copy of the questionnaire is included in appendix 1.

All surveys at Luton were distributed between 15th March and 1st April 2010. To ensure a good spread of passengers the interviewers rotated between different platforms on the station and the shifts worked covered the following times of day:

- 06:00am to 10:00am
- 11:00am to 15:00pm
- 16:00pm to 20:00pm

On some occasions these shift times varied by up to 1 hour.

Shifts took place both during the week and at the weekend in order to ensure a range of passengers were able to complete the questionnaire.

Passengers were asked how satisfied they were with a range of facilities/services at Luton. The scale used to rate each facility/service was: Very satisfied; fairly satisfied; neither satisfied nor dissatisfied; fairly dissatisfied or; very dissatisfied. Passengers were then asked about the things they would most like to see improved about each facility/service.

In order to produce a list showing the highest overall priorities at Luton, a 'paired statements' question was asked. Working with First Capital Connect and Network Rail a total 14 attributes that might benefit passengers were identified. These were an amalgamation of previously identified passenger priorities for improvements at other stations³ and ideas for improvement being considered at Luton.

³Passenger Focus National Stations Improvement Programme research, December 2009.

Using the paired preference question technique, comparisons were made between each to identify which were the most important (see Q24 on the attached questionnaire). For each pair passengers had to say which one of the two was the improvement they would most like to see. This information was then analysed to provide an importance factor for each attribute.

In total 2,791 questionnaires were handed out at Luton and 432 (16%) fully completed questionnaires were returned for analysis. Figure 1 below shows the operator of the train services that passengers were using on the journey where they were handed the questionnaire. These percentages add up to over 100% due to the passengers who were changing trains and therefore used more than one operator.

Figure 1: Train company used to travel to/from Luton

	All
First Capital Connect	83%
East Midlands Trains	26%

Base: All passengers (432)

Passengers were also asked about the purpose of their journey. 66% of passengers were commuters, making an average of 4 journeys per week. 27% of passengers were leisure passengers with the main journey purpose being to visit friends and relatives (9%). The remaining 7% of passengers were travelling on company business.

The ticket types used by passengers are shown in the table below:

Figure 2: Type of ticket used

	All
Weekly or monthly season	31%
Anytime ticket	26%
Other	13%
Off peak ticket	19%
Day travelcard	9%
Freedom pass	1%
Oyster Pay As You Go	1%

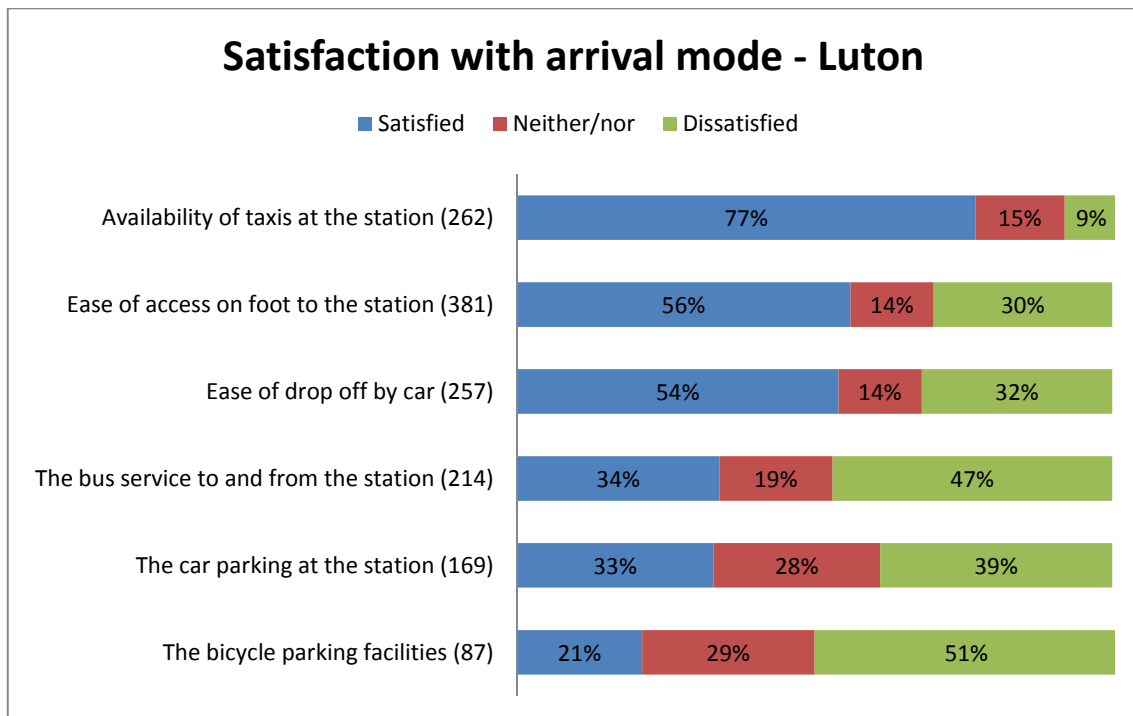
Base: All passengers (378)

Findings

Travel to and from the station:

94% of passengers surveyed were either arriving at or leaving the station with the remaining 6% of passengers changing trains. Of those passengers arriving at/leaving the station, 60% did so on foot, and 13% used the bus. 13% of passengers drove to the station, with over half (7% of all passengers) using the station car park.

Figure 3: Satisfaction with arrival modes at Luton



There was dissatisfaction with a number of modes used to reach the station. Just under a third of passengers were dissatisfied with the ease of access to the station on foot with the footbridge from the town centre and personal safety on walking routes noted as key concerns through passengers verbatim comments.

Almost half of the passengers (47%) who responded to the question about bus services were dissatisfied with bus services to and from the station. In particular, passengers noted concerns about the frequency of services and the fact that they would like to see more direct bus routes.

The comments by passengers indicated that the dissatisfaction levels with car parking were driven by high car parking fees, whilst dissatisfaction with bicycle parking was driven by poor security.

Figure 4 below shows the improvements which would improve satisfaction with their journey to the station. It should be noted that some passengers suggested more than one improvement so the percentages add up to over 100%.

Figure 4: Improvements passengers would like to see; getting to/from the station

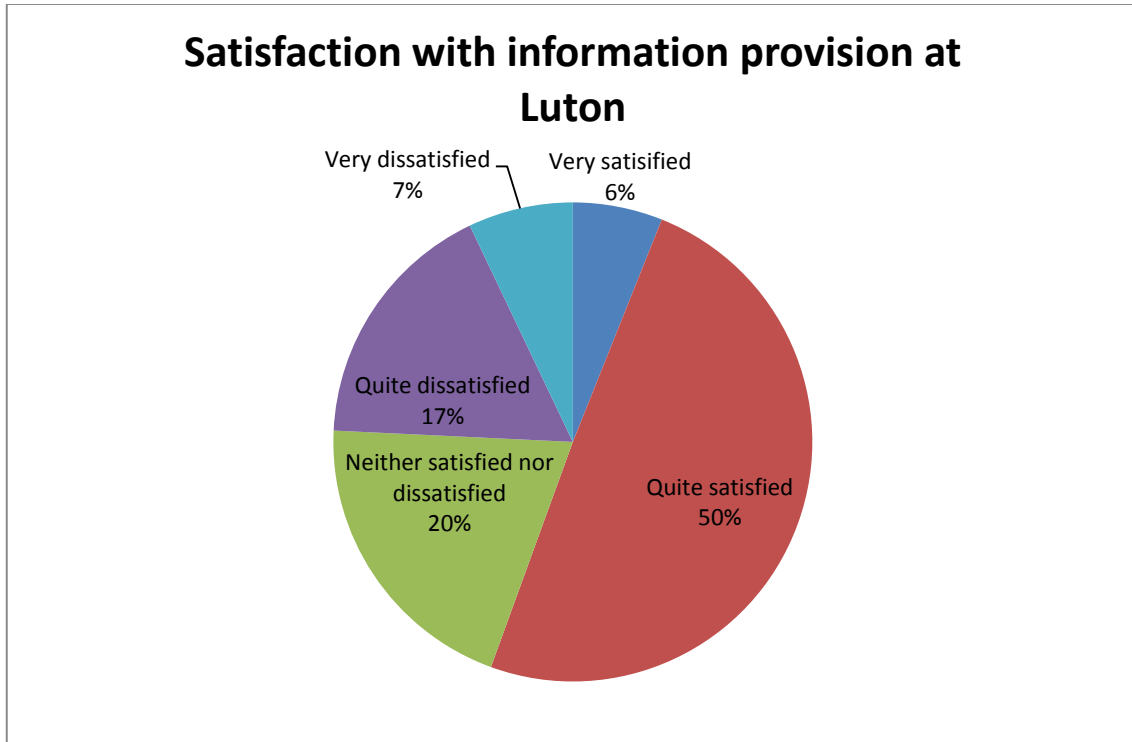
	All
Better protection from weather when waiting	62%
A safer walking route to and from the station	59%
Secure, well lit areas when waiting for lift/bus/connection	57%
Better lightning on approach to station when arriving on foot	47%
More frequent buses	36%
Better information of transport services to and from the station	33%
Better parking/waiting areas for cars meeting you	26%
Better signage to buses/information about buses	24%
Ease of car access to and from the station	22%
Better cycle routes to and from the station	15%
Better taxi queuing arrangement	12%
Better signage to find taxis	8%
Less pedestrian congestion at the bus stops	7%

Base: All passengers (583)

Provision of passenger information:

Figure 5 below shows passenger satisfaction with the passenger information services at Luton. 56% of passengers were satisfied with the provision of information. Commuters were less satisfied with the provision of information (51%) than passengers travelling for leisure/business (64%).

Figure 5: Satisfaction with information provision



Base: All passengers (415)

Respondents were then asked: *'thinking about the passenger information services at this station which, if any, of these do you think need to be improved?'* Figure 6 below shows passenger responses to this question. It should be noted passengers were able to select more than one option.

Figure 6: Improvements needed to information services at Luton

	All
Real time train running information on platforms	42%
Information about local bus services	36%
Public address announcements	32%
Up to date timetable posters	30%
Electronic train departure boards (on station concourse)	29%
Information about which platform to catch my train from	28%
Local area information	23%
Direction signs to find your way around the station	23%

Base: All passengers 345

The main element passengers wanted to see improved was the real time train running information on the platforms. This was relatively high amongst commuters (49%) versus those travelling for leisure/business (30%).

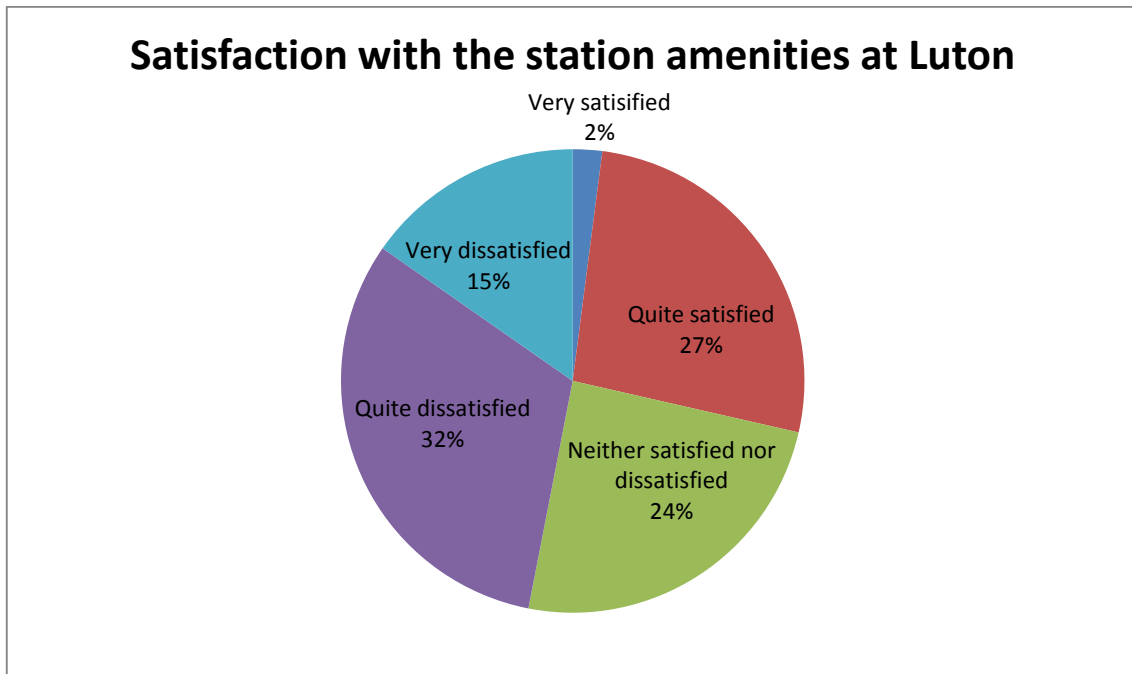
Business/leisure passengers highlighted the provision of information about local bus services as their highest priority (37%). People aged over 55 wanted more public address announcements (48%) compared to those aged 35-54 (34%) and under 35 (22%).

There were no significant differences in the responses of First Capital Connect and East Midlands Trains passengers.

Provision of station amenities:

Figure 7 below shows passenger satisfaction with the amenities, namely toilets, waiting facilities and retail outlets at Luton. Dissatisfaction with the amenities was high with almost half (47%) of passengers stating that they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

Figure 7: Satisfaction with the station amenities



Base: All passengers (416)

Respondents were asked to consider which passenger facilities most needed to be improved at Luton. Figure 8 below shows the passenger responses to this question. As in previous questions, passengers were able to select more than one option.

Table 8: Improvements wanted to passenger amenities at Luton

	All
Availability of seating on platforms	59%
Availability of toilets	55%
Availability of waiting rooms on platforms	52%
Condition of the toilets	46%
Condition of seating on platforms	46%
Condition of waiting rooms on platforms	39%
Bins	38%
Canopies over the platforms	30%
Provision of retail and catering facilities	22%

Base: All passengers 381

The factors shown above were rated consistently by all passengers regardless of the age of the passenger or their journey purpose.

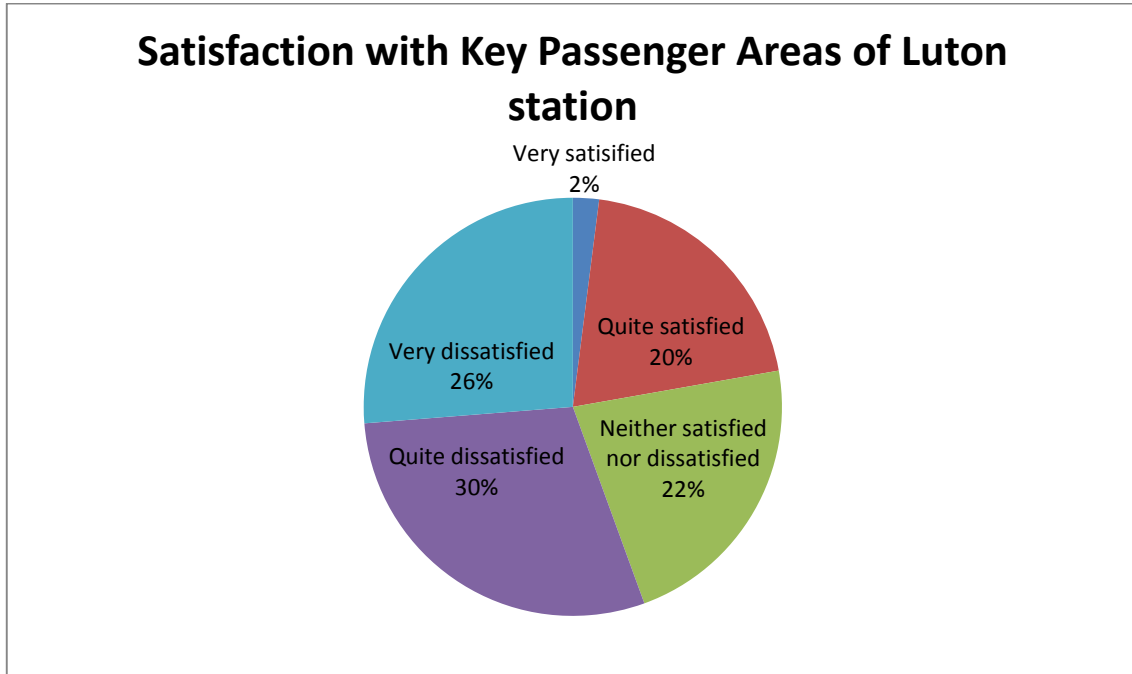
There were however, differences between First Capital Connect and East Midlands Trains passengers. First Capital Connect passengers stated that the availability of the seating on the platform was the most important area for improvement (63%) whilst East Midlands Trains passengers rated it as their 3rd highest priority for improvement (49%) behind the availability of toilets (55%) and waiting rooms (52%)

This may in part be due to the likelihood of East Midlands Trains passengers making longer journeys on less frequent services leading to them arriving earlier, and waiting longer, at the station.

Key passenger areas of the station:

The survey looked at the areas of the station that passengers commonly use and established which areas they felt were the biggest priority for improvement. The key areas in question included the entrances and booking hall, key walking routes around the station and the platform areas. Figure 9 below shows satisfaction with these areas of the station is quite low (22% satisfaction).

Figure 9: Satisfaction with key areas of the station



Base: All passengers (432)

In order to understand which areas of the station were of greatest concern to passengers, respondents were invited to highlight areas which they felt were a priority for improvement. These are shown in figure 10 below. As for previous questions, more than one option may have been selected.

Figure 10: Key station areas needing improvements

	All
Main station entrances and exits	70%
Appearance of the booking hall	68%
Footbridge(s)	61%
Ticket office sales points	48%
Access to the platform from the booking hall	44%
Lifts	44%
Cleanliness of platforms	30%
Track area free from litter/vegetation	16%
Subway(s)	13%
Platforms – size of gap between train and platform	11%

Base: All passengers (395)

The scores for a number of key parts of the station (namely the main station entrances/exits, the booking hall, footbridge and ticket office) are high - This correlates directly to the low satisfaction scores highlighted in Figure 10.

The main station entrance, including the footbridge from the town centre was highlighted as the key priority for improvement by all groups of passengers regardless of age, journey purpose or train company used.

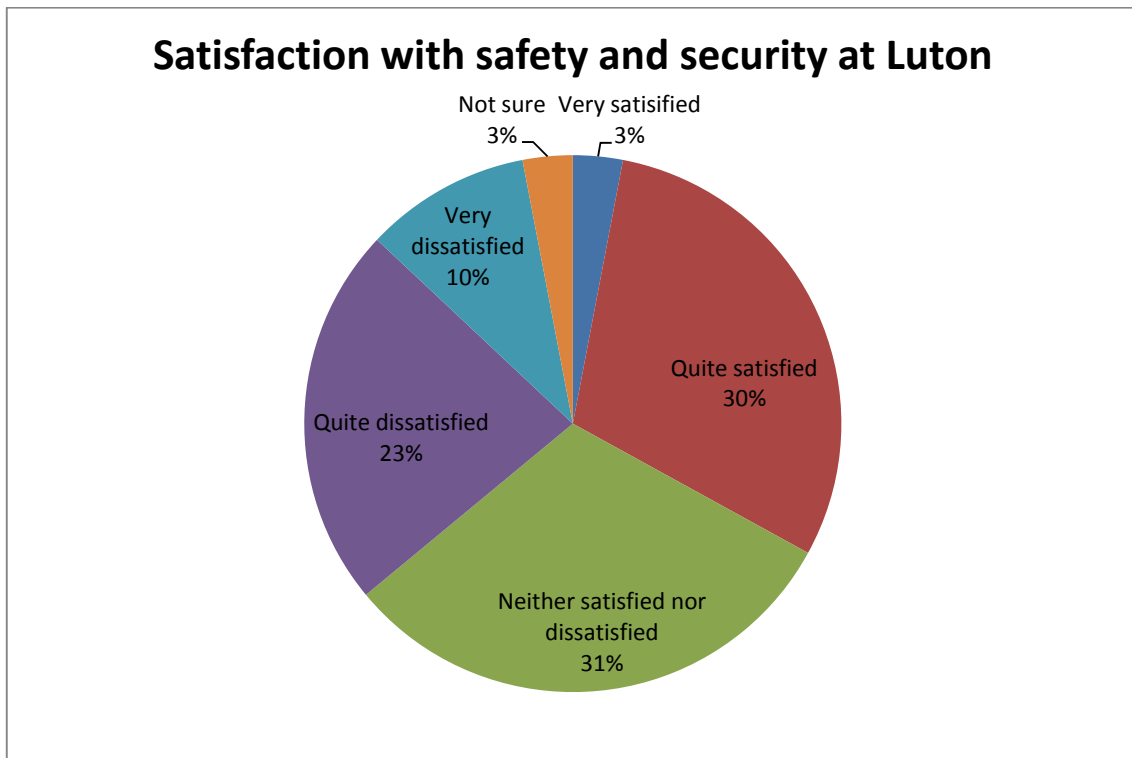
There were no other significant differences in the scores or order of priority for improvement given by commuters or leisure/business passengers or by passengers using the different operators.

Passenger safety and security:

Passengers were asked to rate their satisfaction with safety and security on the station. Low levels of satisfaction were seen across all passengers regardless of journey purpose or train operator used.

Figure 11 below shows overall satisfaction with safety and security.

Figure 11: Satisfaction with safety and security



Base: All passengers (417)

Passengers were asked to note their key areas for improvement; the principle concern for all passengers, regardless of journey purpose was the number of staff visible after dark (68%). Within the verbatim comments, a number of passengers noted the issue of people begging on or near the station as a specific concern. Figure 12 below shows the overall passenger priorities.

Figure 12: Improvements wanted to safety and security

	All
Number of visible staff after dark	68%
Station lighting	53%
Provision of help points	34%
Number of visible staff in the daytime	32%
Level of CCTV provision	28%
Location of help points	20%
Overcrowding on platforms	14%

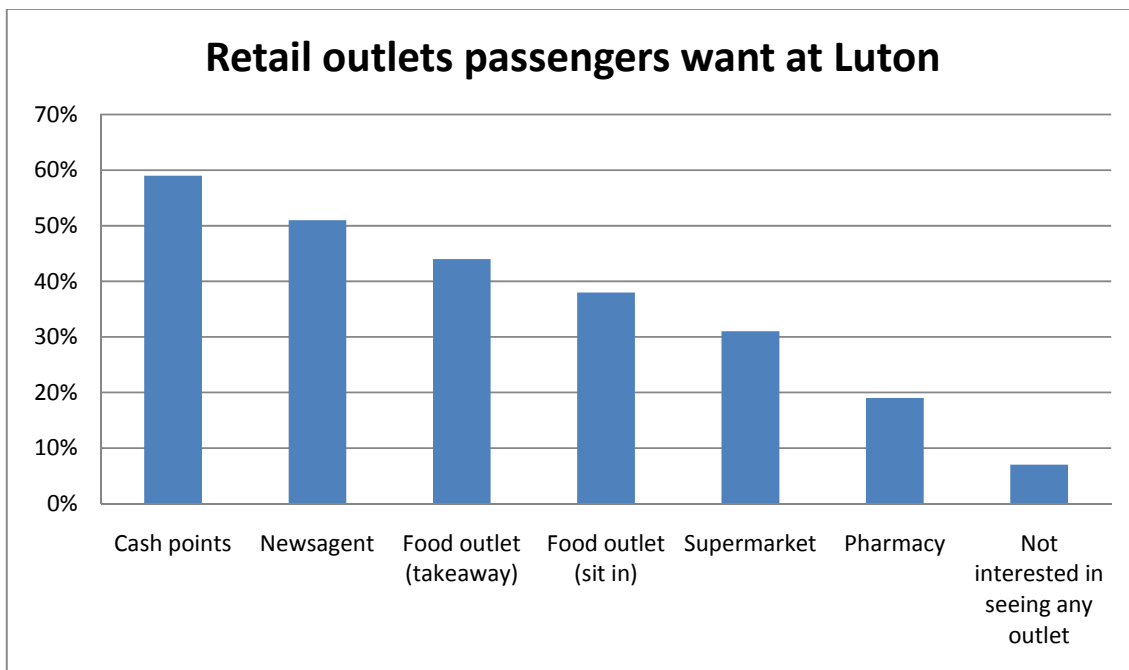
Base: All passengers (333)

Retail outlets:

Passengers were asked which, if any, types of retail outlet they would like to see at Luton, regardless of whether the facility is already available at the station. Figure 13 below shows that cash machines were the facility passengers would most like to have at the station.

Only 7% of passengers stated that they did not want to see any type of retail outlets at Luton station. This percentage was consistent across passengers from First Capital Connect and East Midlands Trains and those commuting and travelling for leisure/business.

Figure 13: Retail outlets wanted at Luton (regardless of whether the facility is already available at the station)



Base: All passengers (410)

Passenger priorities for improvement:

Whilst looking at the 5 key areas of satisfaction and passenger priorities for the station provide a good indication of the improvement passengers want in each area, it is important to consider which of these factors are the highest overall priority for passengers using Luton station.

Passengers were given a set of paired statements and asked to select the improvement they felt was most important. These were analysed and the priorities shown in figure 14 were obtained. The higher the score, the greater the passenger priority for improvement.

Figure 14: Improvement scores arising from Stated Preference analysis

	Rank (all passengers)	Commuters	Other journey type
Walkway linking the twin centre to the station	1	1	1
Lighting throughout the station	2	2	2
Waiting rooms	3	3	4
More station staff	4	5	3
Toilets	5	7	5
Real time information	6	4	=9
Canopies covering the whole length of the platform	7	6	=9
Step free access from the booking office to the platform	8	8	6
Ticket selling facilities (ticket office and machines)	9	9	7
Bus links	10	10	8
Interchange facilities (e.g. bus stops/taxi ranks/drop off areas)	11	12	11
Car parking facilities	12	11	13
Interactive help points	13	13	14
Wayfinding and signage to the station	14	14	12

Base: All passengers (432)

The walkway linking the town centre and station was raised as an area of concern to passengers and was singled out as being the biggest priority for improvement amongst all passengers. This applied regardless of the train operator used or the passengers journey purpose.

First Capital Connect passengers felt that improved lighting and waiting rooms were the second and third highest priorities for improvement, whilst East Midlands Train passengers rated the need for improvement to the waiting rooms and availability of station staff as their second and third highest priorities.

Passengers with disabilities

As Luton has poor step free access from the main station entrance to the platforms and limited facilities for disabled passengers it was felt that the views of disabled passengers may be under-represented within the results.

With this in mind, we invited a number of external stakeholders to comment on the current facilities at these stations. A copy of the correspondence is included in Appendix II.

We received one response from the Joint Committee of Blind and Partial Sighted People (JCMBPS) who noted the generally poor state of the station. Specific comments were made about the lack of step free access provision from the ticket hall to the platforms and the generally poor facilities for visually impaired passengers including poor wayfinding and signage and a lack of tactile paving throughout the station.

Next steps:

This research has identified in detail the current levels of passenger satisfaction with Luton station and the main priorities for improvement.

In the current economic climate, it is imperative that any improvements works taking place at stations, reflect and address passenger priorities. Whilst the funding previously identified for Luton has been withdrawn, we are pleased to see that work is now progressing on a new footbridge linking the station and town centre. Passengers highlighted this as the number one priority for improvement at the station and will welcome this improvement.

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

Appendices

APPENDIX I: QUESTIONNAIRE

APPENDIX II: LETTER TO STAKEHOLDERS