

# National Station Improvement Programme

Benchmarking and improving passenger satisfaction with stations



The National Station Improvement Plan was set up to improve up to 150 stations in England and Wales<sup>1</sup>. In order to measure the impact of this work on passenger perceptions Passenger Focus and Network Rail commissioned “before and after” research at 25 of the stations targeted for investment. The ‘before’ stage revealed fairly average levels of satisfaction – with the stations scoring just over 5 out of 10 overall<sup>2</sup>. There is therefore much scope for the industry to improve the passenger experience at these stations, and those like them. Moreover, at individual stations there is a definite need to actively address low-level satisfaction; at 10 of the 25 stations, passengers gave overall satisfaction scores lower than the all-stations average.

## What passengers told us

There was no single station factor that determined overall satisfaction. Respondents were **generally satisfied** with the following aspects of their station experience:

- Ease of access on foot to the station

- Passenger information services
- Public transport availability (to/from the station).

Passengers were least satisfied with bicycle and car parking facilities. The majority of respondents **were** neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, but bicycle – car-parking facilities scored lowest in terms of satisfaction compared to other facilities.

The facilities that passengers considered **most important** at stations included:

- Visual real-time information (RTI) (54%)
- Staff (53%)
- Toilets (45%).

The facilities that passengers felt **needed improving the most** were:

- Toilets (37%)
- Waiting rooms (30%)
- Information on train arrival times (25%).

<sup>1</sup>Excluding Network Rail managed stations.

<sup>2</sup>Passengers were asked to rate the station where they were handed the questionnaire out of 10.



## Background

In July 2007 the Department for Transport (DfT) published the White Paper "Delivering a Sustainable Railway" praising the provision for customers at the largest rail stations, but also highlighting the "comparative lack of progress at 'intermediate stations'". The National Stations Improvement Programme (NSIP) is a rail-industry initiative, formulated in response to the DfT's observations. Funded primarily by the DfT, the £150 million investment is to be delivered by a five-year programme, which started in April 2009.

The core objective of NSIP is to achieve a noticeable improvement to the passenger perception of stations by focusing on high-footfall, low-satisfaction stations. The programme also aims to develop a more effective, coordinated approach for the planning and delivery of activities at stations by all stakeholders - improving efficiency and value for money in station investments. This includes seeking third-part, investment and linking in with other programmes of work such as Access for All, and that planned by TOCs. In order to achieve these aims, NSIP requires co-operation between Network Rail, Train Operating Companies, Department for Transport, Office of Rail Regulation, Association of Train Operation Companies, Passenger Focus and other industry stakeholders.

The list of candidate NSIP stations is constantly evolving, and has grown substantially beyond the original list of 150 stations. In order to measure if the core objective of the programme is being achieved Passenger Focus and Network Rail have begun a programme of research identifying passenger perceptions and experiences at stations.

The first phase of this consisted of bespoke surveys being carried out at 25 NSIP stations (see appendix A), where planned improvement works have implementation dates between 2008 and 2010. This took place at the end of 2008 prior to any of the proposed improvement works beginning on site.

It is anticipated that a second wave of research, using the same methodology, will begin early in 2010 after the key elements of the improvement works at the 25 stations are complete. When the results of this are published, direct comparisons can be made of "before" and "after", and will allow key stakeholders to determine which elements of the improvement works had the largest impact on passenger perception levels within those sampled stations. This information could then be used to help shape future projects at other stations.



## Methodology

In order to gain the depth of information that was sought by the stakeholders it was decided to survey passengers, using self-completion questionnaires. Network Rail and Passenger Focus contracted Faber Maunsell to conduct the survey and provide analysis of the results.

The questionnaire asked passengers to provide information and their views on a range of subject areas, including:

- Transport used to get to the station
- Ease of access to platforms
- Overall opinion of the station
- Provisions of information train times and platforms (Customer Information Screens/Public Announcement)
- Feeling of personal security (including car parks and interchange with other modes of public transport)
- Ticket-buying facilities
- The overall station environment
- The upkeep and repair of buildings/platforms
- Facilities and services at the station (e.g. toilets)
- Car-parking facilities.

The self-completion questionnaires were handed out at each of the stations between 22nd November and 18th December 2008, covering different times of the day (07.00 to 19.00) and days of the week.

In total, 2214 completed questionnaires were returned by passengers. Over 100 questionnaires were returned for most of the larger stations; however, at those stations where the daily patronage was low (most notably the five stations in Anglesey), the sample size was less robust.

## The results in more detail

### Mode of transport to and from the station

The majority of people walked to (59%) and from (54.6%) the station. *See table 1.*

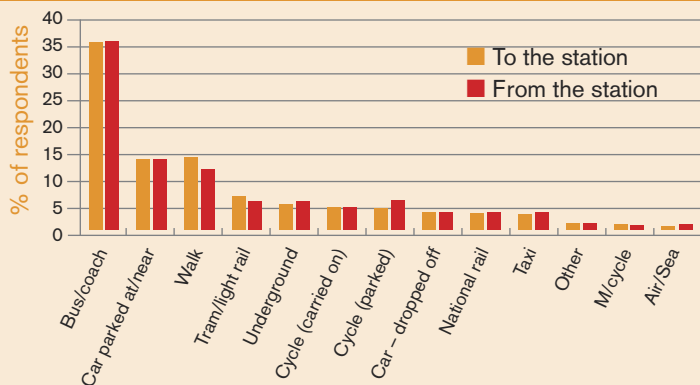
Around a third of all passengers surveyed indicated that there was a different mode of transport that they would like to use to and from the station, the most popular being bus/coach.

Of those passengers that told us they would like to travel to the station by bus/coach, 43% currently do so by car. Similarly 59% of those that wanted to travel from the station by bus/coach were using a car to make this type of journey.

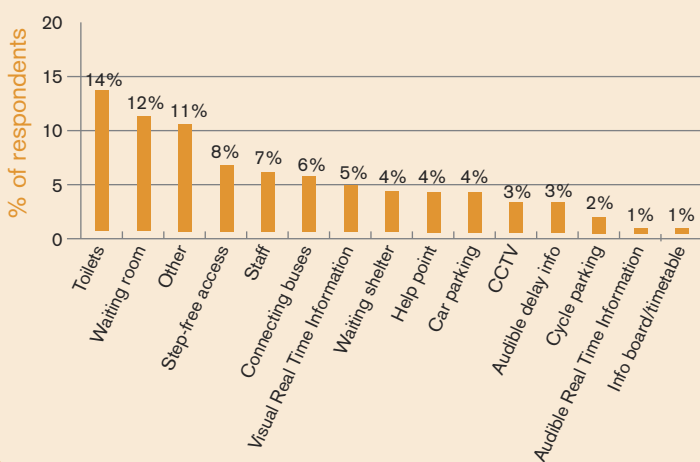
Those respondents who said that they would like to travel to/from the station by bus, indicated that they would consider doing so if there:

- was a more frequent bus service
- were better connections between train and bus.

## 1 Alternative methods of transport passengers would like to use, to and from the station, rather than their current mode of access/departure



## 3 New facility passengers considered most important to have



### Passenger facilities at stations

At a large proportion of stations, satisfaction scores for the facilities provided were poor, in particular for waiting rooms and toilets.

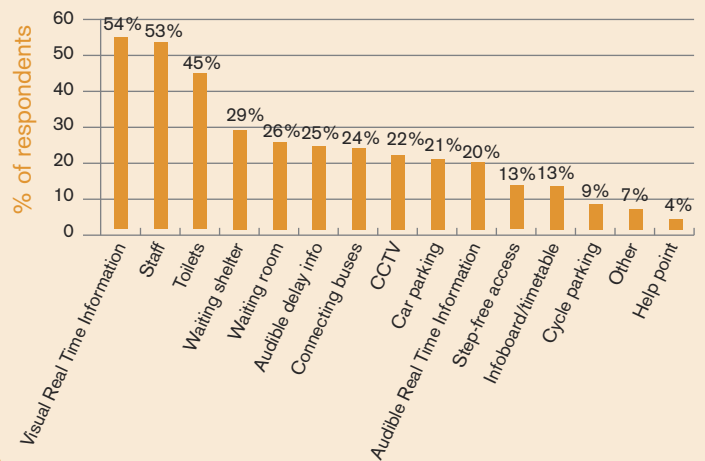
- At 16 of the 25 stations, passengers were dissatisfied with the availability of toilets
- At 14 of the 25 stations passengers were dissatisfied with the condition of the toilets
- At 11 of the 25 stations, passengers were dissatisfied by the absence of waiting rooms

Dissatisfaction with retail outlets and refreshment facilities was also expressed by passengers at nine of the 25 stations.

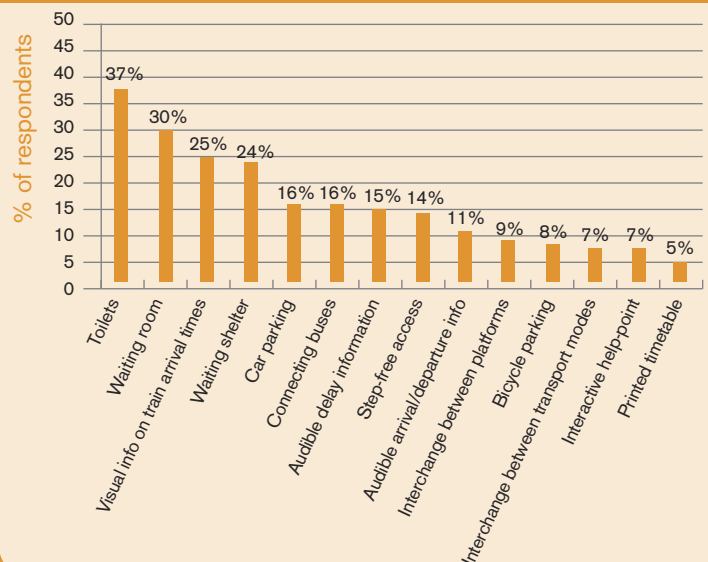
### Important facilities to have at stations

Passengers were asked which facilities were important at their starting station. The top three were visual real-time information (RTI), staff and toilets. Of the 'other' category suggested by passengers, the most common suggestion made was for lifts/escalators. See table 2.

## 2 Facilities passengers consider important to have at stations



## 4 Facilities passengers thought most needed improving



### Most important new facility not currently available

Having established which facilities were important to have at stations, passengers were then asked which one new facility (not currently available at the station where they were given the questionnaire) they would choose to have. The top three were: toilets, waiting room and 'other'. The most common suggestion made under 'other' was again for lifts and escalators. See table 3.

### Top three existing facilities in need of most improvement

Passengers were also asked to rank, from the existing facilities at the station where they were handed the questionnaire, the top three facilities in most need of improvement.

Overall, toilets are perceived to be most in need of improvement. They came top as first, second and third priority of all those respondents who ranked a facility; they also came top of the rankings combined (37%). The table above shows the figures for when all rankings are combined. See table 4.

## Conclusions

From the first wave of NSIP research it is clear that most passengers were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the stations at which they were given the questionnaire. A mean score of 5.35<sup>3</sup> would suggest that whilst dissatisfaction at the 25 stations may not be all that great, there is considerable scope for improvement. The key areas for Network Rail and the station facility operators to look at improving, in order to bring about a positive change in satisfaction at the 25 stations, would appear to be visual real-time information, staff, toilets and waiting rooms/shelters; all of these are viewed as important at stations. Where they are not already provided passengers, consider toilets and waiting rooms the most important facility to be added; where they are, they are often cited as being in need of improvement.

Careful analysis will also need to be undertaken in order to ascertain whether improvements to other areas of the stations might have a positive impact on passenger satisfaction.

In the case of the 25 stations the improvements works taking place were decided upon as part of the first wave of NSIP, prior to any research being commissioned. It is therefore important that when future works are planned the views of passengers,

such as those highlighted by this research, are taken into consideration. In doing so it will be important to recognise that, whilst general conclusions can be drawn from research such as this, there will be subtle differences between stations, depending on which facilities are already there, and their quality.

## Next Steps

These stations will be surveyed again once the improvement work has been completed – expected to begin early in 2010. This will enable direct comparisons of “before” and “after”, and will allow key stakeholders to determine which elements of the improvement works have had the largest impact on passenger perception levels within those stations. This information could then be used to help them shape future NSIP projects at different stations.

In the meantime the information will be used to help inform current thinking on franchise renegotiations, Route Utilisation Strategies, the High Level Output Specification for Rail, Access for All schemes and the Stations Review announced by the Secretary of State for Transport in May 2009.

The individual station reports and full NSIP research are available on our website – [www.passengerfocus.org.uk](http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk)

### Appendix A Number of shifts and returned surveys at each station

Station	Initial shifts (230 surveys to be handed out per shift)	Additional shifts (100 surveys to be handed out per shift)	Number of completed surveys returned
Balham	3	2	142
Bodorgan*	3	-	5
Carmarthen	3	-	76
Chester	3	-	134
Crystal Palace	3	1	120
East Grinstead	3	-	142
Finsbury Park	3	-	121
Gipsy Hill	3	1	101
Halifax	3	-	150
Hatfield	3	-	83
Hersham	3	-	116
Horsham	3	1	136
Llanfair PG*	3	-	9
Norwood Junction	3	1	76
Peckham Rye	3	2	101
Penzance	3	-	135
Queens Road Peckham	3	2	117
Rhosneigr*	3	-	7
Selhurst	3	1	89
Severn Tunnel Junction	3	-	62
Smitham	3	1	77
Streatham Hill	3	-	120
Ty Croes*	3	-	2
Uckfield	3	-	91
Valley*	3	-	2

\*These five Anglesey stations have low patronage; fewer than 24 people a day (each). Base figures should be taken into account when viewing the results for each station.

<sup>3</sup>Respondents were asked to mark their overall satisfaction with the station out of 10.