

Independent national passenger watchdog

# Passenger Voice Rail



Spring 2011

North West

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## Commuters speak out about overcrowding

### Autumn 2011

Train company	Overall satisfaction	Most significant improvement in satisfaction since Autumn 2009	Decline in % satisfied since Autumn 2009
Great Britain	84%	Value for money (4%)	No significant decline
London Midland	86%	The attitude and helpfulness of station staff; and value for money (7%)	Upkeep and repair of the train, cleanliness of the inside of the train (5%)
CrossCountry	84%	No significant improvement	The upkeep/repair of station buildings/platforms (5%)
East Midlands Trains	88%	Connections with other train services (13%)	No significant decline
First TransPennine Express	87%	Facilities for car parking (15%)	No significant decline
Virgin Trains	90%	The frequency of trains (4%)	No significant decline
Merseyrail	93%	Space for luggage (11%)	Facilities for car parking (11%)
Northern Rail	82%	No significant improvement	Station facilities and services (6%)

Passengers commuting to cities in the north of England have spoken out about their overcrowded peak-hour trains in the National Passenger Survey (NPS).

The independent passenger watchdog's latest research has revealed only two out of five commuters travelling to Manchester Oxford Road are satisfied with room on the train. Scores fell to 28% satisfaction for the journey home.

Passenger Focus's NPS has found that satisfaction with room to sit or stand for morning commuters travelling into Manchester, Leeds and Liverpool Lime Street is significantly worse than the national average. In the afternoon, it is passengers travelling from Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield who are least satisfied.

Ashwin Kumar, Passenger Focus rail director, said: "Passengers are seriously unhappy with overcrowding into and out of our major cities in the north of England. Anybody who has to commute into these cities knows how bad the problem can be. Only a few extra carriages would go a long way to alleviating the crush."

Commenting on the fact that overcrowding statistics are published only for train companies operating in London and the South East, he added:

"In these times of spending restraint, it is absolutely critical that there is transparency about the problem. We need to know where and when overcrowding is most severe so we can be sure that additional carriages are going where they are most needed. So we want to see the government's commitment to introduce a national measure of overcrowding delivered as soon as possible."

## Passenger scores turn around

Passenger Focus has welcomed the impressive improvement in passenger satisfaction scores on the East Midlands Trains' (EMT) Liverpool-Norwich service, which links Merseyside with Manchester, Sheffield, Nottingham, Peterborough and Norwich.

The latest National Passenger Survey shows that passengers travelling on the route are among the most satisfied in the country with a 94% overall score. This has increased from 73.7% recorded in the Autumn 2008 survey.

EMT welcomed news from passengers saying: "This is extremely pleasing and reflects the improvements we have made to the train fleet, capacity and timetable on this route. This summer will bring the introduction of additional carriages to help increase the capacity of services between Nottingham and Liverpool."

Guy Dangerfield, Passenger Focus manager, said: "This is a good example of a train company addressing its passengers' concerns, as well as testimony to the power of investment."

## On the move

### Passenger Focus's Manchester office

We can now be found at Passenger Focus, 7th Floor, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD.





## Future rail must meet passenger needs

Passenger Focus has responded to Network Rail's draft West Coast Main Line (WCML) Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS), which sets out the priorities for rail investment between now and 2024.

As part of the consultation process, Passenger Focus and Network Rail have held meetings in Glasgow, Preston and London for rail user groups to discuss what the RUS should be addressing. The group discussions highlighted some key priorities, including capacity, connectivity and station improvements.

Feedback from these groups, together with other Passenger Focus research were used to inform the response to Network Rail.

Robert Samson, Passenger Focus manager, said: "Passenger Focus welcomes the opportunity

to comment on the West Coast Main Line RUS. We support the broad thrust of what has been proposed. However, in our response, we stressed that the West Coast railway network will need to allow for continued passenger growth while addressing passenger priorities for improvement."

Meanwhile, Passenger Focus has called on the Government to ensure that the new West Coast franchise, currently run by Virgin Trains, is based on passengers' needs and priorities. Passenger Focus has undertaken research to understand what existing West Coast passengers think needs to be improved. The findings will form the basis of Passenger Focus's discussions with the Government and companies vying to operate West Coast services from 2012 onwards.

## Passenger Focus responds to ORR

Passenger Focus has written to the Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) about track access rights on the West Coast Main Line (WCML), which would give train companies the ability to run additional or amended services.

In its response, the independent watchdog backs direct services between Blackpool and London and the extension of the Euston to Crewe Trent Valley service to Liverpool. It adds that passengers would benefit if there were additional stops on the London-Manchester (and Liverpool) services at Watford Junction through extra trains over the route as a whole.

However, Passenger Focus warned that a complete review of the WCML timetable could not be done until the WCML Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS) was finalised later this year and the franchise process was completed.

The ORR has since decided to allow more flexible access rights than currently in place. The next operator will be able to make service changes more easily, take forward new ideas to improve passenger services and provide greater value for money to the taxpayer.

## Capacity a major issue

Passenger Focus has responded to Network Rail's draft Northern Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS), which sets out the priorities for rail investment in the north of England for the next 30 years.

In its submission, the independent passenger watchdog said the biggest challenge was developing enough capacity to meet the expected growth in rail passenger demand, which is forecast to increase by five per cent each year.

It also said that while both performance on the railways and passenger satisfaction has steadily improved, it would be up to the industry to continue to work on punctuality and journey times, while enhancing

services and facilities, including station access, capacity and car parking.

Sue Tibbett, Passenger Focus manager, said: "We support the broad thrust of what has been proposed in the Northern RUS. However, in our response, we express the view that the railway network in the north will need significant investment to meet future demand."

Passenger Focus's submission was based on the findings of research with nearly 3200 passengers on Northern Rail and TransPennine Express as well as 8598 other passengers surveyed for other RUSs that have covered part of the north. In addition, the most recent National Passenger Survey results were considered.



## Commuter chaos

Passengers have been calling a peak train into Manchester the 'Sardine Express'. The 7.15am service from Liverpool run by TransPennine Express (TPE) usually comprises six carriages but has been down to three since Christmas. Demand on the busy route means that trains are full and passengers are standing from Warrington and Birchwood.

Passenger Focus manager Sue Tibbett commented: "TransPennine Express has explained that they have had several trains out of service after damage caused during the recent freezing weather conditions. "Passengers are telling us that the crowding is unbearable. The situation is made worse by week-long engineering work every six weeks which forces East Midlands Trains' passengers to try and catch the already busy TransPennine Express service."

After raising the issues with TPE, the company has assured Passenger Focus that crowding would be alleviated by the return of one of the trains and will promote alternative – but slower – Northern Rail services to passengers. Passenger Focus will continue to monitor crowding and passenger concerns.