



## Changing trains – what will New Cross Country passengers need?

Final Passenger Focus recommendations  
to the Department for Transport

April 2007

## **Executive summary**

In order to establish the extent to which passengers would be affected by the Department for Transport's (DfT) proposed changes to the Cross Country franchise, Passenger Focus commissioned a new and comprehensive piece of research in January 2007. Travelwatch North West and Travelwatch West Midlands were contracted to assist Passenger Focus with the analysis of the collected data, assessing the suitability of suggested interchange stations and developing an interchange strategy looking at marketing and information for passengers, fares and through ticketing issues, and facilities and staffing needed at stations.

This report highlights the key findings from the new research, summarises communications between Passenger Focus and the DfT, and presents Passenger Focus' final recommendations to the DfT on the New Cross Country franchise.

## **Summary of final recommendations:**

### **Recommendation one**

Passenger Focus strongly believes that the DfT must procure the costed 30% increase in capacity on the central, most congested franchise routes.

### **Recommendation two**

Passenger Focus recommends that the DfT requires the successful operator to develop a robust interchange strategy that mitigates the impact on those passengers who will require an additional change of trains once the new services are introduced. This must include consideration of the following factors:

- **fares and ticketing**
- **improved marketing and information**
- **improved facilities at interchange stations**
- **improved staff assistance.**

### **Recommendation three**

Passenger Focus recommends that the DfT considers how communicating key messages about new franchises can be improved, and how data enabling an informed analysis of the impact on passengers can be more readily available in future.

## **Background**

In June 2006, the Department for Transport (DfT) published its proposals for the New Cross Country franchise<sup>1</sup>, due to commence in November 2007. Passenger Focus submitted a detailed response to the DfT consultation document<sup>2</sup>, expressing concerns about the changes; in particular the loss of many long-distance direct services. The proposal to sever these links would result in many passengers having to change trains, primarily at Birmingham New Street, a station where interchange is already notoriously difficult. The New Cross Country franchise forms part of the DfT's remapping of Central Trains services in the Midlands. There will be three new franchises operating in the area: New Cross Country; East Midlands and West Midlands and the restructuring of all these services will impact on Birmingham New Street station.

Passenger Focus commented that the existing Cross Country franchise is an acknowledged success in terms of improved passenger satisfaction, improved reliability, and increased patronage. We made very clear to the DfT that it would be a mistake to break up the network when it is popular with passengers.

The recommendations made by Passenger Focus were based on extensive research including specific research with over 3300 passengers on all Cross Country routes<sup>3</sup>. Passengers told us that one of their top priorities was the ability to complete a journey without having to change trains. Passenger Focus also clearly stated disappointment at the lack of evidence provided by the DfT to justify the franchise proposals relating to the management of connecting services to reduce the need to change at Birmingham and to improve journey times. Our original recommendations on the franchise proposals were as follows:

### **Recommendation one**

Our top priority is that passengers can get a seat. The DfT needs to define how many seats it needs to procure to tackle the current crowding problems and to allow for continued high growth which is predicted across the lifetime of the franchise. The franchise should also include a commitment to introduce a robust monitoring regime.

### **Recommendation two**

Our second priority is to retain as much of the existing direct network as possible. Passengers prefer direct services, and terminating so many trains at Birmingham New Street would be a retrograde step. There should be no significant increase in journey times for passengers. Our research demonstrates the need to offer minimal increases in end-to-end journey times for currently available through journeys, which the DfT are proposing will have more connections than before.

### **Recommendation three**

Passengers deserve better value for money. A simple, easy to understand fares structure should be in place, and there should be no reduction in the current availability of cost-effective

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.dft.gov.uk/consultations/closed/nccfc/newcrosscountryfranchisecons1747>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/news-and-publications/document-search/document.asp?dsid=604>

<sup>3</sup> Research carried out in Spring 2006

through-ticketing. The franchise should include a commitment to improve passenger satisfaction with value for money.

#### **Recommendation four**

Passenger Focus would like further clarification on the level of service to be provided and seeks assurances that robust consultation processes will be in place for discussing proposed changes to service levels.

#### **Recommendation five**

The DfT needs to ensure there is commitment on the part of the franchisee to contribute to the development of stations and integration with other modes of transport, including connections with other train operators' services.

#### **Recommendation six**

Passenger Focus seeks assurance that the DfT will ensure trains that are fit for purpose for long distance travel are provided for Cross Country journeys, with satisfactory on-board facilities for passengers. Cleanliness and upkeep/repair should be monitored. Passenger Focus should also be consulted on the design of any new or refurbished stock.

#### **Post-consultation activity**

On 8 November 2006, Passenger Focus held a conference in Birmingham exploring the issues around the New Cross Country and Midlands franchises. Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport, Tom Harris was a speaker and, in response to questions about the impact of larger numbers of passengers interchanging at Birmingham New Street station, stated that under the New Cross Country franchise proposals there would actually be fewer passengers interchanging at Birmingham New Street.

The Minister re-iterated this statement on 30 November 2006 in the House of Commons – “According to our passenger figures, fewer passengers will have to change at Birmingham New Street.”<sup>4</sup>

However, the DfT was unable to support this statement as evidential data was deemed commercially sensitive. This attracted criticism from conference delegates in Birmingham and other stakeholders regarding lack of transparency around the franchise process.

Passenger Focus wrote to the DfT on 17 November 2006<sup>5</sup> challenging the view that there would be fewer passengers interchanging at Birmingham New Street when New Cross Country services begin, and seeking further information on the following questions:

- The franchise specification mentions that 40% of Cross Country passengers already change at least once before they join a Cross Country service. What percentage of passengers will require a further change as a result of the proposals?
- How many Cross Country passengers currently travel through Birmingham New Street without changing? How many Cross Country passengers will be required to interchange at

<sup>4</sup> Tom Harris, House of Commons Debates (30 November 2006)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/news-and-publications/document-search/document.asp?dsid=762>

Birmingham (or Wolverhampton) to complete the same journey, as a result of the proposals?

- Your proposal suggests that you are providing more seats across the core of the network, at the expense of losing some long distance services. How many passengers will benefit from the overall proposal (better chance of getting a seat across the core of the network) compared with the number of passengers who will be inconvenienced, in terms of having a further interchange?

During December 2006, whilst awaiting the response from the DfT and due to the lack of available data, the Passenger Focus Board agreed<sup>6</sup> to commission further research into passenger flows that would be substantially affected by the New Cross Country franchise. The collected data was intended to challenge DfT assumptions if necessary, establish the number of affected passengers and the impact on interchange stations such as Birmingham New Street and the alternatives suggested by the DfT.

On 19 January 2007, the DfT responded to our letter<sup>7</sup> stating that they are seeking to benefit the majority of passengers making journeys on New Cross Country routes. However, they acknowledged that some passengers on lesser used flows will be inconvenienced by a further change of trains during their journey in future. They specifically pointed to the new journeys available on routes between Manchester and Bristol, a new operational simplicity which will provide better reliability for all passengers and additional seats across the core of the network (as a franchise option).

The DfT stated:

*“In summary our evidence leads us to conclude that:*

- *The vast majority of passengers will receive an improved service in terms of reliability, timetabling and journey times.*
- *The changes we are proposing provide the most effective way of asking bidders to develop their plans on how they could deliver substantial improvements in capacity (up to 30%) on the busiest parts of the network.*
- *There will be a small increase in the total number of passengers that will need to change trains between cross country (around 160,000). It should be remembered that this is < 1% of the travelling passengers based on 2005/6 data.*
- *We expect the number of passengers who have to change trains at Birmingham New Street station will be around 100,000. We encourage the new bidders to develop a strategy for interchange but would be interested in hearing your views on how this can best be achieved<sup>8</sup>.*”

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/news-and-publications/document-search/document.asp?dsid=931> (Item 4.2)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/news-and-publications/document-search/document.asp?dsid=870>

<sup>8</sup> Taken from letter from Dr Stephen Clark (DfT) to Anthony Smith (Passenger Focus), dated 19 Jan 2007

In early February the DfT responded to our consultation submission<sup>9</sup>. The response addressed each of our recommendations and detailed how the DfT would be ensuring the new franchisee tackles the issues and concerns raised by Passenger Focus on behalf of passengers.

**Further research**

Passenger Focus engaged MRUK research, a national market research company, to interview passengers on Cross Country trains making journeys that, under the New Cross Country franchise, will not be possible on through trains. Trains between Leamington Spa and Birmingham New Street, and Cheltenham Spa and Birmingham New Street were surveyed between Monday 15<sup>th</sup> January and Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2007 inclusive. Passengers were asked for the origin and destination of their journey. A total of **106** trains were surveyed, and the journeys of almost **10,000** passengers were recorded. The survey also undertook, whenever possible, to count how many passengers were on board the trains.

Total number of passengers surveyed	9,672
Number of trains surveyed	106
Number of trains on which passenger counts conducted	55
Number of passengers travelling on the trains where counts took place	8,005
Estimated total passengers travelling on trains surveyed in this research <i>(using multiple regression)</i>	16,034

The raw data from MRUK<sup>10</sup> and the initial analysis report prepared by TravelWatch<sup>11</sup> was shared with the DfT in late February.

**Findings**

51% of passengers surveyed were travelling through Birmingham New Street. Of these, 51% will no longer be able to make direct journeys and will need to change trains in future. 5% of these passengers who will need to change in future will have no option other than to change at Birmingham New Street<sup>12</sup>.

It should be noted that these percentages do not take into account the additional 30% capacity which bidders for the New Cross Country franchise have been asked to factor in. This allowance for further growth will result in larger number of passengers able to make journeys and potentially add to the numbers interchanging in future.

Information supplied to Passenger Focus by the DfT predicts that around 100,000 passengers will have to change trains at Birmingham New Street station when New Cross Country services commence. This equates to 0.5% of the total number of passengers. Analysis of the data collected by Passenger Focus shows that 1.4% of all passengers surveyed would have

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/news-and-publications/document-search/document.asp?dsid=863>

<sup>10</sup> Raw research data is available on request from Passenger Focus

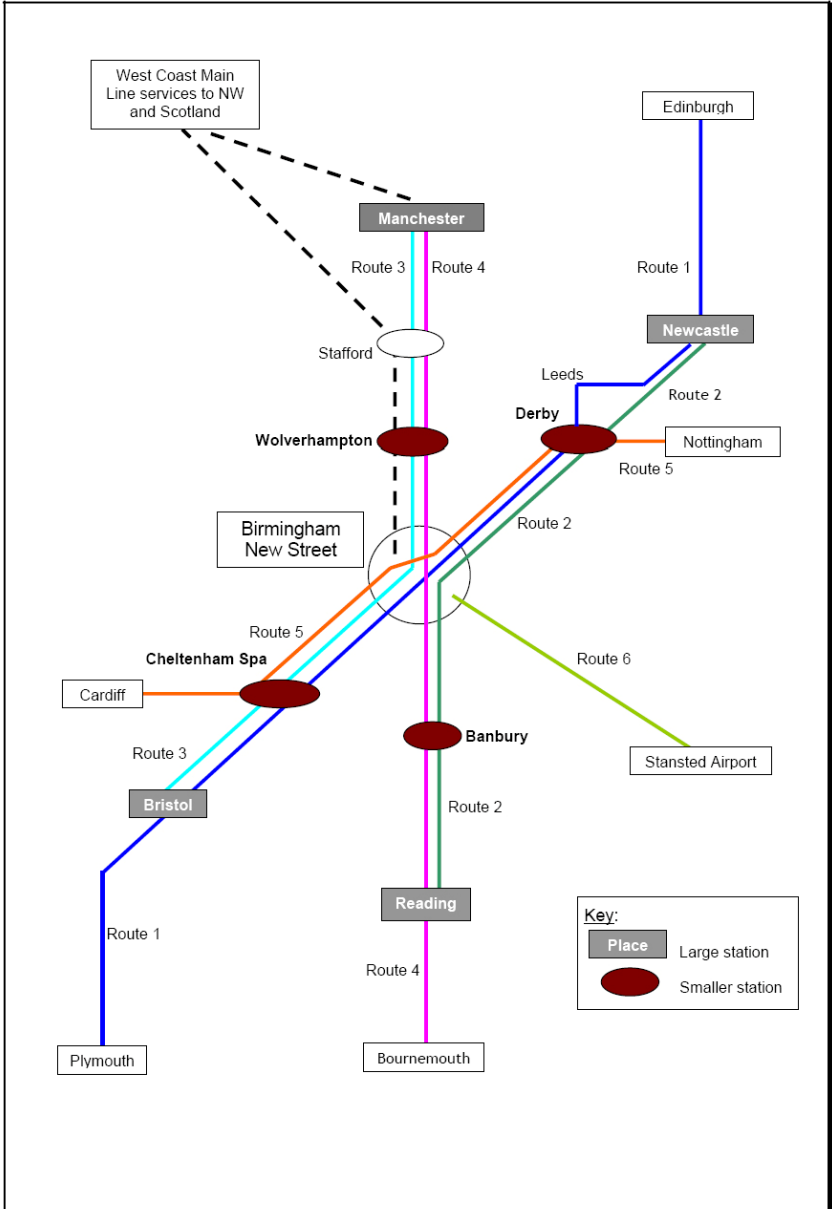
<sup>11</sup> Please contact TravelWatch via: <http://www.travelwatch-northwest.org.uk/>

<sup>12</sup> The percentages given here can be replaced by the following actual figures, based on our research: 4,956 passengers travelling through Birmingham New Street. Of those, 2540 will no longer be able to make direct journeys in future. 132 of these passengers would have to change at Birmingham New Street.

no other option than to change trains at Birmingham New Street. This difference is not surprising as our research was specifically targeted on routes affected by the planned changes to Cross Country services whereas the DfT figures are based on journeys across the whole Cross Country network. Our analysis therefore suggests that the predictions made by the DfT are reasonable.

However, the details of passenger journeys recorded during the research established that changing at Birmingham New Street will not be compulsory for all passengers and other interchange stations will be available. For each of the New Cross Country routes, our research identified large and smaller stations where interchange would be possible as an alternative to Birmingham New Street:

Figure 1: Map of New Cross Country network showing potential interchange stations



As can be seen above, the interchange stations proposed are:

Major stations	Smaller stations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bristol Temple Meads</li><li>• Reading</li><li>• Manchester Piccadilly</li><li>• Newcastle</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cheltenham Spa</li><li>• Banbury</li><li>• Wolverhampton</li><li>• Derby</li></ul>

When looking at the suitability of potential interchange stations, TravelWatch considered:

- any platform changes passengers would be required to make
- number of seats in waiting areas on platforms (open air, under canopy and enclosed)
- access between platforms
- facilities at the station
- information
- maintenance
- security
- staffing.

### Summary

The planned changes to the Cross Country franchise will clearly have an impact on significant numbers of passengers. At least 100,000 passengers will need to make an additional change at Birmingham New Street. The DfT predicts the changes could affect as many as 400,000 passengers who will face unfamiliar changes during their journeys. It is therefore imperative that the DfT ensures a robust interchange strategy is developed and implemented. This strategy must include careful consideration of the need to minimise the number of passengers who will suffer an additional change at Birmingham New Street.

Our research suggests that there are some realistic alternative stations for passengers to change between New Cross Country trains (and between Cross Country and services on the West Coast Main Line). Most significant of these stations is Wolverhampton where improved facilities would be required. There is concern that improvements to facilities would need to take place in addition to planned major redevelopment work for the station entrance and concourse. Although they are smaller stations, Banbury, Cheltenham Spa and Derby also offer opportunities for interchange, however they would require more modest improvements and additional staffing<sup>13</sup>.

There are also larger stations where interchange may be attractive to passengers and TravelWatch cite a station pertaining to each New Cross Country route: Bristol Temple Meads; Reading; Newcastle and Manchester Piccadilly. These are large stations with multiple platforms. Interchanges here may involve platform changes including subways or footbridges, therefore connection times may also be an issue. However, passengers may prefer to interchange at a larger station with better information, catering and waiting facilities and where

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<sup>13</sup> Further details on the TravelWatch recommended improvements at the stations above can be found in their summary report: "Interchanging Cross Country Passengers" (Feb 2007)



more staff are available for assistance if necessary. These larger stations may therefore be more appealing to passengers than the smaller stations proposed by the DfT and suggested by the TravelWatch analysis.

## **Recommendations**

Passenger Focus has conducted two significant research studies to assess the priorities and needs of Cross Country passengers. The detail of the DfT proposals for the New Cross Country franchise has been the subject of ongoing discussions and debate between our two organisations as we have continued to highlight our concerns on behalf of passengers.

The DfT has formally thanked Passenger Focus for our work on the New Cross Country franchise proposals and is considering how engagement with stakeholders can be more effective in future:

*“I would like to thank you and your colleagues for challenging our evidence and communications regarding the NCC franchise. We have found the debate very constructive and we will consider with colleagues how we can use the lessons learnt for future stakeholder briefings.<sup>14</sup>”*

Passenger Focus remains disappointed that some long distance journeys will be lost under the new arrangements for the Cross Country franchise. However, the trade-off is that the majority of Cross Country passengers will benefit from the increased capacity available as a result of the changes especially if the DfT buys in the much needed extra 30% capacity. Passengers travelling across the core of the network should then be able to get a seat and we know this is their top priority.

Passenger Focus now presents the following final recommendations to the DfT:

### **Recommendation one**

The top priority for passengers travelling on Cross Country trains remains getting a seat. Passenger Focus strongly believes that the DfT must procure the costed 30% increase in capacity on the central, most congested franchise routes. We welcome the franchise commitment to introduce a robust monitoring regime.

### **Recommendation two**

Passenger Focus recommends that the DfT requires the successful operator to develop a robust interchange strategy that mitigates the impact on those passengers who will require an additional change of trains once the new services are introduced. This must include consideration of the following factors:

#### **Fares and ticketing**

- Passenger Focus continues to stress the need for an integrated fares structure between all Train Operating Companies (TOCs) that will be operating on existing Cross Country routes in the future. There must be no reduction in availability of cost-effective through-tickets (with through reservations) and no threat to walk-up traffic
- a review of ticket sales strategies should be undertaken. Passengers should be offered alternative interchange stations where this is an option. Advantages of each station

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<sup>14</sup> Taken from letter from Dr Stephen Clark (DfT) to Anthony Smith (Passenger Focus), dated 19 Jan 2007

should be explained so the passenger can make an appropriate choice i.e. is mobility an issue, or is journey time the concern?

### **Improved marketing and information**

- Passenger Focus recommends a review of systems and staff training at point of sale to ensure that passengers are appropriately informed about the options for their journey. This review should incorporate information provided by the National Rail Enquiries service
- information about station layouts and platform locations should be available for passengers concerned about interchange
- at interchange stations departure information must be regularly updated. Announcements should focus on information for interchanging passengers when appropriate i.e. information regarding platform numbers, location of station facilities and where to get help from staff.

### **Improved facilities at interchange stations**

- the DfT has clearly stated that the New Cross Country franchisee will not operate any stations. Improvements to station facilities, systems, CCTV and staff processes to support handling larger numbers of interchanging passengers will therefore have to be negotiated and agreed with other TOCs and Network Rail. Passenger Focus recommends that this negotiation is facilitated by the DfT
- Passenger Focus recommends that DfT conducts a thorough review/audit of the interchange stations proposed as alternative interchange stations to Birmingham New Street. Passenger Focus would be delighted to provide input into this process <sup>15</sup>
- in recent Passenger Focus research passengers told us their top priority when changing trains is being able to make a connection on time. Sufficient connection times are vitally important especially when accessibility to other platforms may be an issue.
- clear guidance must be provided for passengers who miss onward connections due to a delayed incoming train and compensation should be available. The DfT should ensure there is a commitment to monitor the reliability of connections and the delivery of booked assistance to passengers.
- to maintain reliability of services when there are increased numbers of interchanging passengers, aids to correct boarding of trains will be necessary e.g. marking of train platforms with coach numbers, and seat number information displayed on the exterior of trains. Station dwell times must also allow for larger numbers of passengers changing trains.
- a review of access to platforms and station facilities may be necessary to ensure larger numbers of passengers can be accommodated. Sufficient catering and toilet facilities must be available. Waiting areas require adequate heating, information screens and announcement systems

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<sup>15</sup> Passenger Focus has recent experience of Accessibility audits at Chester and Crewe stations, taking into account the needs of different passenger groups. We can also provide advice on Best Practice, see <http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/news-and-publications/document-search/document.asp?dsid=880>

- interchanging can be difficult and stressful for passengers. Redevelopment work at any station needs to take passenger needs into full account especially when larger numbers of passengers are expected
- for stations at which significantly increased numbers of passengers will be interchanging in future, appropriate facilities must be created to accommodate the additional British Transport Police and Police Community Support Officers who will be required to provide the appropriate levels of operational support and reassurance. We recommend that DfT and bidders engage with BTP on their likely requirements.

#### **Improved staff assistance**

- Passenger Focus recommends that dedicated customer care staff should be visible on station platforms to assist passengers changing trains
- train managers should make themselves available to passengers prior to interchange stops to provide advice and guidance.

#### **Recommendation three**

Passenger Focus recommends that the DfT considers how communicating key messages about new franchises can be improved, and how data enabling an informed analysis of the impact on passengers can be more readily available in future.

#### **Summary of supporting information**

New Cross Country Franchise – Consultation Document (*June 2006*):

<http://www.dft.gov.uk/consultations/closed/nccfc/newcrosscountryfranchisecons1747>

Passenger Focus Response to DfT Proposals for the New Cross Country Franchise (*7 August 2006*):

<http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/news-and-publications/document-search/document.asp?dsid=604>

Letter from Anthony Smith (Passenger Focus) to Stephen Clark (DfT) (*17 November 2006*):

<http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/news-and-publications/document-search/document.asp?dsid=762>

Letter from Stephen Clark (DfT) to Anthony Smith (Passenger Focus) (*19 January 2007*):

<http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/news-and-publications/document-search/document.asp?dsid=870>

Department for Transport (DfT) Response to the Recommendations of Passenger Focus for the New Cross Country Rail Franchise (*9 February 2007*):

<http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/news-and-publications/document-search/document.asp?dsid=863>

TravelWatch Website:

<http://www.travelwatch-northwest.org.uk/>



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Passenger Focus is the operating  
name of the Rail Passengers Council