



Passenger Focus in Wales

Key activities in Wales

November 2006

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Introduction and background

Passenger Focus is the official independent national rail consumer watchdog in Great Britain. Passenger Focus was created by The Railways Act 2005, following recommendations of The Future of Rail White Paper in 2004. The re-structured organisation came into being in July 2005, replacing the former Rail Passenger Council (RPC) and its constituent committees, including RPC Wales. The operating name, Passenger Focus, came into being in January 2006. Passenger Focus' mission is to get the best deal for Britain's rail passengers. With a strong emphasis on evidence-based campaigning and research, Passenger Focus works with the rail industry, other passenger groups and government to secure journey improvements.

Passenger Focus' Structure

The Board is made up of 14 Members and the Chairman. The current Chair, Colin Foxall, lives in Wales and is a former RPC Wales Chair. Stella Mair Thomas was appointed to the Board by the National Assembly for Wales' Enterprise Innovation and Networks Committee in May 2006, for a period of three years. The Scottish Parliament has also made an appointment to the Board. Passenger Focus has a dedicated manager in Wales, passenger link manager Simon Pickering – as well as ten corresponding posts in the English regions and a further one in Scotland. The team in Wales has the support of the policy and research, communications and administration functions in Passenger Focus' offices in London and Manchester. We have monthly meetings with the Rail Unit of WAG and have established effective processes for working together. When the Wales Transport User Committee is established, Passenger Focus would like to participate, as a voice for rail passengers in Wales.

Key activities

Campaigning for improvements

Passenger Focus is an evidence-based organisation. The National Passenger Survey (NPS) lies at the heart of much of Passenger Focus' work. Inherited from the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA), the survey is carried out twice a year with 25,000 passengers on both occasions, of which 1000 are in Wales. The data provides an assessment of overall passenger satisfaction with a particular train operator and with a range of on-train and at-station services. The results provide a benchmark of the service improvement for individual train companies and the industry as a whole. The information forms part of the franchise compliance management of several operators, including Arriva Trains Wales (ATW), as well as being used to highlight areas for service improvement and to develop action plans.

Passenger Focus also undertakes a number of targeted research projects to support specific campaigns. In 2006, the main research emphasis has been on fares. The results have underpinned Passenger Focus' calls for a simpler and more transparent fares system that offers value-for-money and protects the concept of the 'turn up and go' railway. We have briefed the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) Rail Unit on the findings, following its recently devolved responsibilities in this area.

Passenger Focus responds to key industry consultations, including franchise renewals, Route Utilisation Strategies and other reviews such as the DfT's recent *Railways Closure Guidance*.

Providing practical advice

As a consumer organisation, Passenger Focus provides passengers with advice on how to get the best from the national rail network, explain their rights and help them when things go wrong. This includes the development of a passenger-focused website and advice leaflets, such as *Get the Best Deal*.

Resolving Appeal Complaints

Passenger Focus becomes involved in complaints after the service provider and passenger have attempted to resolve the issue. Passenger Focus offers advice on how best to pursue the complaint and offers guidance on passenger rights. In Wales, from January to mid-October 2006, we have dealt with close to 300 complaints and queries from passengers often securing compensation and other benefits. The most common areas of complaint for Welsh passengers are train service performance, fares, and timetable issues.

Partnership working

Partnership working is a cornerstone of Passenger Focus's activities. In Wales our key partners are:

- National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Assembly Government (Rail Unit)
- Arriva Trains Wales
- First Great Western
- Virgin CrossCountry and Virgin West Coast
- Regional Transport Consortia: Taith, Trafnidaeth Canolbarth Cymru (TraCC), South East Wales Transport Alliance (SEWTA), South West Wales Integrated Transport Consortium (SWWITCH)
- Wales and Borders Franchise – Cross-Border Stakeholder Group
- Community rail partnerships
- British Transport Police
- Community Safety Partnership Group.

Passenger Focus also works with other passenger groups. These include:

- Church Stretton and District Rail User Association (CSDRUA)
- Craven Arms Rail Users Association (CARUA)
- Crewe and Shrewsbury Passenger Association (CASPA)
- Heart of Wales Line Travellers Association (HOWLTA)
- Ludlow Rail Users
- South West Wales Community Rail Partnership
- Wrexham Birkenhead Rail Users
- North Pembrokeshire Transport Forum
- Pembrokeshire Rail Travellers Association (PRTA)
- North Pembrokeshire Transport Forum
- Shrewsbury - Chester Rail Users' Association (SCRUA)
- Shrewsbury - Wolverhampton Rail Users Association
- Cambrian Rail Partnership
- Chester - Shrewsbury Rail Partnership
- Heart of Wales Line Forum and the North Cheshire Rail User Group (NCRUG).

Input into Strategic and Long-term Rail and Transport Planning Activities.

Passenger Focus regularly represents the views of Welsh passengers in the development of rail and transport strategies at all levels in Wales and makes significant contributions within the Great Britain context. For example, focus groups in Cardiff have contributed to research into fares which was submitted to the Transport Select Committee in April. The aim is the development of a simpler and better value fares system. Also, evidence (including some collated by AMs) of the high cost of leasing second-hand trains leading to overcrowding on Valley Lines services was included in a September submission to a National Audit Office enquiry into train leasing arrangements. The objective is to reduce costs to make it realistic to provide longer and better quality trains.

Passenger Focus is a member of the working group for the Wales Rail Planning Assessment being undertaken jointly by DfT and WAG. We have argued strongly for the retention of socially inclusive rail services in future policy and franchise development.

Passenger Focus also responds to key transport consultations in Wales such as the Wales Transport Strategy and the National Assembly's Committee on Rail Infrastructure and Improved Passenger Services.

At a regional and local level, Passenger Focus is involved in the development of the regional transport plans currently being prepared by each of the transport consortia. It is also active in a number of line studies, such as Chester-Shrewsbury and Fishguard Harbour, as well as other local initiatives. Participation at this level includes the contribution of practical, best-practice advice from previous work and research, such as that outlined in the reports *What Passengers Want From Stations* and *From Strategy to Reality*.

Current Projects

Passenger Focus is actively involved in a number of projects aimed at delivering improved rail services within, to and from Wales, many of which it has initiated. Recent examples include:

- ***Cambrian Line Improvement.*** Passenger Focus has initiated a series of activities aiming to improve the punctuality, quality and frequency of journeys on the Cambrian Line, including regular meetings with ATW and Network Rail, a passenger forum held in Shrewsbury and a 'mystery shopping' exercise. This has generated a range of evidence covering punctuality/performance and on-train quality factors that has been fed into the WAG-sponsored study of the route that commenced in July. Passenger Focus has also used the data to test ATW's claims of recent improvements as part of our on-going efforts for service improvements on this route.
- ***Accessibility audits*** Passenger Focus is current working with ATW and Cheshire County Council to improve accessibility at Chester and Crewe stations, key gateway stations for Welsh passengers. We will be conducting accessibility audits with groups of passengers at each station to provide advice on station improvement plans and to help with the bid for various funding streams.
- ***Crewe-Manchester rejuvenation*** Passenger Focus has brought train operators (Northern and ATW) and other industry stakeholders together on this route to agree a series of actions to rejuvenate local services. This follows almost three years of engineering works that has seen passenger numbers fall. The route is part of the South Wales to Manchester services. It is also a valuable link for North Wales passengers, particularly to Manchester airport

Agreed outcomes include:

- creation of a Community Rail Partnership and full time officer on the line
- fare incentives to get passengers back on the route
- financial recognition for long-suffering season ticket holders
- improved publicity and marketing on the line and station improvements.

‘Wins’ for Passengers in Wales

Passenger Focus has regular dialogue with ATW and other industry stakeholders that regularly delivers smaller scale wins for passengers, such as:

- correcting problems with information provided by automated station help-points at unstaffed stations across Wales
- correcting errors to posters for engineering works on the Marches line
- ensuring the repair of faulty ticket machines in station car parks at Newport
- improving punctuality of Cardiff departure of services to the South West of England
- correcting published information about disability access at Haverfordwest and Whitland
- securing the withdrawal of planned engineering works between Wrexham and Bidston on the weekend of the British Open at Hoylelake
- obtaining refunds and compensation for many individual passengers when trains are delayed and cancelled.

Passengers in Wales also benefit from Passenger Focus’ statutory duties that include reviewing proposed railway land sales and new flows. For example, a recent objection to a land sale at Carmarthen Station, for example, saw the land retained by the industry for possible future development as a passenger car park.

Media

Passenger Focus regularly provides comment on rail issues to print and broadcast media across Wales, including The Western Mail, South Wales Echo, Daily Post, BBC Radio Wales, Real Radio, GTFM, and BBC One (Wales) TV. Topics have included personal security at Welsh stations, the performance of ATW and First Great Western, accessibility issues at Port Talbot and investment plans for the Valley Lines network.

Future Work

Among the projects in Wales that we plan to work on in the future are:

- **Improved rail services to and from major events at the Millennium Stadium** Passenger Focus has initiated a project bringing together the key industry partners (ATW, FGW, Network Rail, WAG) to take a strategic look at how to improve the provision of rail services to and from Cardiff, particularly in the evenings and weekends for major events at the Stadium
- **Wales’ passenger priority research** Passenger Focus is planning a research project into passenger priorities across Wales. The research will collect information on aspects such as the frequency and comfort of services; overcrowding; fares and ticketing; journeys to and from stations; and, safety and security. The final result will be a list of priority areas for service development that will be fed into planning processes, particularly Network Rail’s Wales Route Utilisation Study (RUS) and regional transport plans

- **Train Standards** We have recently begun to work with the WAG Rail Unit initiative to develop a scheme for measuring standards of cleanliness for both trains and stations as part of the franchise management process
- **Welsh Language Scheme** We are currently developing a Welsh Language Scheme that is planned for completion in the first quarter of 2007. Passenger Focus currently produces its Corporate Plan, Annual Report and an introductory leaflet in Welsh (*Rhoi Teithwyr Tren yn Gyntaf*)
- **Franchise review** Passenger Focus' National Passenger Survey will be an essential element of the five-year review process of ATW's franchise, in 2008.

Current issues

Passenger Focus believes the current major issues facing rail users in Wales include:

- **Capacity** Wales has seen strong growth in rail use during the last few years. This has led to overcrowding and capacity issues on a number of routes, particularly the Valleys and Cambrian lines
- **Stations** Passenger Focus is concerned with the current level of facilities and maintenance at most stations in Wales, particularly at unstaffed stations. We welcome the proposed investment in major stations, such as at Bangor and Newport
- **Cleanliness** Both our research and complaints data point to significant passenger concerns in relation to the cleanliness of trains (interior and exterior) and stations in the ATW network
- **Rolling stock** Related to both issues above, the quality and quantity of trains is a major concern of passengers in Wales
- **Integrated transport** There is considerable opportunity to improve the integration between rail and other travel modes in Wales through a variety of infrastructure development, information provision and ticketing initiatives
- **FGW's December 2006 timetable** In FGW's new timetable, the 15.15 service from London Paddington will terminate at Cardiff, rather than Swansea. This will create excessive pressure on ATW's Cardiff to Swansea evening peak services. We have made representations to FGW and the DfT and supported WAG on this issue
- **Reduction of FGW services** Also, as part of the FGW timetable changes, from December 2006 there will be fewer services operating between Cardiff and Bristol/West Country and fewer stops at Severn Tunnel Junction
- **Possession of track at weekends** Network Rail's possession at weekends poses enormous difficulties for passengers, particularly large numbers attending events at the Millennium Stadium and other venues
- **North West England Route Utilisation Strategy** The consultation document - published earlier this month - proposes re-routing North Wales' services from arrival at Manchester Piccadilly to Manchester Victoria. This has significant implications for passengers travelling from North Wales to Manchester Airport and for those wishing to make connections with other mainline routes.

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Board member for Wales

Passenger Focus

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Passenger Focus is the operating
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