



## Passenger Focus's response to the Essex Thameside franchise consultation

June 2010

## **Passenger Focus – who we are and what we do**

We are an independent public body set up by the Government to protect the interests of Britain's rail passengers, England's bus and tram passengers outside London and coach passengers in England on scheduled domestic services. We are funded by the Department for Transport (DfT) and our independence is guaranteed by an act of Parliament.

Our mission is to get the best deal for passengers. With a strong emphasis on evidence-based campaigning and research, we ensure that we know what is happening on the ground.

We use our knowledge to influence decisions on behalf of passengers and we work with the industry, passenger groups and government to secure journey improvements.

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# 1. Introduction

This document provides Passenger Focus’s response to the Department for Transport’s (DfT) consultation on the specification of a new Essex Thameside rail franchise, expected to start in 2011. Passenger Focus carried out research with over 1000 passengers in Autumn 2009 and made a submission to the Secretary of State for Transport during preparation of DfT’s consultation. Passenger Focus’s full submission to Government can be viewed on our website <http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/news-and-publications/document-search/document.asp?dsid=3527>.

Passengers’ priorities for improvement identified in that research are shown below. Set out in Section 2 is a summary of the recommendations made in that submission. This document is therefore confined to responses to the DfT consultation and comments about a small number of other issues.

**Table 1 – Passenger priorities for improvements on the c2c network<sup>1</sup>**

	All passengers’ priority	main line passengers’ priority	Tilbury loop passengers’ priority
Punctuality / reliability of the train	1	2	1
Frequency of trains on the route	2	1	2
Value for money for price of ticket	3	3	3
Being able to get a seat on the train	4	4	5
Your personal security at the station	5	5	6
The provision of information about train times/platforms during times of disruption	6	6	4
Length of time the journey was scheduled to take (speed)	7	7	7
Personal security while on board the train	8	8	8
Ease of getting to/from the station	9	9	9
Facilities for car parking at the station	10	10	10
Connections with other forms of transport	11	12	11
Buying your ticket from a member of staff at the booking office	12	11	13
Facilities available at the station	13	13	12
Buying your ticket from a ticket machine	14	14	14

<sup>1</sup> What passengers want from the Essex Thameside rail franchise, September 2009

## 2. Recommendations

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This is a summary of the recommendations Passenger Focus makes for the Essex Thameside Franchise.

### Recommendation 1:

#### Punctuality and reliability, moving towards a Right Time Railway

Passenger Focus recommends that further **improvement in punctuality and reliability** be one of DfT's key objectives for the Essex Thameside franchise. The specification should include the following requirements:

- an explicit vision that Essex Thameside becomes Britain's first Right Time Railway, with challenging but achievable targets for increasing the number of trains arriving 'right time' without resorting to extended journey times.
- an obligation to report on percentage of trains arriving 'right time' at key intermediate stations. We suggest Barking and West Ham on trains to London and Barking and Benfleet on trains from London.
- challenging but achievable targets to continue the downward trend in the number of trains that are significantly late or cancelled. Among other things, this may require the train operator and Network Rail to tackle the high level of delay caused by 'external factors, excluding weather'.

### Recommendation 2:

#### Improving aspects of the current c2c timetable

Passenger Focus recommends that **improvement to aspects of the current c2c timetable** be one of DfT's key objectives for the Essex Thameside franchise. The specification should include the following requirements:

- that services on Sundays from all Tilbury loop stations should start earlier than at present, with a much earlier first train from Purfleet, Rainham and Dagenham Dock.
- that the last train from London on Mondays to Fridays and Saturdays be later than at present. We suggest between 0100 and 0130 to all destinations.
- that trains be provided on 26 December for a period of five years from December 2012, at which point demand will be assessed and a decision made about making the service permanent.
- that bidders are asked to propose how they would align the timetable with passengers' aspirations for more frequent services, including improved connectivity with London Underground, Docklands Light Railway and London Overground services.

### Recommendation 3:

#### Additional peak capacity

Passenger Focus recommends that the delivery of **additional peak capacity** be one of DfT's key objectives for the Essex Thameside franchise. The specification should include the following requirements:

- that sufficient capacity is provided in the high peak hour when the largest volume of passengers wish to travel, not just on average across the three hour peak period, in order that passengers joining peak trains at Basildon or east of Basildon are not forced to stand.
- that the High Level Output Specification (HLOS) requirements for c2c – longer trains, platform lengthening – be implemented as quickly as possible so that passengers do not suffer as growth resumes.
- that plans are developed to deliver capacity in addition to the current HLOS proposals for implementation in the event that demand grows more strongly than expected.

### Recommendation 4:

#### Increasing passenger satisfaction with value for money

Passenger Focus recommends that measures to improve passenger satisfaction with **value for money** be one of DfT's key objectives for the Essex Thameside franchise. The specification should include the following requirements:

- that the fares regulation regime allows prices to rise by no more than Retail Prices Index (RPI) plus 1% per annum and that restrictions continue to be placed on the fares basket flexibility to prevent excessive increases on individual fares.
- that the facility to pay for an annual season ticket in 12 instalments, without a charge for credit, is developed and actively promoted. This will allow more passengers, and potential passengers, to benefit from the value offered by the 52 weeks for the price of 40 on annual season tickets and will bring the railway in line with other public and private sector organisations.
- that carnet-style multiple journey tickets be introduced for the majority of origin and destination flows.
- that erosion of the times at which Off-Peak and Super Off-Peak tickets are valid is specifically prevented.

### Recommendation 5:

#### Making ticket purchase easier for passengers

Passenger Focus recommends that **making ticket purchase easier for passengers** be one of DfT's key objectives for the Essex Thameside franchise. The specification should include the following requirements:

- that the current c2c Ticketing and Settlement Agreement Schedule 17 ticket office opening hours be maintained and delivered consistently at all stations, with a formal requirement to report adherence levels to DfT station by station, period by period.
- that Ticketing and Settlement Agreement standards for queuing times of three and five minutes be met at all stations, with a formal requirement to report adherence levels to DfT station by station every six months. At stations where 'tickets for today' and 'tickets in advance' have separate queues, they should be reported separately.
- that there are contractual targets for National Passenger Survey (NPS) satisfaction with ticket buying facilities at ticket offices managed by the franchise.
- that a 'smartcard' system similar in concept to Oyster within London be introduced across the c2c network
- that to facilitate onward travel within London, ticket offices at all stations should sell Oyster cards and allow Oyster 'pay as you go' top up, the latter also to be available from ticket vending machines at those stations.
- that in addition to the full range of National Rail and TfL destinations, ticket vending machines operated by the franchise must offer monthly season ticket renewal, discounts for all railcards, GroupSave, PlusBus add ons, Travelcard boundary extensions and the facility to buy tickets for the following day.
- that ticket vending machines and automatic ticket gates be programmed to make tickets available and allow access to platforms in sufficient time for passengers to travel on the first train on which Off-Peak tickets are valid.

## **Recommendation 6:**

### **Increasing transparency and trust in the fares system**

Passenger Focus recommends that the delivery of a **ticket and retailing strategy that will increase transparency and trust in the fare structure** be one of DfT's key objectives for the Essex Thameside franchise. The specification should include the following requirements:

- that on flows controlled by the franchise, applicable restrictions should be printed on passengers' tickets to remove confusion over validity.
- that all ticket vending machines operated by the franchise must clearly display outward and return ticket restrictions on the screen prior to a passenger committing to purchase.
- that posters be displayed at all stations advertising the cheapest walk-up fare to key destinations.
- that fares on 'walk up' interavailable flows controlled by the franchise, the official through fare must never exceed the sum of 'walk up' interavailable fares for individual legs of the journey except where a journey takes place partly at peak time and partly not.

## Recommendation 7:

### Improving the management of service disruption and provision of passenger information

Passenger Focus recommends that improved **management of service disruption and provision of information to passengers** be one of DfT's key objectives for the Essex Thameside franchise. The specification should include the following requirements:

- contractual targets to improve NPS satisfaction with the provision of information during the journey, and that a strategy be developed and implemented to improve NPS scores for “how well train company dealt with delay” and “usefulness of information during a delay”.
- targets to reduce the impact on passengers of Network Rail maintenance, renewal and upgrade of the railway and, in particular, measures to prevent the operator choosing to receive a ‘schedule four’ compensation payment even when opportunities exist to run at least some trains.
- a facility for passengers to receive SMS text alerts free of charge warning them if disruption will, or is likely to, affect their journey – with an associated requirement to achieve a strong level of uptake through marketing of the service.
- compliance with the Association of train operators (ATOC) Approved Code of Practice: Passenger Information During Disruption and Good Practice Guides on provision of passenger information, together with a programme of audit and mystery shopping.
- that active co-operation be required with proposals developed by the industry Passenger Information During Disruption (PIDD) Steering Group to feed station customer information systems directly from Darwin, the national real time train running database.

## Recommendation 8:

### Increasing satisfaction with personal security while using the railway

Passenger Focus recommends that the development and implementation of **a strategy to deliver improved passenger satisfaction with personal security** while using the railway be one of DfT's key objectives for the Essex Thameside franchise. The specification should include the following requirements:

- contractual targets to improve NPS satisfaction with personal security on board trains and at stations.
- measures to increase the visible presence of staff on trains and at stations, particularly at times of the day when passenger satisfaction with personal security is at its lowest.
- provision of comprehensive CCTV coverage within each coach of each train operated by the franchise.
- achievement and maintenance of Secure Stations accreditation at all stations.

## **Recommendation 9:**

### **Passenger's charter**

Passenger Focus believes that the Essex Thameside operator should be required to introduce a new Passenger's Charter. Drawing on best practice from around the industry, we recommend that it contains the following provisions, including protection for season ticket holders who could experience a large number of sub-30 minute delays but receive no compensation under 'delay repay' Charters:

- an 'irrespective of cause' delay repay scheme giving compensation to the value of 50% of either the outward or return portion for a delay of 30-59 minutes; compensation to the value of 100% of either the outward or return portion for a delay of 60-119 minutes; and compensation to the value of 100% of the outward and return portions (where applicable) for a delay of 120 minutes or more.
- compensation to the value of your ticket in the event that an APRS booking is not honoured.
- in the event of a missed connection because of delay to or cancellation of an Essex Thameside train, a commitment to arrange alternative transport to get passengers to their final destination if the next connecting train is more than 60 minutes later and the alternative transport will result in an earlier arrival than waiting for the next train.
- in the event that delay to or cancellation of an Essex Thameside train makes it impossible for a passenger to get to their destination at a reasonable time by train or alternative transport, a commitment EITHER to get the passenger back to their origin point and let them travel again the following day OR arrange overnight accommodation and let them continue the following day, in either instance without additional charge.
- a commitment to provide refreshments at stations in the event of severe delays.
- protection for season ticket holders in the event of poor punctuality in the peaks over a sustained period. Our suggested wording is "Should customers on any Essex Thameside route experience a sustained period of poor punctuality on peak services we will compensate Season Tickets holders over and above the Delay Repay arrangements". Agreement would be needed about an appropriate delay threshold and trigger level and, based on research conducted previously on this subject we suggest a 10 minute threshold.

## **Recommendation 10:**

### **Meeting the needs of disabled passengers**

Passenger Focus recommends that DfT includes the following requirements in the specification of the Essex Thameside franchise:

- that an annual action plan be developed and implemented to enhance the service provided to disabled passengers using the Essex Thameside network and to improve customer satisfaction among those using the Assisted Passenger Reservation Service (APRS).
- that the new operator participates in the 'railways for all' process including a quantified commitment to improve access to stations over the life of the franchise.

- that sufficient post-journey customer satisfaction surveys are conducted each period to give a robust indication of the views of Essex Thameside passengers who used APRS when making their journey
- that all passengers with an APRS booking whose journey will be affected by amendments, cancellations or disruption to services will receive a telephone call to help them re-plan their journey.

## **Recommendation 11:**

### **Getting to the station**

Passenger Focus recommends that DfT includes the following requirements in the specification of the Essex Thameside franchise:

- that alongside assumptions about growth in passenger volume during the franchise term a strategy must be developed for how passengers will get to and from Essex Thameside stations, including implications for car and bicycle parking. This should include a requirement to implement station travel plans at key locations.

## **Recommendation 12:**

### **On train environment**

Passenger Focus recommends that DfT includes the following requirements in the specification of the Essex Thameside franchise:

- that all additional rolling stock brought into the franchise is refurbished to a standard comparable with the existing Class 357 fleet.
- that the operator meets contractual targets for NPS satisfaction for train cleaning, train toilets and upkeep/repair of the train.

## **Recommendation 13:**

### **Station environment**

Passenger Focus recommends that DfT includes the following requirements in the specification of the Essex Thameside franchise:

- that the operator meets contractual targets for NPS satisfaction with up-keep/repair of stations, station cleanliness and station facilities and services.

## 3. Analysis of franchise consultation and proposals

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### 3.1 Objectives for the Franchise, Page 25

Passenger Focus is pleased to note that developing services to accommodate growth in passenger demand, improving passenger satisfaction with value for money and improving operational performance are listed among DfT's objectives for the Essex Thameside franchise. Passengers told us their top three priorities for improvement within the new franchise are<sup>2</sup>:

- Punctuality and reliability of the train
- Frequency of trains on the route
- Value for money for the price of the ticket

However, given that improving punctuality and reliability is passengers' top priority for improvement, we feel that improving operational performance should not be achieved simply to 'contribute towards national performance targets' but because passengers on these routes see it as their top priority.

Given that performance of the current operator under the Public Performance Measure currently used by the industry is very good, and the fact that passengers continue to want improvement, the objectives should state explicitly an ambition to make Essex Thameside Britain's first 'Right Time Railway', with a greater focus on right-time arrivals.

### 3.2 Franchise length, Page 26

Subject to DfT retaining its ability to take action if performance is unsatisfactory, Passenger Focus supports the proposal for a franchise of at least 10 years. Should a bidder propose a longer term in return for significant investment, this should be given serious consideration, subject to arrangements to remove a poorly-performing operator and for the franchise specification to evolve over time. The longer the franchise the greater the need for arrangements to ensure passengers do not suffer (e.g. through price increases, cost cutting and deferring of investment) if a train company is faced with an unexpected economic downturn.

Passengers' top priority for improvement on Essex Thameside is punctuality and reliability. It would therefore be appropriate that any proposals for a franchise length significantly longer than 10 years should be focused on delivering performance that is significantly better than today.

### 3.3 Major Schemes and other initiatives, Page 27

#### High Level Output Specification HLOS – longer trains

We support the need for the work to deliver the Greater Anglia Route Utilisation Strategy and the capacity improvements set out in the High Level Output Specification. Passengers on the Tilbury

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<sup>2</sup> What passengers want from the Essex Thameside rail franchise, September 2009

Loop are particularly anxious for the platform extensions needed to accommodate 12 car operations.

As this will cause considerable disruption to passengers we would expect both the incumbent and the successor franchisee to work with Network Rail in finding the best way to mitigate the impact on passengers. It is particularly important that Seven Day Railway principles are brought to bear in the planning of such work and that the use of replacement bus services is minimised.

### **West Ham re-signalling project**

This project is long overdue. Once completed, we would expect a full consultation on any proposed timetable changes to avoid the difficulties encountered during the last major timetable change in December 2006.

### **3.4 The proposed DfT base specification, Page 35**

Section 9 (The proposed DfT base specification, page 35 onwards) makes clear that the base specification maintains the current level of train service and explores options for enhancement from December 2011 onwards. However Section 2 (Process and timescales, page 11) says that the department will consider options to reduce the service level set out in the base case. The consistent message from passenger groups is for stability and improvements and Passenger Focus does not want to see any reduction to the current level of services that passengers use today.

We welcome the DfT's proposal to prepare a revised set of demand forecasts. As this is crucial to decisions that will affect capacity it is vital that forecasts are published and subject to scrutiny. All the evidence points to a continuation of the growth in passenger numbers and therefore overcrowding will become an increasing problem. This is all the more likely given the plan for significant housing growth in the area, for example at Thurrock. It is therefore important that the flexibility exists to respond to unanticipated increases in demand during the life of the franchise.

Addressing the high peak demand for arrival in London between 08:00 and 08:59 will be a major challenge for the new franchise. The Thames Gateway population growth will only add to the pressure for more capacity to be provided.

### **Service Level Commitment 2 (SLC2)**

We welcome additional stops at West Ham and on the Tilbury Loop. We would like to see all services stopping at West Ham station to achieve its full potential as a major interchange on the route as well as avoiding the inconvenience to passengers having to change at Laindon or Barking for connecting services.

We look forward to the infrastructure enhancements to platform length and West Ham signalling and the added capacity that will come with additional rolling stock. For the Ockendon Branch Line, the current off-peak service frequency does not appear to match the current and future demand. We would expect the new franchise to include options to enhance the services should funding become available to improve the existing infrastructure during the life of the franchise as the

current service being offered is not adequate to meet the needs of passengers wishing to travel to Lakeside shopping centre.

Enhancements are particularly required on the Tilbury Loop where our passenger research demonstrated a clear desire for a higher frequency than at present. For Sunday services on the Rainham route, the current service is substantially below the aspirations of passengers as expressed in our research so we would strongly recommend that the Department should seek a 'standard off-peak' pattern with greater frequency than at present.

### **Tilbury Riverside bus service**

We note that the Department is considering whether there is sufficient demand to justify the costs of providing the current bus service from the Tilbury Riverside to the Station. We would oppose its removal for the simple reason that there would then be no alternative public transport service. For those who do not have cars, the only option is a 20-minute walk through an industrial part of town. We would consider this unacceptable and would therefore welcome proposals aimed at providing a viable alternative public transport offering. If a suitable alternative is proposed that can meet passenger needs, we believe that it must continue to be supported within the new franchise agreement.

### **Services at evenings and weekends**

The Department has asked for specific comment on the appropriate first and last train times and service frequencies proposed for the franchise. We strongly support the proposal for more consistent first/last train times that meet passengers' aspirations. Our pre-consultation submission set out our view that we would like to see the first services from Purfleet, Rainham and Dagenham Dock arriving in London pre-0600 on Monday to Friday; we would also like to see an earlier Sunday service on the Tilbury Line to improve on the current earliest train which departs at 0651 from Tilbury Town.

For the last train in the evening, our research indicated that passengers would like to see services as late as post 0100 for last departure and we would strongly support enhancements to this effect.

### **Services on public holidays**

We did not include a specific question on Boxing Day services in our pre-specification passenger research but it does seem likely that providing such a service would meet the suppressed demand of passengers wishing to take advantage of the post Christmas sales at Lakeside and in the West End. We would therefore expect the Department to seek the introduction of trial Boxing Day services for a minimum period and we strongly recommend that this is included in Service Level Commitment 2.

## **3.5 Reliability and performance, Page 40**

We welcome the Department's expectation that the current high levels of performance will continue and the expectation that reductions will be achieved in significant lateness and cancellations. However, improvements to punctuality and reliability still remain at the top of c2c passengers' priorities for further improvement. Recent research with National Express East Anglia

(NXEA)<sup>3</sup> shows that passenger satisfaction starts to decline from the first minute of delay, and that lateness at intermediate stops has a significant impact on the passenger experience of punctuality.

So in our view the future direction for performance must be aiming to achieve a 'Right Time Railway' – where '*on time*' for the rail industry means exactly the same as it does for its passengers. This should include additional targets set for right-time arrivals and the monitoring and publication of data on right-time arrivals at intermediate stops.

Additionally we are concerned that any changes to the timetable must not compromise the existing punctuality and reliability as this is passengers' number one priority. The major timetable change in December 2006 offers useful lessons for any future timetable change proposals. In any consultation process there must be representation of all interests on the different parts of the route to avoid changes such as those that were made to the Laindon starter services. We would also be looking for assurance on the operational robustness of the timetable changes and the process and period within which any initial performance slippage would be remedied.

We would also have serious concerns about any aspects of the new franchise which might pose a risk to the current levels of performance, such as a change in rolling stock which does not have the proven levels of reliability as the Class 357.

### **3.6 Security and safety, Page 43**

We welcome the requirement for input measures to improve passenger perceptions of personal security, including maintaining Secure Stations Accreditation, extending CCTV on trains and increasing the car parks covered by the Park Mark award. However given the particular concerns expressed by c2c passengers in our research<sup>4</sup>, Passenger Focus believes that the franchise should contain clear outcome targets for the franchisee to achieve: there should be contractual targets to increase passenger satisfaction with personal security at the station and on the train.

Both at the station and on the train, passengers identify anti-social behaviour and a lack of staff, as the principal causes of concern with personal security<sup>5</sup>. Currently staff presence comes in the form of gate line and security staff. Better customer service training so that security staff adopt a more customer friendly approach when they are not pursuing security matters will enhance that staff presence, as will providing support in a similar way to NXEA's Travel Safer Teams. We have a particular concern with regards to staffing during late night train services and we would support the provision of staff patrol teams backed up by the British Transport Police.

Improving the station environment is also important. For example, Ockendon station has a less than pleasant environment because of the boards and bars in place. Trespass and revenue protection could also be addressed by providing longer fencing to stop fare evaders simply walking along the platform to avoid the ticket gates.

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<sup>3</sup> Passenger Focus, Towards a 'right time' East Anglian railway, March 2010

<sup>4</sup> Passenger Focus, National Passenger Survey, Spring 2009

<sup>5</sup> Passenger Focus, National Passenger Survey, Autumn 2008

### 3.7 Fares, ticketing and revenue protection, Page 44

We support the broad objective of achieving a sustainable value for money of the franchise within the constraints of the overall franchise budget insofar as it is not aimed at reducing the current level of services or introducing fare increases above the current level of RPI+1 which applies to regulated fares. We would also seek assurances that restrictions continue to be placed on the fares basket flexibility to prevent excessive increases on individual fares. We would also not support changes to off-peak and super off-peak ticket restrictions which seek to restrict the times for cheaper travel.

We welcome proposals to improve the affordability and convenience of purchasing annual season tickets, and the requirement for the franchisee to make ticket restrictions clear on ticket machines. As stated in our recommendations (see Section 2 – Recommendation 6), we recommend that time restrictions for off-peak tickets and super off-peak tickets should be printed **on the ticket** so that passengers holding a ticket know precisely the value of the product that they have purchased.

We also recommended that fares on 'walk up' interavailable flows controlled by the franchise, the official through fare must never exceed the sum of 'walk up' interavailable fares for individual legs of the journey except where a journey takes place partly at peak time and partly not.

### 3.8 Improving service quality

Undoubtedly, c2c customers have benefited from a brand new fleet of trains which have proved to be very reliable and well maintained and cleaned. Passengers will expect the same standards to be maintained as part of the new franchise.

Staffing both on board the trains and at stations also needs to be addressed to improve persistent poor satisfaction scores in these areas. The poor perception of the availability of staff must be looked into to understand what improvements passengers would like to see to address this concern. If it relates to non-commuter travel, for instance anti-social behaviour on late-evening trains, then in addition we would expect to see a commitment to providing staff on board those trains. The helpfulness and attitude of staff where they are available is very much below the London and South East average. It is therefore very important that they have customer services training over and above their typical revenue protection or security duties.

## Appendix A: Bibliography

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National Passenger Survey, Spring 2009

<http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/news-and-publications/document-search/document.asp?dsid=2911>

What passengers want from the Essex Thameside rail franchise, September 2009

<http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/news-and-publications/document-search/document.asp?dsid=3527>

Towards a 'right time' East Anglian railway, March 2010

<http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/news-and-publications/document-search/document.asp?dsid=3764>

## Appendix B: Consultation

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We consulted with the following organisations as part of the formal consultation for the Essex Thameside franchise:

Organisation
c2c passenger panel
Southend Rail Travellers Association
Thurrock Rail Users Group