



# Passenger Focus's response to the Network Rail East Midlands Route Utilisation Strategy Draft for Consultation

November 2009

## **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 and, subject to Parliamentary process, from spring 2010 England's bus passengers outside London and coach passengers on scheduled domestic services. We are funded by the Department for Transport (DfT) but 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. Executive summary

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Passenger Focus's response to Network Rail's East Midlands Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS) draft for consultation draws on evidence from our research, in particular **passengers' priorities for improvements in rail services, 2007<sup>1</sup>** and the **National Passenger Survey<sup>2</sup>**.

As referred to in the consultation document<sup>3</sup>, Passenger Focus is currently undertaking research to inform recommendations in the Final RUS about passenger access to stations, in particular car parking. This work will report in December 2009.

Passenger Focus's **passengers' priorities for improvements in rail services, 2007** research shows that among passengers in the East Midlands Region the top priorities for improvement are:

- value for money
- frequency of service
- punctuality and reliability
- seating capacity on the train

As this RUS also covers the railway from Bedford to London, it is worth noting that the top four priorities for improvement among passengers in the East of England Region are the same – and in the same order – as in the East Midlands.

Passenger Focus believes that the East Midlands RUS must therefore ensure that the industry's investment priorities are focused on delivering improvements to these factors.

In summary, Passenger Focus broadly supports the recommendations in the RUS draft for consultation. In some cases, however, we feel that the proposed interventions do not address or do not fully address the gap identified.

A decision about electrification of the Midland Main Line is critical to longer-term strategic planning in this RUS area and it also appears to offer the solution, through the electric version of the Intercity Express Programme (IEP) train, to increasing capacity on Long Distance High Speed (LDHS) services beyond the proposals in this RUS. Passenger Focus therefore advocates an early decision about electrification to Nottingham, Derby and Sheffield.

Finally, Passenger Focus calls on the industry to make this RUS the first to formally embrace the conclusions of recent discussions between the rail industry, Government and Passenger Focus about keeping passengers on trains during engineering works wherever possible, using replacement buses only as a last resort.

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<sup>1</sup> Passengers' Priorities for Improvements in rail services, July 2007

<sup>2</sup> National Passenger Survey, Spring 2009

<sup>3</sup> Paragraph 3.4.7, Page 46 of the RUS draft for consultation

## **2. Introduction**

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Passenger Focus welcomes the opportunity to respond to the East Midlands RUS draft for consultation. We support the broad objectives of the RUS process and welcome the consultative approach adopted by Network Rail. Passenger Focus has used its membership of the Stakeholder Management Group to provide a passenger voice in discussions about the future of the network in the East Midlands. We recognise that there is an established process for the creation of a RUS and note that the route utilisation objective is:

*“the effective and efficient use and development of the capacity available on the network, consistent with funding that is, or is likely to become, available.”<sup>4</sup>*

### **Structure of this response**

In Section 3 we set out evidence from relevant Passenger Focus research; in Section 4 we comment in more detail about the specific options and recommendations in the RUS draft for consultation; and in Section 5 we give a flavour of the views expressed to us at the stakeholder event we held in Leicester on 29 September 2009.

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<sup>4</sup> Extract from ORR Guidelines on Route Utilisation Strategies, April 2009.

### 3. Passenger Research

In this section we set out the findings of relevant Passenger Focus research, including **passengers' priorities for improvements in rail services, 2007**, the **National Passenger Survey (NPS)** and the February 2009 **Fares and Ticketing Study**<sup>5</sup>.

#### 3.1 Passenger priorities

Passenger Focus's **passengers' priorities for improvements in rail services, 2007** research shows that the top priorities for improvement among passengers in the East Midlands Region are:

- value for money
- frequency of service
- punctuality and reliability
- seating capacity on the train

**Table 1 – East Midlands Region passenger priorities<sup>6</sup>**

Issue for potential improvement	Priority for improvement ranking, East Midlands
Price of train tickets offer excellent value for money	1
Sufficient train services at times I use the train	2
At least 19 out of 20 trains arrive on time	3
Passengers are always able to get a seat on the train	4
Information on train times/platforms accurate and available	5
Company keeps passengers informed of train delays	6
Seating area on the train is very comfortable	7
Trains are consistently well maintained/in excellent condition	8
Max queue time no more than 2 minutes to purchase tickets	9
Passengers experience a high level of security on the train	10

As this RUS also covers the railway from Bedford to London, it is worth noting that the top four priorities for improvement among passengers in the East of England Region are the same – and in the same order – as in the East Midlands.

<sup>5</sup> Passenger Focus Fares and Ticketing Study, February 2009

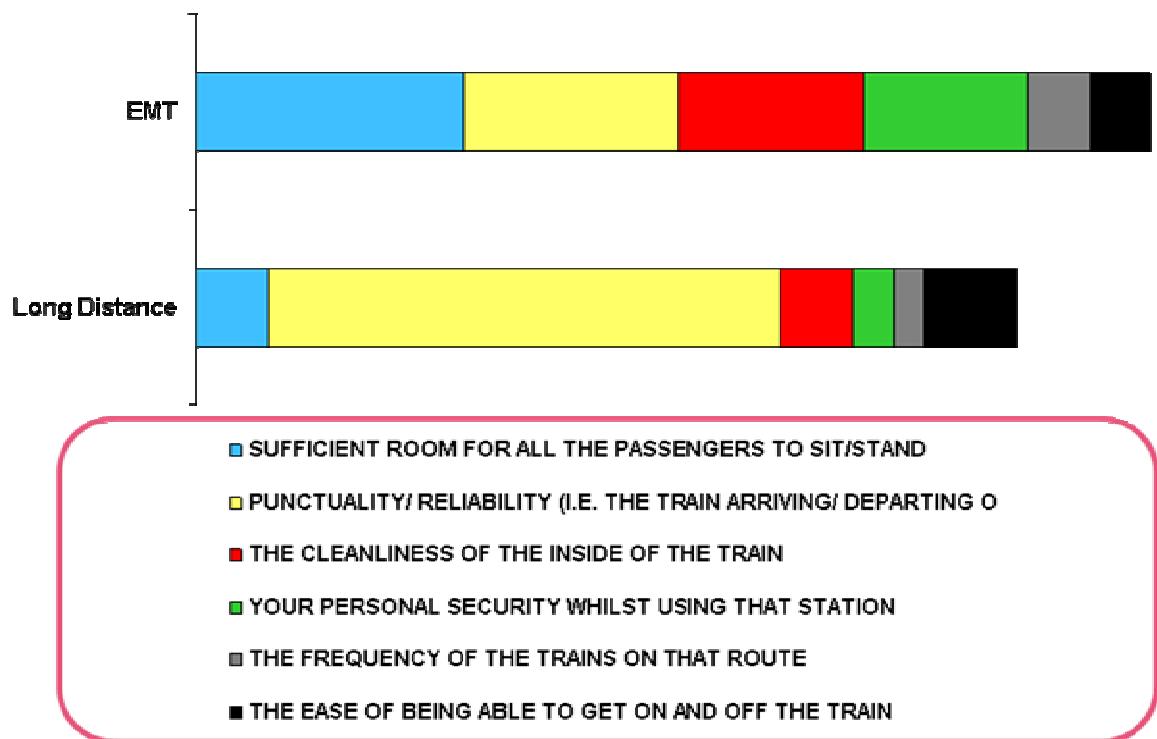
<sup>6</sup> Sample 379. 38% of rail journeys are commuting, 21% business, 41% leisure purposes. Weighted priorities

### 3.2 National Passenger Survey

#### Drivers of satisfaction

Analysis of NPS Spring 2009 results shows the significant drivers of satisfaction among East Midlands Trains (EMT) passengers are:

**Figure 1 – Drivers of passenger satisfaction for EMT, NPS Spring 2009**

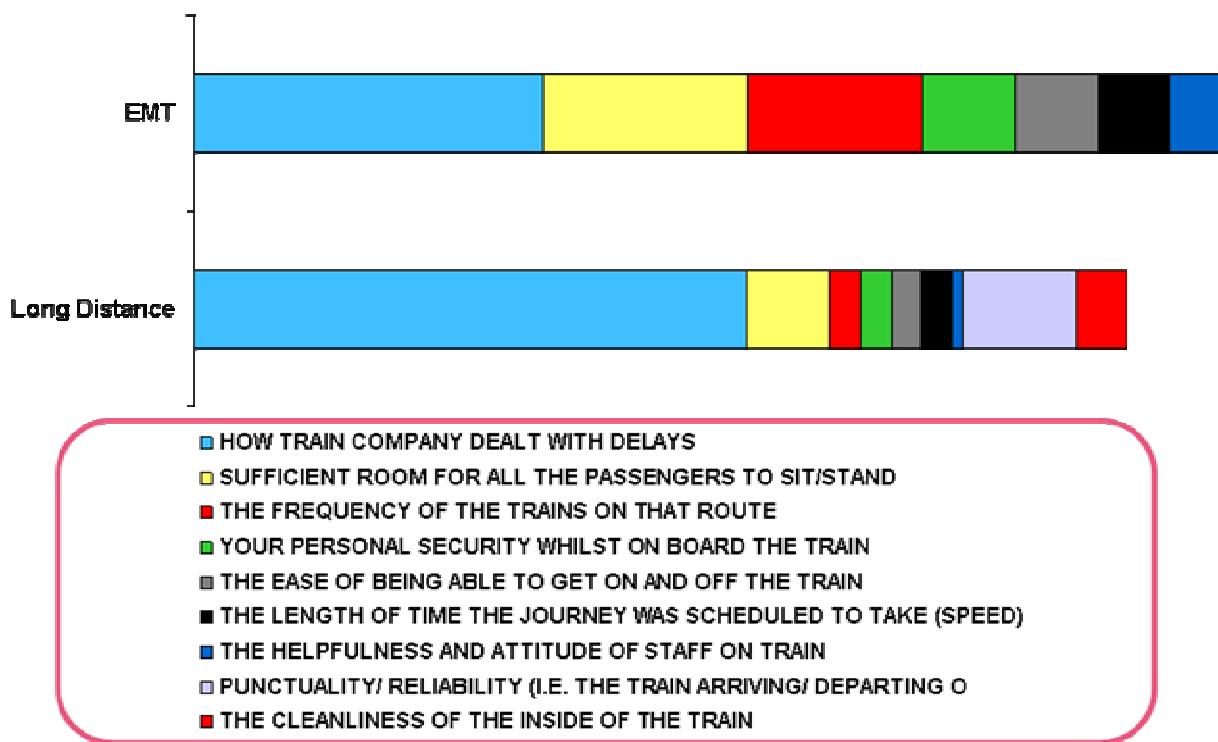


This shows that sufficient room for all passengers to sit or stand is the biggest driver of satisfaction among EMT passengers (26% contribution), more so than among passengers of long-distance train companies as a whole (7% contribution). The second biggest driver of satisfaction with EMT is punctuality and reliability (21% contribution), which is less significant than among long-distance train companies as a whole (50% contribution).

Whether or not somebody gets a seat is a bigger driver of overall satisfaction among East Midlands Trains passengers than among those travelling with other long-distance train companies.

## Drivers of dissatisfaction

Figure 2 – Drivers of passenger dissatisfaction, EMT NPS Spring 2009



This shows that how the train company dealt with delays is the biggest driver of dissatisfaction among EMT passengers (34% contribution), less significant than among passengers of long-distance train companies as a whole (54% contribution). The second biggest driver of dissatisfaction with EMT is sufficient room for all passengers to sit or stand (20% contribution), more significant than among long-distance train companies as a whole (8% contribution). The third biggest driver of dissatisfaction among EMT passengers is frequency of trains (17% contribution), long-distance (3% contribution).

Once again, the question of whether somebody gets a seat appears to be a bigger issue for East Midlands Trains passengers than those travelling with other long-distance train companies.

### Sufficient room for all passengers to sit or stand

Passenger satisfaction with there being sufficient room for all passengers to sit or stand is the top driver of overall satisfaction and second highest driver of overall dissatisfaction among EMT passengers. It varies by journey purpose and between different EMT routes.

Table 2 – % fairly or very satisfied with sufficient room to sit/stand by journey type, NPS Spring 2009

Total	Commuter	Business	Leisure
66%	52%	72%	78%

**Table 3 – % fairly or very satisfied with sufficient room to sit/stand by route, NPS Spring 2009**

Liverpool-Norwich	Local services	London services
64%	71%	68%

This shows that commuters are less likely to be satisfied with their ability to get a seat and that the lowest satisfaction is with Liverpool to Norwich services. It is notable that, overall, one third of EMT passengers did not express satisfaction with sufficient room for all passengers to sit or stand.

### Punctuality and reliability

Passenger satisfaction with punctuality and reliability varies by journey purpose and between the different routes passengers are using. For completeness, data for First Capital Connect Thameslink North are included in Table 4.

**Table 4 – % fairly or very satisfied with punctuality and dealing with delays, NPS Spring 2009**

	East Midlands Trains (whole)	First Capital Connect (Thameslink North)
Punctuality/reliability	80%	85%
How well dealt with delays	35%	26%

**Table 5 – % fairly or very satisfied with punctuality/dealing with delays by EMT route, NPS Spring 2009**

	Liverpool – Norwich	Local services	London services
Punctuality/reliability	85%	80%	86%
How well dealt with delays	26%	27%	42%

**Table 6 – % fairly or very satisfied with punctuality/dealing with delays on EMT by journey type, NPS Spring 2009**

	Commuter	Business	Leisure
Punctuality/reliability	71%	85%	88%
How well dealt with delays	26%	41%	47%

This shows that satisfaction with punctuality and reliability is significantly lower among commuters. Satisfaction with how the train company dealt with delays is lower among commuters than business or leisure users, and lower among passengers on Liverpool to Norwich and local services than on the EMT London routes.

### Passenger satisfaction with connections

There are two questions within NPS relating to connections. These cover satisfaction with connections with other train services and satisfaction with connections with other forms of public transport. Tables 7 and 8 show satisfaction by route and journey type for EMT.

**Table 7 – % fairly or very satisfied with connections by route, EMT NPS Spring 2009**

	Liverpool – Norwich	Local services	London services
<b>Connections with other train services</b>	71%	66%	71%
<b>Connections with other forms of public transport</b>	78%	63%	79%

**Table 8 – Satisfaction with connections by journey type**

	Commuter	Business	Leisure
<b>Connections with other train services</b>	66%	75%	79%
<b>Connections with other forms of public transport</b>	70%	75%	77%

Least satisfied with the connections for all forms of transport are passengers using local services, while commuters are the least satisfied with connections in both contexts.

### Value for money

Paragraph 3.1 shows that offering better value for money is the top priority for improvement among passengers in the East Midlands Region. Of the Government Office areas not dominated by London commuting, the East Midlands has the lowest satisfaction with value for money in the NPS.

**Table 9 – Value for money satisfaction by geography<sup>7</sup>**

Government Office Region, Scotland and Wales	Value for money
East of England	31%
London	34%
South East	38%
<b>East Midlands</b>	<b>46%</b>
South West	48%
North West	51%
Scotland	55%
West Midlands	55%
North East	56%
Yorkshire & Humber	56%
Wales	59%

### 3.3 Fares and Ticketing

Passenger Focus's **Fares and Ticketing Study**, February 2009 shows which factors have the greatest influence on passengers' assessment of value for money for the price of their ticket.

<sup>7</sup> National Passenger Survey, Spring 2009

Among long-distance passengers the influencing factors are:

- being able to get a seat on the train
- punctuality/reliability of the train
- kept informed of delays/journey changes
- the journey is fast and direct
- the train is not overcrowded
- the train is clean
- the toilets are clean and in working order
- the price of the ticket is cheap
- the stations used to board and exit are safe and well lit

Among commuters the top three influencing factors are:

- punctuality/reliability of the train
- being able to get a seat on the train
- kept informed of delays/journey changes

### **3.4 Access to stations**

As referred to in the draft for consultation, Passenger Focus is currently undertaking research to inform recommendations in the Final RUS about passenger access to stations, in particular car parking. This work will give an overview of current usage of station car parks, as well as insight to passenger satisfaction in this area. Our findings will be reported in December 2009.

In advance of this, it should be noted that recent Passenger Focus submissions to the Department for Transport about the specification of new passenger franchises have made recommendations in this area. In summary, that alongside assumptions made about future passenger volume growth, a strategy for how passengers will get to and from stations, including implications for car and bicycle parking, should be developed and implemented. Where appropriate, we have recommended that this includes formal station travel plans at a number of locations.

### **3.5 Conclusions from passenger research**

In conclusion, we reiterate that the top priorities for improvement among passengers in the East Midlands Region (and the East of England Region) are:

- value for money
- frequency of service
- punctuality and reliability
- seating capacity on the train

Passenger Focus believes that the East Midlands RUS must therefore ensure that the industry's investment priorities are focused on delivering improvements in these areas.

## 4. Analysis of options

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### Gap 1 - peak crowding and growth in key corridors

#### Crowding to/from London

Passenger Focus **supports** Option 1.1 (lengthening LDHS services), however we note the warning that passengers may again be standing by 2019. As lengthening trains beyond 11 coaches and pathing additional LDHS services are ruled out, we **recommend** that Option 1.4 (introduction of IEP trains), along with proposals for electrification of the Midland Main Line to Nottingham, Derby and Sheffield, is developed as soon as possible. We note that an electric version of IEP will deliver 30% more seats than the existing rolling stock.

If the Final RUS recommends additional Selective Door Opening – instead of platform lengthening – the operational and passenger implications must be considered carefully (e.g. the additional need for passengers, particularly those with disabilities, luggage, bicycles etc., to be in the correct part of the train).

The Final RUS should give firmer details about lengthening existing trains, including timescales.

#### Crowding to/from regional centres

Passenger Focus **supports** Options 1.5 to 1.9 (1.5 Leicester-Derby; 1.6 Leicester-Nottingham; 1.7 Leicester-Kettering; 1.8 Nottingham-Worksop; 1.9 Nottingham-Leicester), however we note that even after implementation Options 1.5, 1.7 and 1.8 involve some passengers continuing to stand. While industry definitions may deem this “acceptable”, it is unsatisfactory from a passenger perspective – not least because current rolling stock is not designed to allow standing in reasonable comfort. The industry should note that, unlike commuting into central London the private car is a practical option for commuter journeys into regional centres in the East Midlands and crowded trains, whether officially “acceptable” or not, are likely to suppress rail demand and damage long-term customer loyalty.

While Passenger Focus supports Options 1.5, 1.7 and 1.8, they do not go far enough to reduce the level of crowding that has been identified and we **recommend** that the Final RUS reviews the draft conclusions.

Notwithstanding the paragraph above, the Final RUS should give firmer details about implementation of Options 1.5 to 1.9, including timescales.

## Gap 2 - all day crowding and growth

### Liverpool to Norwich capacity

Passenger Focus **supports** Option 2.1 as essential to address crowding at the western end of the route after three-car trains were replaced with two-car trains. The Final RUS should set out a clear timeline to bring these proposals to fruition. While the current plan is to eliminate one two-hour gap in the service between Nottingham and Norwich by extending the 1352 from Liverpool, it should be noted that the 1652 from Liverpool also terminates at Nottingham, leaving a gap in North West, South Yorkshire and the East Midlands to East of England journey opportunities at a key time of the day.

### Birmingham to Stansted Airport

Passenger Focus **supports** Option 2.4, a mix of service extensions that deliver increased frequency east of Leicester and train lengthening. However, we are concerned that even after these interventions the average load factor on Birmingham to Stansted Airport services will be 95% of seated capacity, suggesting that passengers on particular trains are very likely to be standing.

While Passenger Focus supports Option 2.4, it does not appear to go far enough to meet the level of demand likely to materialise in the RUS period. We suspect that a half-hourly service from Birmingham to Cambridge every second hour will be inadequate to meet passengers' aspirations for more frequent trains. We therefore **recommend** that the Final RUS makes a bolder recommendation, perhaps that all Birmingham to Stansted trains should be at least three car trains and that Birmingham to Leicester trains should be extended to Cambridge every hour and run as at least three car trains.

## Gap 3 - freight capability

Beyond noting the potential to eliminate the 30 minute dwell time at Kettering on some London to Corby/Corby to London journeys, and the potential benefits of additional infrastructure during engineering works and service disruption, Passenger Focus has no comments about the freight recommendations.

### Radlett Strategic Rail Freight Interchange

Helioslough, a property development company, is proposing that a Strategic Rail Freight Interchange be constructed on land at Radlett, linked to the Midland Main Line. This is briefly mentioned in the RUS draft for consultation.

Passenger Focus **recommends** that the Final RUS is clear that this cannot proceed unless the necessary paths can be accommodated alongside the capacity and punctuality requirements of the Thameslink Programme and the future requirements for LDHS services on the route.

## Gap 4 - regional connectivity

### Improved journey times

While improvement to the speed of journeys does not show as a priority in Passenger Focus 2007 research, this may be because passengers were asked whether making their journey five minutes faster was a priority. It is possible that long-distance passengers would have placed greater priority on journey time improvements had we asked about more significant time savings. We are aware that journey time plays an important role in passenger demand assumptions and some inter-regional journeys covered by this RUS are undoubtedly slow (at around 2 hours 45 minutes by train, it is quicker to drive the 100 miles from Cambridge to Birmingham<sup>8</sup>). Passenger Focus therefore **supports** the various proposals designed to reduce journey time or investigate the reduction of journey time, although any brought about by removing intermediate stops will require careful examination. We are pleased to note that potential cuts in the level of service at Burton on Trent and Tamworth, and the option to remove Sheffield calls in Liverpool to Norwich trains have been rejected in the RUS draft for consultation. A careful balance must be struck with punctuality objectives, but a review of sectional running and station dwell times is desirable to establish whether they are overly generous.

It is disappointing that the draft RUS has not recommended improved links between the East Midlands and the North West, beyond the extra capacity in Option 2.1. Three options have been looked at and rejected because improvement in generalised journey time is insufficient to justify the extra operating costs. An option that has not been evaluated is provision of a Leicester-Derby-Chesterfield-Manchester service, possibly calling at Loughborough, Long Eaton and Stockport. Passenger Focus **recommends** that the Final RUS looks further at options to improve the links between the East Midlands and the North West: the draft RUS has raised this as a gap, but has not recommended a remedy.

Given that train frequency is the second highest priority for improvement in the East Midlands, Passenger Focus **supports** the conclusion in Option 4.6 (Nottingham-Lincoln) that improving service frequency between Nottingham and Lincoln is of greater priority than journey time improvements.

### Improved service frequency

Passenger Focus research<sup>9</sup> shows that having “sufficient train services at times I use the train” is the second highest priority for improvement among passengers in the East Midlands Region.

#### Sheffield to London

Passenger Focus **supports** Option 4.7 and the Final RUS should give an update on progress with bringing this to fruition.

#### Bedford and north Northamptonshire to the north

Passenger Focus **supports** the objective that Option 4.8 seeks to achieve. However, it is unclear that the recommendation made will address the gap identified. The RUS draft for consultation states that “Bedford has the largest proportion of current passenger journeys”, yet concludes that the

<sup>8</sup> Road journey time from [transportdirect.info](http://transportdirect.info), 2 hours 19 minutes

<sup>9</sup> Passenger Focus's passengers' priorities for improvements in rail services 2007

Derby semi-fast train (which may in due course be extended to Sheffield) should stop at Kettering. The consultation document explains that the time penalty for London-bound passengers of stopping trains at Bedford, which takes longer than stopping at Kettering, outweighs the benefits that would accrue. We note the relative size of the two Boroughs (Kettering 81,844, Bedford 147,911)<sup>10</sup> and the wide range of destinations available by rail with a single change of trains at Bedford. There is a direct train service from Bedford to 13 intermediate stations to London (including the sizeable towns of Luton and St. Albans, as well as Luton Airport) and to 11 stations on the line to Bletchley, itself within the Milton Keynes unitary authority area. Given these points and what the draft RUS says about rail demand from Bedford to the north, Passenger Focus **recommends** that the Final RUS reviews the draft conclusions – including examination of whether, in conjunction with Thameslink Programme works, the time penalty for calling a southbound train at Bedford can be reduced.

#### **Peterborough to Lincoln all day service**

It is disappointing that Option 4.9 does not recommend an all day hourly service between Peterborough and Lincoln even after resignaling has dramatically reduced operating costs. At present the service runs approximately hourly between c. 0830 and c. 1630 only. The draft RUS suggests that one additional single car train would be required to achieve an all day service and Passenger Focus **recommends** that the Final RUS examines further how this could be achieved.

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<sup>10</sup> 2001 Census

## Gap 5 - Performance

Passenger Focus research **passengers' priorities for improvements in rail services, 2007** shows 'at least 19 out of 20 trains arrive on time' as the third most important priority for improvement among passengers in the East Midlands Region. Indeed, in recent submissions to DfT regarding the specification of future franchises we have called for greater emphasis on 'right time' arrival at destination and highlighted the need to monitor punctuality at key intermediate stations. Passenger Focus notes that various schemes are committed or being considered for implementation in Control Period 4, while others will be examined in preparation for the December 2015 Thameslink Programme timetable. However, given that it is cited as being responsible for 120,000 minutes delay over two years, Passenger Focus **recommends** that the Final RUS sets out clearly the industry's strategy to reduce knock-on delays arising at Derby.

Passenger Focus **supports** the recommendation to develop Option 5.3 further (provision of an east-west flyover over the East Coast Main Line at Newark) because of its service frequency, performance and journey time benefits to passengers in the East Midlands and on the East Coast Main Line.

## Gap 6 - Seven Day Railway

Passenger Focus **recommends** that the Final RUS becomes the first to formally embrace the conclusions of recent discussions between the rail industry, Government and Passenger Focus about keeping passengers on trains during engineering works wherever possible, using replacement buses only as a last resort.

## Thirty-year vision

Passenger Focus welcomes the fact that recently-completed RUSs look beyond their official 10 year horizon. We **recommend** that the Final RUS should be explicit about how the thirty-year vision will seek to deliver improvements in the areas passengers state are priorities. Passenger Focus will provide updates as passenger priorities research is refreshed from time to time, but as referred to already the current top priorities for improvement among passengers in the East Midlands Region are:

- value for money
- frequency of service
- punctuality and reliability
- seating capacity on the train

## 5. Stakeholder views

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While Passenger Focus's recommendations in this document are based on the findings of passenger research, we have consulted a number of organisations with an interest in the East Midlands RUS area. Passengers Focus has urged all to respond directly to the RUS consultation and several have provided us with a copy of their response. We also organised a stakeholder event in Leicester on 29 September 2009, at which Network Rail made a presentation about the RUS, and we set out below a brief distillation of the principal themes from those attending:

The organisations who attended generally had few concerns about the recommendations in the RUS draft for consultation, but most were frustrated that they did not go further. This may stem from a desire among some that RUSs should not be constrained by the "*consistent with funding that is, or is likely to become, available*" clause. The issues and questions raised included:

- Whether available data underestimate current usage and current crowding on some non-London routes, leading to fewer recommendations than might otherwise be justified (Passenger Focus is aware that additional counts have been undertaken as a result of this feedback).
- Whether the RUS draft for consultation took account of all development proposals in the Region (e.g. Newark 15,000 additional homes by 2026<sup>11</sup>, Leicestershire as a whole 131,000 additional homes by 2031<sup>12</sup>). It would be helpful if the Final RUS provided clarity about which developments have been factored into its forecasting and which have not.
- Concern about availability of the additional rolling stock identified in a number of recommended options, and whether it will be fit for purpose in terms of luggage space, inter-unit connections etc.
- Why the draft RUS has confined itself to today's railway and not sought to expand it. In particular there was reference to the Burton-on-Trent to Leicester reopening scheme, listed as having a positive business case in the recent ATOC Connecting Communities report<sup>13</sup>, but not mentioned in the draft RUS.
- Concern that Paragraph 6.5.10 of the RUS draft for consultation states "connectivity to airports within the RUS area has not been identified as a gap." The concern related to aspirations that connectivity between Sheffield/Derby and Luton Airport be improved from the current one train per hour with a change at Leicester, and aspirations that in future Nottingham might benefit from direct trains to Stansted Airport.

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<sup>11</sup> Newark & Sherwood District Council, September 2009

<sup>12</sup> [www.thisisleicestershire.co.uk](http://www.thisisleicestershire.co.uk) 28 September 2009

<sup>13</sup> Connecting Communities - Expanding Access to the Rail Network, ATOC June 2009

## Organisations with which we had direct contact relating to the East Midlands RUS included:

Association of Public Transport Users (St. Albans)
Bedford Commuters' Association
Bedford to Bletchley Rail Users' Association
Derbyshire & Peak District Campaign for Better Transport
Harborough Rail Users
Leicestershire and Northamptonshire Rail Action Committee (LANRAC) - representing the district councils in those counties
Lichfield Rail Promotion Group
Peterborough-Ely-Norwich Rail Users (PENRUG)
Railfuture East Midlands
Railfuture West Midlands
Travelwatch East Midlands

## 6. Bibliography

Fares and Ticketing Study, February 2009 <a href="http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/news-and-publications/document-search/document.asp?dsid=2526">http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/news-and-publications/document-search/document.asp?dsid=2526</a>
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