



Passengers' priorities for improvements

Rail services in Scotland

Foreword

Passenger Focus commissioned MVA Consultancy to carry out a survey amongst rail passengers in Scotland to identify which attributes of rail services in Scotland they would most like to see improved. Transport Scotland can use this information to make sure that its resources are clearly aligned to the areas passengers want to see improved.

The priorities for improvements for individual passengers or groups of passengers will sometimes differ from those of the majority. The aim of this research was to find out the views of the majority of rail passengers.

The National Passenger Survey carried out by Passenger Focus each spring and autumn asks 25,000 passengers to rate more than 30 different service attributes ranging from the punctuality and reliability of trains to the cleanliness of stations. All of these attributes are important to passengers and cause dissatisfaction if not delivered to a satisfactory standard and train companies, like other service providers, have to try their best to meet their customers' reasonable needs at all times.

Passenger Focus commissioned Outlook, an independent market research agency, to carry out group discussions to gain a better understanding of passengers' priorities for improvement to train services and understand their issues regarding the environmental impact of rail. In addition the prioritisation for improvements survey carried out by MVA Consultancy helped to identify which of the 30 service attributes are most in need of improvement.

This work was funded by Passenger Focus, Transport Scotland and the Department for Transport.

What did the research involve?

Two groups of seven passengers in Glasgow were recruited to discuss issues relating to the environmental impact of rail and passenger priorities for improvement in depth. This was in addition to 11 other group discussions on the same issue held in other parts of Great Britain.

In addition, a cross-section of rail passengers at 15 different sized train stations across Scotland, were given self-completion questionnaires during March 2007. These passengers were asked to rate how well their reasonable expectations of service at stations and on trains are being met and their priorities for improvements. In total 326 questionnaires were returned.

Summary of findings – focus groups with Glasgow / Great Britain rail travellers – priorities for improvement

- There was some feeling that rail travel is currently 'on the up' in terms of improved reliability, comfort, speed etc. This feeling was heightened by negative press coverage for air and road travel.
- Tackling overcrowding was considered the key issue for the rail industry. The current network was seen as unable to cope with demand for rail travel. Personal security also emerged as an area that passengers felt needed improvement.
- Whilst passengers suggested a number of improvements for their comfort and convenience (e.g. more leg room, free wireless broadband etc.), these were all seen as 'nice to haves' rather than 'essentials'.
- The issue of personal security is most likely to impact negatively on future likelihood of travel. Differences in perceptions of personal security vary by size of station: larger stations are seen as more secure, smaller stations less secure and sometimes a reason not to travel through smaller stations.
- At stations, addressing personal security issues and improving inter-modal connectivity were highlighted as priorities for improvement by current users.
- The ticket purchase process is a source of frustration for some passengers. Key to improving this will be raising awareness of alternative purchase channels encouraging more remote purchases where possible. There is a strong desire amongst frequent users for smart card and e-tickets to simplify the purchase of tickets and speed up their journey.
- There is a number of different factors affecting modal choice for long journeys - it is not simply a case of which is the fastest/cheapest mode. These factors include cost, time of travel, length of journey, other modes available, who passengers are travelling with, comfort etc.
- Although the innovation and vision of a new high-speed rail network for the UK is broadly welcomed, most are sceptical of the cost implications for passengers and would prefer investment to be made in improving the existing network.
- Whilst it goes without saying that safety is the most important issue for all passengers, it is usually taken for granted. This was even the case within the context of a very recent major rail incident which occurred during the research. Rail travel is viewed as inherently safe. Passengers therefore felt that it would not be particularly useful for them to regularly receive safety statistics and information.

In conclusion, within the context of all modes available, rail often compares favourably and holds several key advantages over the alternatives. No issue was strong enough to be a barrier to continued usage. The capacity to cope with demand and improving personal security were seen as the two key areas for improvement.

Summary of findings – focus groups with Glasgow / Great Britain rail travellers – environmental impact of rail

- When deciding which mode of transport to use, issues taken into consideration include speed/time, comfort, cost and quality of life, but generally not the environmental impact of the journey. The issue of how green modes of public transport are is not seen as an issue for the passenger but one that the rail industry and the government should deal with.
- In the context of all modes of transport, trains are viewed most positively as the least polluting mode. However, some see trains as being potentially as polluting as any other modes if, for example, they run with a low number of passengers on board.
- Very few passengers are actively seeking information on the environment or environmental impact of different modes of transport, so they are reliant upon the media/government for any information regarding this. There is some desire to find out more of this type of information if objective agencies (such as universities) make it more accessible. But for some passengers, this makes for uncomfortable reading and they would rather not know.
- To make the railway more environmentally friendly, smaller measures such as recycling bins, low energy bulbs and more space for bicycles are often seen as more realistic than larger measures, as they are more in keeping with what passengers are currently doing themselves in their home environment.
- Of a number of statistics shown to respondents, the statistics on the potential environmental impact of running high-speed trains had by far the most impact (a very high speed train running between London and Edinburgh would cut journey time by 15% but would consume 90% more energy than for the equivalent current journey by rail according to figures provided by the Department for Transport.). A long distance business passenger in Glasgow remarked that “I think it would be really expensive to build and run and we would end up paying. It would have to cut the journey time by over an hour for me to use it.”

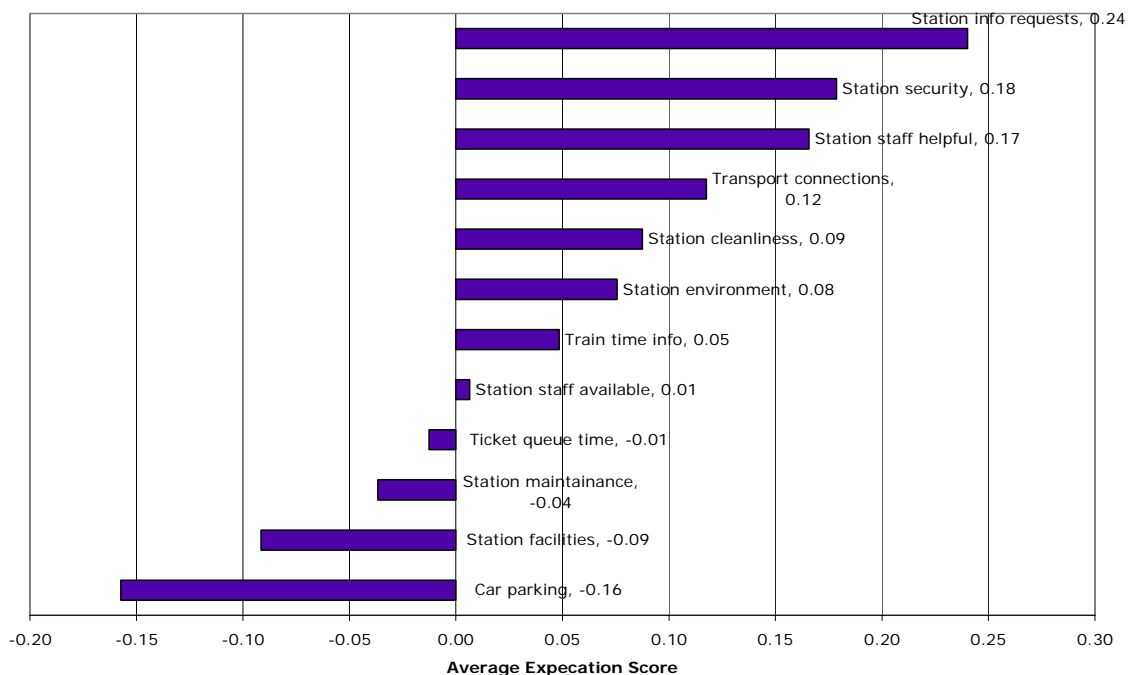
Summary of findings – survey of 336 rail passengers in Scotland

• Passenger expectations survey - Scotland

To find out if passengers in Scotland felt they were receiving the rail service that they should reasonably expect, they were asked to rate each station and train attribute using a five point scale. The chart below has positive scores (on the right) where passengers feel they are receiving a better service than they should reasonably expect, while a negative score (on the left) indicates that passengers are receiving a worse service than they should reasonably expect.

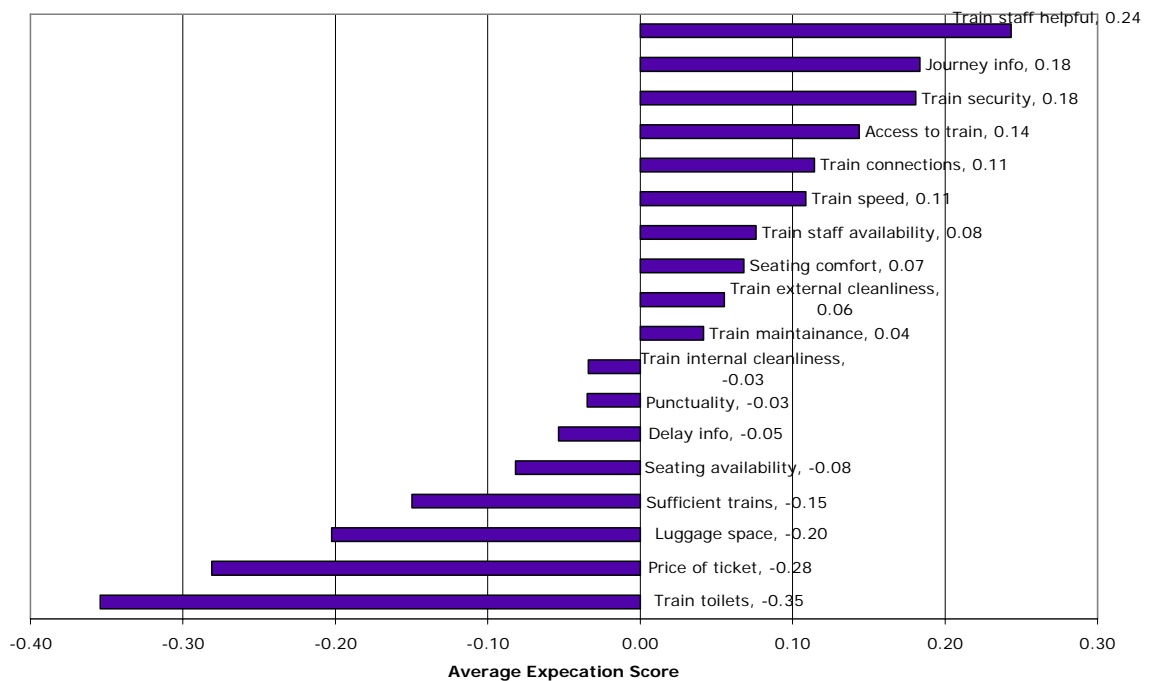
Passengers across Scotland believed that eight service attributes at stations exceeded their expectations and that four were below what they would reasonably expect. Experience of the quality of information at stations in particular exceeded passengers expectations. Experience of personal security was better than expected despite this being a key area of concern identified in the in depth discussion groups held with passengers in Glasgow. This may be due to passengers' low expectations in this area which on many actual journeys are exceeded, although this does not mean that improving personal security or perceptions of personal security should not be a priority for improvement. Passengers did not believe that the service they experienced for five of the service attributes at stations were reasonably met, the most negative area was car parking followed by facilities at stations.

Average expectation score for station attributes in Scotland (positive = reasonable expectations exceeded and negative = not being met)



Passengers across Scotland believed that ten service attributes at stations exceeded their expectations and that eight were below what they would reasonably expect. Experience of the helpfulness of staff on trains particularly exceeded passengers' expectations as did information provided on the journey and experience of personal security. Passengers did not believe that the service they experienced for eight of the service attributes on trains were reasonably met – the most negative areas were toilets on the train, value for money for the price of the ticket and space for luggage in that order.

Average expectation score for train attributes (positive = reasonable expectations exceeded and negative = not being met)



Priorities for improvements

As well as identifying areas that are falling short of passengers' reasonable expectations, it is also useful to identify ranked priorities for improvement in order to understand where finite resources should be focused and would be of most value to passengers.

In order to quantify which station and train service attributes passengers feel it is most important to improve, two types of questionnaires were distributed. Two-thirds of passengers completed an 'importance ranking' in which 30 attributes were presented in groups of six or seven and passengers were asked to rank these in order of importance. One attribute, punctuality, was repeated in every group, so that priority scores for all attributes could be calculated in the analysis.

The remaining passengers completed a set of six stated preference questions, asking respondents to state which of three 'travel options' they would most and least prefer when planning a similar journey in future. The results of this appear overleaf.

The value for money offered by the price of the ticket is the top priority for improvement followed by increasing the capacity of trains, improving the punctuality of trains and reducing crowding. Improving queue lengths at station ticket offices and ticket machines is the fifth priority for improvement, slightly higher than for the rest of Great Britain.

Scotland rank	Attribute	GB rank of attribute
1	Price of train tickets offer excellent value for money	1
2	Sufficient train services at times I use the train	2
3	At least 19 out of 20 trains arrive on time	3
4	Passengers are always able to get a seat on the train	4
5	Max queue time no more than two minutes to purchase tickets	6
6	Company keeps passengers informed if train delays	5
7	Seating area on the train is very comfortable	9
8	Information on train times/platforms accurate and available	7
9	Trains are consistently well maintained/in excellent condition	8
10	Passengers experience a high level of security on the train	10
11	The inside of the train is cleaned to a high standard	14
12	Good easy connections with other forms of transport	12
13	Your journey time is reduced by five minutes	13
14	Personal security at stations is improved through CCTV/staff	11
15	Facilities at stations are plentiful and of good quality	18
16	Connections with other train services are always good	15
17	There is sufficient space for passengers' luggage	24
18	Station staff are available whenever required	17
19	All trains have staff to assist	20
20	There are good quality toilet facilities on every train	25
21	All train staff helpful and have a positive attitude	23
22	The train travels at a fast speed throughout the journey	16
23	All station staff are helpful and with a positive attitude	21
24	Always a quick response to information requests at stations	19
25	Useful information is provided throughout the journey	22
26	Station environment always pleasant and comfortable	26
27	Stations are cleaned to a high standard	27
28	High quality car parking available	29
29	All station building maintained to a high standard	28
30	The outside of the train is cleaned to a high standard	30

Sample size of 326 passengers.

44% of rail journeys are for commuting, 11% for business and 45% for leisure purposes.

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