

Independent national passenger watchdog

Passenger Voice Rail



Summer 2010

North West

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North West passengers report on disruption



The way train operating companies (TOCs) handle disruption consistently falls short of passengers' expectations.

In the Spring 2010 National Passenger Survey only 35% of Great Britain passengers said they were happy with this aspect of train services. To provide constructive feedback from passengers to TOCs, Passenger Focus has set up a nationwide disruption panel with

around 1000 passengers acting as reporters.

Passengers on Northern Rail have indicated a problem with faulty announcements and customer information screens.

TransPennine Express (TPE) has implemented staff training at Huddersfield and Selby stations. An information point is being set up at Huddersfield, and the use of Selby as a 'turn-round point' in cases of major disruption

throws up particular challenges and two options are being examined. East Midlands Trains has used the feedback to overhaul its disruption and communications plans, which include improvements to public announcement equipment, help points and customer information screens.

Passenger manager Robert Samson has met Virgin Trains' communications director to discuss the good and the bad in



the reports, which will be used in training sessions for staff.

High standards of punctuality at Merseyrail make information less of an issue, but at times of disruption, passengers express frustration with a lack of credible and accurate information.

Passengers score North West rail services

Passengers travelling in the North West have rated the region's rail services as part of the independent watchdog's National Passenger Survey (NPS).

Passenger Focus's NPS, in which over 56,000 passengers participate each year, gives a clear indication of how satisfied passengers are with Northern Rail (82%), First TransPennine Express (87%), Virgin Trains (90%), Merseyrail (93%), CrossCountry (85%), London Midland (86%) and East Midlands Trains' (86%) services.

These results show a pretty good picture of the region's railway. As more trains arrive on time, Britain's rail passengers are becoming more satisfied. Particularly good news is passengers say many train companies have improved value for money following many New Year fares staying the same



or even falling as a consequence of the lower inflation rate in mid-2009. However, the gulf between the likes of Virgin Trains (90%) and smaller operators like Merseyrail (93%) compared with Northern Rail (82%) is huge.

The publication of this independent comparative data is one of the most cost-effective ways of driving improvements on the railway. As operators vie with each other for pole position it also allows valuable comparisons between routes and the widely different scores operators achieve for various aspects of their services. For example, Northern Rail's 82% overall score spans 87% scores on West and North Yorkshire services and 74% on the crowded routes in and around Manchester and Liverpool.

Passenger Focus is now working with train companies to improve those areas passengers have identified as being problematic.

The Spring 2010 National Passenger Survey is available at www.passengerfocus.org.uk or contact info@passengerfocus.org.uk or call 0300 123 2350.

Spring 2010

Train Company	Overall satisfaction	Improvement in % satisfied or good since Spring 2009	Decline in % satisfied since Spring 2009
Great Britain result	83% up 2%	Value for money (8%)	Cleanliness of the outside of the train (2%)
CrossCountry	85%	Value for money (6%)	Train toilet facilities (7%)
East Midlands Trains	86% (up 5%)	How well the train company handles delays (14%)	No significant decline
First TransPennine Express	87%	Value for money (9%)	No significant decline
London Midland	86% (up 8%)	Frequency (11%) Punctuality/reliability (11%) Value for money (11%)	No significant decline
Merseyrail	93%	The helpfulness and attitude of staff on the train (18%)	No significant decline
Northern Rail	82%	Value for money (6%)	Connections with other forms of public transport (6%)
Virgin Trains	90% (up 4%)	Punctuality/reliability (10%)	No significant decline

Transport funding commitment

Passenger Focus was pleased to see a commitment to developing regional public transport with spending confirmed in the new budget to extend the Manchester Metrolink; the Tyne and Wear Metro; Birmingham New Street station redevelopment; and improvements to rail lines to Sheffield and between Liverpool and Leeds.

Sue Tibbett, Passenger manager in the North West, said: "Passengers will welcome the government's commitment to these four transport projects which will bring real benefits to people. This Government investment is helping people have real transport choices and helping to underpin economic growth in these four areas."

Passenger Focus will continue to work with industry to ensure passenger views are incorporated into plans as projects progress.

Initial findings from ticket machine research

Passenger Focus's research on the benefits and shortcomings of ticket vending machines (TVMs) and queuing times at stations will be published soon. The research asks why passengers queue to speak to a staff member when there is no queue for a TVM. What is it about some TVM programs that

passengers find off-putting and drives them to wait longer to buy their ticket from the booking office? The need for reassurance is compounded by the complexity of tickets and fares. If you would like to see the research email info@passengerfocus.org.uk or visit www.passengerfocus.org.uk



Passengers continue to rate Merseyrail

Passenger Focus's Spring 2010 National Passenger Survey (NPS) shows an impressive 93% of passengers are satisfied with their last Merseyrail train journey.

Passenger Focus has been working in partnership with Merseyrail to improve the train company's customer service and pleasingly, scores for passenger satisfaction with staff on the train soared 18 percentage points to 67% satisfied. Passenger satisfaction with the availability of staff

on the train improved 15% points to 48%.

Julie Warburton, Passenger Focus manager, welcomed the latest results: "This train company has worked very hard and is addressing passenger concerns. Improved satisfaction scores shows that putting passengers first can pay off."

We encourage the train company to keep up the good work to improve passenger satisfaction scores further."

Passenger views on new rail franchises

As an independent consumer watchdog, Passenger Focus has been asked by Government to ensure passenger views are sought early and included in plans for future rail franchises.

Over recent months Passenger Focus has spoken with around 13,000 passengers who currently travel on First TransPennine Express services and other franchises around Great Britain which are up for renewal in coming years. It is using this feedback to make recommendations to Government about what passengers want from new operators. Once preferred bidders are selected, it will present the research findings to each applicant and ensure passenger views are central to the deal.

Meanwhile the Government has announced the Northern Rail franchise has been extended for two years until September 2013. The decision comes following the train company beating its performance targets for its 2500 daily train services across the north of England.

Passenger Focus's Spring 2010 National Passenger Survey shows 82% of passengers using Northern Rail are satisfied overall with the train company,

83% happy with the operator's punctuality and reliability. Passengers' satisfaction with value for money improved six points to 60% in the latest survey.

However, Passenger Focus manager Sue Tibbett continues to have concerns about overcrowding on some services with only 74% of passengers satisfied overall on those services in and around Manchester and Liverpool.

Sue commented: "It's good news that Northern Rail has met its targets on punctuality and capacity which has led to this franchise extension. Passengers tell us that punctuality is a top priority. On the other hand commuters travelling to Liverpool and Manchester face severe overcrowding on peak services and investment in new carriages is desperately needed. The National Passenger Survey shows that only 70% of passengers are satisfied with room to sit or stand. Effort needs to be made to improve this aspect of service for passengers.

"We need to see the Government and the industry set out their vision and long-term plans on how overcrowding will be addressed."

High-speed future?

The new Government has made a commitment to developing a Great Britain high-speed rail network.

Passenger Focus has welcomed plans to develop the network and address issues with increasing popularity of the railway.

Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief executive, said: "In the long term more and more people are going to want to use the railway. So, a step change in the ability of the network to handle more trains, longer trains and more reliable trains, all key passenger priorities for improvement, is needed now. This plan represents an important first step in unlocking this potential, that should also free up more space on the rest of network to handle more regional and local trains. More trains arriving on time are now helping to attract more passengers. Add higher speeds to that and a whole new group of passengers could be tempted to use rail.

"Passenger Focus welcomes the commitment that the new line will be an addition to the current network – not a bolt on, rich man's railway. The ability to turn up and travel remains a key attraction of Britain's railway – this new line, with fast frequent services could, with attractive fares, start to revolutionise intercity rail travel. The other commitment, that funding will not be diverted from the existing network, is also welcome."

