

Passenger Voice

Independent national rail passenger watchdog



ORR to probe excessive fare rises

Passenger Focus has continued to speak out against excessive fare increases, referring South West Trains' 20% hike to the Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) who ruled that it fell outside competition law.

Passenger Focus welcomes the fact that the ORR is now doing further work aimed at identifying circumstances under which price rises might be considered excessive.

Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief executive said; "We are really pleased that the ORR has responded to our call to look into the issue of excessive

fare increases. This is a step forward for passengers. Train companies shouldn't be allowed to introduce the steep and unjustified fare rises that we have seen recently. We want to see greater consumer protection for passengers who are currently at the mercy of train companies."

Passenger Focus also raised the issue with the

Department for Transport (DfT) and highlighted a lack of transparency over unregulated fares in the franchising process. Following Passenger Focus pressure, in the four most recent franchise announcements - East Coast Main Line, New Cross Country, West Midlands and East Midlands - guideline figures for unregulated fares rises have been included. Anthony said "While we don't like the high figures that are being stated for these new franchises, at least we now all know the



ball park figures for unregulated fares rises".

Passenger Focus will continue to raise passenger issues at the highest level and will appeal against further excessive increases.

What passengers want, what they really really want

A major piece of research, commissioned by Passenger Focus, about passengers' priorities and their expectations has now been published.

The research was jointly funded by the Department for Transport (DfT) and involved asking 4,000 rail passengers in ten different regions to rate how well their reasonable expectations of their

rail services are being met along with their priorities for improvements. The research was used to inform the Government's White Paper so that the passenger voice could be considered at the heart of the Government's rail strategy.

This research gives a very clear view not only of what passengers think

of the services they receive, but also uniquely provides a set of priorities of what passengers would most like to see improved. Passengers' top priorities were getting value for money, more trains running and more trains arriving on time. As punctuality has improved it has slipped down the priorities list but remains key to passenger expectations.

Passengers were asked to rank 30 attributes in order of importance (the full report is available to download from www.passengerfocus.org.uk). This important research demonstrates clearly where resources should be utilised to make a real difference to passengers.

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DfT's plans just the ticket for passengers?

So, did the High Level Output Specifications and the White Paper deliver for passengers?

Passenger Focus commissioned extensive 'passenger priorities' research in partnership with the Department for Transport (DfT) ahead of the White Paper. We're pleased to see that in terms of matching passenger needs, the Government's announcements are a big step in the right direction – particularly 1300 more carriages, more trains running on time, better safety standards and the green light for the Thameslink project among others. However, passengers will increasingly fund these improvements. We will monitor fare rises very closely and want to see the Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) take a greater role in regulating excessive fare increases.

Passenger Focus played a major role in the debate regarding Saver de-regulation. We commissioned independent research into passenger attitudes on fares simplification, names and potential de-regulation. This research was key in persuading government to hold off making any changes to Saver regulation in the absence of an alternative that is

acceptable to passengers.

The Government has said it does not want wide performance discrepancies between operators. There is a huge gap to bridge as our National Passenger Survey shows – some train companies and Network Rail have a lot to do. And in the midst of all this the Reading, Birmingham New Street and Thameslink projects will kick off. The scale of the ambition is welcome but the delivery challenge is huge. Everyone hopes this will meet the growing demand for rail travel, but it seems likely that travel for some will continue to be crowded and in all likelihood there will be continuing demands for more capacity.

We are already on Network Rail's Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS) national steering group and on individual RUS steering groups; we also influence debate through the Department for Transport Inter City Express Programme Board and Network Rail's Station Improvement Programme Liaison Group among others. We are pleased that the Secretary of State outlined a new role for Passenger Focus: a greater role in commenting on the specification of future franchises. The extent of this new responsibility is not yet clear but we will try to bring to it evidence based analysis and comment, a clear,



Colin Foxall

independent passenger voice and commitment in order to make a difference for passengers. And we will press for the greatest possible degree of transparency about franchise terms and expectations.

I hope you enjoy this third edition of Passenger Voice. If you have issues you feel we should be pursuing please email me: colin.foxall@passengerfocus.org.uk

Colin Foxall
Charman

'Green' travel

New Passenger Focus research shows that passengers would like to see more train operating companies recycling all the free newspapers and litter that gets left on trains, using low energy light bulbs at the stations, and encouraging

people not to drive to the station. For those train operators already doing these things, it is essential that they let passengers know.

Passenger Focus' research fed into the Government's White Paper, providing detailed passenger

opinion and views on the role of the environment in rail travel.

Passengers were also asked if they would like a high speed train service between London and Edinburgh which would cut journey times by 15%, but with the trade off that the service would use 90% more energy. Most passengers said

they wouldn't want to use such a service because of the effect on the environment for a relatively small gain.



Good news for Cross Country passengers

With the announcement that the New Cross Country franchise has been awarded to Arriva Plc, Passenger Focus was pleased to see that the new franchise included many of the key recommendations it fought for.

Most importantly Passenger Focus pushed for 30% more seats to be provided for passengers travelling on busy areas of the Cross Country route. These have been promised along with other proposals we called for in the new franchise such as more luggage space and effort put into helping passengers change trains more easily.

Passenger Focus surveyed over 3,000 passengers about what they want from the new Cross Country franchise. The top priority for passengers was getting more seats. We understand that First Class Partnerships, who advised Arriva Plc on their franchise bid, made

much use of our research. The planned improvements to the franchise should make a real difference to passengers.

Further welcome news for passengers is that Birmingham New Street has finally got the funding it needs to redevelop the station. A gateway to the city and region, New Street is in need of this investment so that passenger facilities can be improved and the crowding problems can be dealt with. This station is core to the Cross Country franchise.

However, while it is welcome that an average figure for unregulated fares has been published, it does mean that using the current rate



Cross Country passengers

of inflation some prices may rise by more than 50% over the length of the franchise. This makes it all the more important that affordable, off-peak turn up and go fares are protected.

Crewe station to be accessible for all

Jointly funded by Cheshire County Council, Passenger Focus commissioned a full technical audit of Crewe station including a site visit with passengers with disabilities to identify what improvements could be made to the benefit of all passengers using the station.

Julie Warburton, Passenger Focus manager commented; *"This research shows the value of speaking to passengers to find out what they need from stations which included more disabled parking spaces and accessible ticket kiosks. We have shared this research with Cheshire County Council, Network Rail, and passenger representatives and look forward to working with them to ensure that these key areas of concern are dealt with."*

Communication communication communication



Passenger Focus recently worked with Network Rail and 'one' to understand what is most important to passengers during planned engineering work using Colchester to Clacton-on-Sea resignalling as a case study for the in-depth focus group research.

Guy Dangerfield, Passenger Focus manager said; *"While disruption to services is never welcomed, passengers are more tolerant of engineering work if they are kept fully informed about the work and understand how it will affect them – making the most of media channels to ensure the effective flow of information was seen as crucial. Commuters were particularly concerned about the possibility of Monday morning over-runs and how they would be managed if they did occur."*

Passenger satisfaction

Passenger Focus' spring 2007 National Passenger Survey (NPS) of 25,334 rail travellers showed that overall passenger satisfaction with rail journeys has fallen for the first time in three years. Passengers said their experience was slightly worse on 11 of the 30 key criteria which they were asked to rate. The biggest drops were on how well the train companies deal with delays, toilet facilities on trains, and sufficient room to sit or stand.

Passenger Focus encourages train operators to listen to their passengers and take action. Northern has done exactly that. By working with Passenger Focus manager, David Sidebottom, Northern is making improvements to Harrogate, Rochdale and Blackpool North stations. As well as improving onboard and station cleaning activities, Northern are also undertaking local marketing to encourage new passengers. Northern are planning to

benchmark passengers attitudes by interviewing 200 passengers at each station with an NPS style questionnaire before and after the improvement work has taken place.

Train operators should pay attention to the NPS in order to drive improvements for passengers. Results for First Great Western and First Capital Connect services slumped in our spring 2007 NPS, with overall satisfaction on these operators dropping 6% and 5% to 72% and 71% respectively. Additionally, only 72% of 'one' passengers were satisfied overall, this is in comparison to a 79% satisfaction rate nationally. We want to see services improved for these passengers so that the ratings for these train operators improve significantly in the next NPS.

Passenger Focus' full spring 2007 National Passenger Survey is available from www.passengerfocus.org.uk/nps

Manchester Piccadilly tops stations poll



Piccadilly Station, Manchester

For the first time, Passenger Focus has released figures from its National Passenger Survey showing passengers' satisfaction with the 20 busiest stations in Britain. Manchester Piccadilly station, in which Network Rail has invested around £100million, was rated at the top of the league with more than nine in ten (92%) passengers satisfied. Glasgow Central came second with 87% of passengers satisfied and Leeds was third with 81% of passenger saying they were satisfied with the overall station environment.

New trains, happy passengers

Passenger Focus' research showing what passengers think of the new TransPennine Express 'Pennine Class 185' trains was presented to Vernon Barker the managing director of TransPennine Express at Leeds station on 16 May. The research, involving 1,765 passengers showed overwhelming

satisfaction with the new trains. More than 90% of passengers said they were satisfied with the ease of getting on and off the train and the cleanliness of the train interior and 88% of passengers asked were satisfied with seating space.

The research provides an in depth understanding of the

specific aspects of the new trains that passengers like and helps to inform the rail industry and Government when considering future plans for new trains on the network.

Susan Tibbett, Passenger Focus manager said; "This research fed into the Government's strategy

for the future of the railway by showing how new trains can make a difference to passengers' journeys. We are pleased that further investment in new trains has been promised and we want to see our research used further in the more detailed plans for implementation of the new trains."

As part of the launch of this research, Passenger Focus held a board meeting and stakeholder reception in Leeds.

News roundup



- Annual report**
 Passenger Focus has now published its 2006-2007 annual report which can be downloaded from www.passengerfocus.org.uk or if you would like a hard copy, please call 0870 336 6111

- Board meeting**
 Passenger Focus is holding a public board meeting in Bristol on 11 September and another on 12 December in London

- Let us know what you think**
 If you have any comments about anything you have read in this issue of Passenger Voice or anything you would like to see in the next issue, contact: Jane Cobell at Passenger Focus, Whittles House, 14 Pentonville Road, London, N1 9HF contact@passengerfocus.org.uk