

Passenger Voice London

Independent national rail passenger watchdog



Passengers report London rail is slightly better

But watchdog warns there is still room for improvement

The Spring 2008 National Passenger Survey (NPS) shows rail services have improved marginally in the south east with an overall satisfaction rating of 79%. However, while some passengers said train operators in the region had improved in some areas, services received in London and the south east continued to rank below national scores.

Passenger Focus's NPS is the largest survey of rail users in Europe, and includes the opinions of more than 50,000 passengers. The watchdog

uses the results to work with train operators and drive improvements for passengers.

At the station, London and south east passengers said ticket-buying facilities, provision of information about train times/platforms, the overall environment and customers' satisfaction with personal security had improved. On board the train, operators scored better on the room passengers had to sit or stand (up four points to 60%), punctuality (78%) and connections with other

train services (69%).

Areas where passenger satisfaction had declined were connections with other forms of public transport (72%), facilities for car-parking (41%) and the helpfulness and attitude of staff on the train (51%).

Heathrow Express (92%) and Chiltern Railways (89%) continue to be strong performers in terms of passengers' overall satisfaction rating. Passengers also said First Capital Connect (up five points to 77%) and Southeastern (up four points to 79%) were better.

The survey provided some insight into early passenger



views on the new franchises which haven't been previously looked at in the NPS. However, following the substantial changes in November 2007 to the shape and ownership of many train companies, the results for London Overground should be seen as an initial, early snapshot of passenger opinion. A fuller analysis will be possible from the Autumn 2008 NPS.

Reducing complaints

Responding positively to passenger complaints is the best way to diminish their frequency, passenger manager Tunde Olatunji says.

When passengers' expectations are not met, they will usually complain directly to the train company. If they are still not satisfied they can appeal to Passenger Focus or London TravelWatch. We therefore take a direct interest in how train companies handle passenger complaints and generally seek to improve customer services.

Working in partnership with London TravelWatch, we reviewed a cross section of complaints to Southeastern and made recommendations for improvements. Our recommendations were positively received, and we are pleased to see



the changes resulting in noticeable improvements to customer service. For instance, we are seeing fewer appeals and better outcomes for passengers when we intervene. Southeastern has also reported that it is seeing a fall in the overall numbers of complaints but an increase in letters of praise.

Most passengers will settle for punctual and reliable services but where their expectation is not met, they can be rest assured that Passenger Focus will encourage Southeastern to continue 'putting the interests of rail passengers first'.

Overground work

Passengers have seen rapid changes to the appearance of stations on the London Overground – the new name for the services in and around London previously operated as Silverlink Metro. Transport for London (TfL) took over responsibility for them in November 2007 and let the concession to London Overground Rail Operations Limited (LOROL).

Passenger Focus has been invited to join the Stakeholder Forum, alongside London TravelWatch, which had its first meeting in May 2008. The first six months of LOROL have seen significant investment in staffing as well as station infrastructures, which were acknowledged to be unwelcoming with poor facilities. The first of the 188 new vehicles should be in service on the North London line from early 2009 after driver and conductor training. The new trains will be first used between Watford and Euston and then on the West London Line. Fully integrating the new operation into the network will be a major challenge as the East London Line and extensions are added to create an orbital railway for London.

South Central franchise consultation launched

Passenger Focus's early involvement in this document gave the Government a good idea about passenger priorities

Passenger Focus was asked to advise the Department for Transport (DfT) on the future franchise, putting forward the views of passengers. We undertook research asking more than 6000 passengers their opinions on the rail service and priorities for improvement. Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief executive, commented: "The Government has clearly listened to a lot of what passengers have said are priorities for the South Central franchise. Passengers' main priorities are more trains to relieve overcrowding, more evening and weekend services and more trains arriving on time. However, information, especially at times of disruption and a clear, transparent ticketing structure also figured.

"While the consultation covers many of the issues passengers raised, we will be looking for commitments to improve value for money, additional trains and effective consultation with passengers about future changes to services. Passengers and user groups must speak up and ensure the DfT hears their views – this is a rare opportunity to influence fundamental services in south London, Sussex and Surrey." Consultation continues until 14 August.

The franchise will be shorter than usual, at five years, 10 months, because major changes are envisaged around 2015 when the Thameslink Programme is complete.

Research into Thameslink passenger needs

Research led by Passenger Focus will help with the design of both trains and services in the major expansion of Thameslink.

The Thameslink Programme (formerly Thameslink 2000) is a £5.5 billion scheme that will deliver significant additional capacity for passengers using the current First Capital Connect Bedford to Brighton route and, ultimately, other lines. Improvements will come in two phases: the first will be delivered in 2011 and the second in 2015. Many stations will have platforms lengthened to accommodate 12-coach trains, and Blackfriars, Farringdon and London Bridge

stations will be substantially rebuilt. Capacity will allow 24 trains an hour through central London.

Passenger Focus will shortly publish the findings of two major research projects examining key passenger issues relating to the programme. First, in partnership with London TravelWatch and the Department for Transport, we have been establishing what passengers want from the new trains that will be built for Thameslink services – and to test reaction to the initial design concepts. Second, we have been working with First Capital Connect and Southeastern railway to understand what can be done to minimise inconvenience to passengers during construction, which commences in 2009.

Strategy for South London published

The pattern of future rail services over the complex network south of the Thames is clearer following the publication of the South London Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS).

Commuting into London is the dominant pressure, and Network Rail's RUS focuses on measures to raise peak capacity, primarily through a programme of train and platform lengthening. Significant changes to the network are already planned and, in looking to 2019, the RUS identifies three

major phases of delivery, each with significant challenges and milestones.

Timetable changes are anticipated for Southern and Southeastern, as well as new high-speed services to St Pancras and the implementation of the East London Line phase one. Train and platform lengthening are proposed before London Bridge reconstruction works commence, requiring wide-ranging measures to maintain capacity.

The capacity increases of the RUS and

associated programmes are vital and welcomed. However, inevitable changes to services mean some passengers will be inconvenienced. Passenger Focus manager Sharon Hedges believes that phase two of the East London Line must be delivered to address travel needs, and that communication and consultation with passengers must continue to ensure that hardships are identified and addressed wherever possible.

The RUS can be found at www.networkrail.co.uk

News roundup

- **Through ticketing for Eurostar**
Over 100 stations across Britain now offer through tickets to the Continent, making it easier for passengers to buy just one ticket to cover both the local and international legs of their journey. The move from Waterloo to St Pancras has encouraged many more Eurostar journeys from the Midlands and north. We will continue to encourage more co-operation between local and international train operators to make travel simple and convenient for rail passengers. Passenger Focus manager, Tunde Olatunji says he expects to see even more through ticket fares for passengers to Europe available from more stations as time progresses.

- **Passenger Views**

Passenger Focus is calling for public opinion on South West Train's plans to change ticket office opening hours.

South West Trains has announced it is reviewing the opening hours of ticket offices at more than 100 stations and will be advertising plans to passengers from mid-July. Affected passengers will have 21 days to comment on the proposal.

Jocelyn Pearson, passenger manager, is leading Passenger Focus's consultation on the SWT changes.

Passengers who wish to comment on the South West Trains proposal should get in contact with Passenger Focus at www.passengerfocus.org.uk, call our passenger advice team on 08453 022 022 or write to Freepost RRRE-ETTC-LEET, PO Box 4257, Manchester, M60 3AR.