

New service's baptism of fire



Passengers have been delayed on Grand Central services

Passengers suffer as Grand Central's Sunderland service has a trying start

Following the launch of services in December 2007 between Sunderland and London King's Cross, operational problems have beset Grand Central and impacted on its passengers. This was mainly caused by the poor reliability of the High Speed Train power cars used by Grand Central; some services had to be cancelled and others were severely delayed, creating problems for hundreds of passengers. Performance in April dropped to 51.9%.

While Grand Central is working hard to improve the current situation for passengers, Passenger Focus has met with Grand Central's managing director, Tom Clift, to discuss what urgent action is being taken to improve reliability and punctuality for passengers. Other issues discussed included how the operator manages delays and disruption to services, the range of fares and ticketing deals it sells, and ways for the operator to understand better what its passengers want from Grand Central services. Passenger Focus manager Kerry Williamson will take forward an action plan with Grand Central this summer to seek improvements for passengers.

Customer service – what passengers want

On the theme of improving passenger satisfaction, Passenger Focus chief executive Anthony Smith and manager David Sidebottom actively supported Northern Rail's 'Excellence in Customer Service Forum'. The day's aim was to inspire managers of on-board and station staff to deliver more

consistent levels of excellent customer service. By using eight actors role-playing various scenarios, some based on complaints, staff could see what worked well and how a passenger's perception of a journey can be transformed by thoughtful staff – who also derive greater satisfaction. One of

the most important situations covered was managing delays and helping with alternatives for a missed connection. Anthony Smith gave a keynote speech outlining what passengers want from rail companies and how Passenger Focus influences what Northern Rail can do for its passengers.



Passengers at York

NPS research guides training programmes

The detail in Passenger Focus's National Passenger Survey is helping First TransPennine Express (FTPE) formulate its customer-service training.

Thanks to the detailed comments of passengers relating to perceptions of staff,

Passenger Focus manager Sue Tibbett has been able to work with the learning and development team at FTPE to develop a customer-service programme based more around attitudes and behaviours than technique. This will link with an in-house

National Vocational Qualification in customer service. By concentrating on what passengers believe is really important, FTPE has identified areas where staff would benefit from specific customer-service training. Sue has also been invited to talk to staff at training sessions about the positive impact of good service and the implications for passengers of poor service. This work demonstrates how Passenger Focus ensures the passenger voice is powerful enough to be heard by the train company and is used to gain improvements for all passengers.

News roundup

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• **National Passenger Survey 2008**
 This year's NPS results are now available on our website at www.passengerfocus.org.uk/nps

• **I think that's my seat**



Regular failure of the seat-reservation system on First TransPennine Express (FTPE) is creating awkward situations for passengers.

Passenger Focus manager Sue Tibbett has a network of passengers who regularly get in touch to let her know of their experiences of travelling by train, and a recurring issue on FTPE trains has been the lack of reservations on seats. It is naturally a particular problem on crowded services; passengers are disappointed and angry to find that the seat they thought was guaranteed has not been labelled, often resulting in chaos on board and confrontations between passengers. FTPE has encouraged passengers to book ahead for a good deal on ticket prices, and with the growing popularity of advance purchase tickets comes a rising number of associated reservations. An action plan is now in place and passengers should see a huge improvement.

Dip in National Passenger Survey results for FTPE

Declining scores in the Passenger Focus National Passenger Survey (NPS) suggests the halo effect of First TransPennine Express's new fleet has now gone

Passenger satisfaction with First TransPennine Express (FTPE) is declining. It now stands at 84%, which is a far cry from the 90% benchmark FTPE sets in its latest business plan. Overall, a number of factors measured in the NPS show decreases. The high approval ratings experienced when the new fleet of Class 185 trains was introduced are now wearing off.

Passengers have got used to the new trains, which perhaps served to raise their expectations. FTPE scores below other long-distance operators on punctuality and reliability, helpfulness of staff at stations and how requests

to station staff were handled. The NPS is sufficiently detailed to reveal the stations and particular routes on which passengers are less satisfied, so Passenger Focus manager Sue Tibbett will be exploring these findings with FTPE to consider where and how improvements can be made.

Though satisfaction is declining overall, it is still above other long-distance operators in many areas. Satisfaction is high for station factors with FTPE ranked first amongst train operators for overall environment, reflecting the £12 million investment in improvements. Clearly passengers approve!

First results for new CrossCountry franchise

CrossCountry has maintained satisfaction scores since taking over the franchise from Virgin, according to the Spring 2008 National Passenger Survey.

Comparisons and trends across time are difficult to establish because CrossCountry has taken on some routes from Central Trains and lost routes between

the north west and Scotland, but overall there do not appear to be any significant changes in passenger satisfaction. Comparisons can be made with other long-distance operators, and room to sit and stand remains a key issue for passengers travelling on CrossCountry trains; the

operator ranked 17th out of 21 operators on this measure. However, there are plans to improve capacity as part of the new franchise which should help to address this concern, CrossCountry is exceeding the 30% increase in capacity recommended by Passenger Focus to create 35% more seats.

Passenger perception of helpfulness, attitude and availability of staff on trains is of particular concern, as many passengers change trains during their journey and may need help and information from train staff. Staff issues clearly need to be carefully considered and we will continue to encourage the train company to work with us to develop clear plans which will address passengers' concerns.

