

Passenger Voice North West

Independent national rail passenger watchdog



More welcoming stations in north west

Investment in stations reflects Northern Rail's commitment to raise standards

Passenger Focus continues to work closely with Northern Rail by using the results of our National Passenger Survey to deliver real improvements for passengers. The results of our research

project at Harrogate, Rochdale and Blackpool North clearly demonstrated that passengers welcomed the work Northern Rail undertook to improve the general environment of its stations.

Work has included a thorough clean of the stations, minor repairs and removal of redundant signs. Local artwork was used to brighten up the waiting room at Harrogate. Since the introduction of the

initiative there has not been a single instance of graffiti. At Rochdale the platform underpass was improved with lighter-coloured paint, a more attractive flooring system and better lights. Passenger Focus manager Kerry Williamson said: "This project shows you don't have to spend millions to make a difference. Having made the improvements, it's vital that the stations are kept clean."

This successful approach to improving station facilities has now convinced Northern Rail to undertake improvement works at other stations based upon local passengers' needs, which include work at Widnes, Blackburn and Halifax stations.

Passengers concerned about safety

Passenger Focus's research has identified what helps to make passengers feel more secure.

Passenger Focus is working on behalf of Merseyrail passengers to influence how the train company can make improvements to station facilities and rail services by detailed analysis of the latest National Passenger Survey (NPS) results. Passenger Focus recently held a meeting with Merseyrail's managing director and

senior managers to gain a proper understanding of what the Spring NPS was telling the operator and how these results show what passengers want in terms of improvements.

While Merseyrail continues to rate highly amongst passengers in terms of key areas such as punctuality and reliability, there is evidence its 100,000 passengers a day are less impressed about the facilities and sense of personal security at stations, and how staff at



Liverpool South Parkway is a good example of a secure station

stations handled requests for help. Passenger manager Julie Warburton will shortly be presenting these results to Merseyrail's full management team and agreeing a plan with the operator to see how and where improvements can be made 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. 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 does for its passengers.

More parking spaces for Virgin customers

Virgin and Network Rail are creating an additional 3862 spaces at all 17 Virgin-managed station car-parks

Although this is good news, there will be huge disruption and fewer spaces during building work, though temporary parking will be provided at five of the 17 stations. Half the spaces at Preston were lost when work began in June on a multi-storey

car-park to create an extra 469 spaces. As there will be no designated alternative parking, passengers will have to park in town-centre car-parks or find other means of getting to the station. Some may discover that cycling to the station is faster than a car journey.



More space for Virgin customers

Others will need extra time to find a parking space or for travelling by bus or walking. Work at Runcorn is underway to create an extra 272 spaces. Passenger Focus

has worked with Virgin on poster and leaflet designs to let passengers know about alternative car-parks and bus services at both Preston and Runcorn.

Helping North West passengers feel safer

Feeling safe when you are waiting for a train at the station or leaving the station to head home should be something passengers can take for granted.

Every autumn, the National Passenger Survey (NPS) asks passengers several questions about safety and security, such as whether they have had cause to worry about

their personal security and if so, what that worry was. Passenger Focus has recently started working with the British Transport Police to use the NPS to identify the stations where there are low satisfaction ratings for safety and security. As part of the policing plan, we have identified three north-west stations that will be the target for additional resources:

Chester, Conway Park and Moorfields. Chester featured because of the large amount of scaffolding and hoardings during its major refurbishment, which should be completed in September. There will be greater staff and police visibility, together with other measures to reassure passengers. We will measure the impact in the Autumn 2008 NPS.

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. 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, and CrossCountry is exceeding the 30% increase in capacity recommended by

Passenger Focus to create 35% more seats.

CrossCountry remains below other long-distance operators in many areas. Passenger perception of helpfulness, attitude and availability of staff on trains is of particular concern, especially as many CrossCountry passengers change trains during their journey, and may need help and information from train staff. Staff issues clearly need to be carefully considered by CrossCountry, and we will continue to encourage the train company to work with us to develop clear action plans which will address passengers' concerns.

Proposals for Lancashire and Cumbria

The Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS) for Lancashire and Cumbria has been published for consultation.

Network Rail has analysed the current and future capability and capacity of the Cumbrian Coast line, the Settle & Carlisle route and the East Lancashire route between Blackburn and Hellfield. Passenger Focus is a member of the Network Rail-led Stakeholder Management Group which looked at options for bridging the identified gaps. The proposals need to make the routes fit for purpose for the next 30 years.

Passenger Focus held two workshops with the Lancashire and Cumbria Rail User Groups to find out their priorities for improvement and incorporate them into the plan. The consultation document can be found at www.networkrail.co.uk