

# Passenger Voice South East

Independent national rail passenger watchdog



## 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 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 earnest in early 2009.

## Preparing for Kent high-speed services

Work is in hand on the timetable for the December 2009 introduction of high-speed trains to Kent.

The new Javelin trains from Kent into the new terminus at St Pancras will open up a new commercial hub and gateway, making travel to the north far easier from adjacent King's Cross or nearby Euston.

Passenger Focus's Tunde Olatunji will play a key role in ensuring that the pros and cons of the timetable changes are fully understood and explained. We would also like to see Southeastern launch a campaign to inform and consult passengers of the changes soon after the peak timetable proposals are published.

As with all major timetable changes, support and concerns are likely to be expressed in varying measure, but passengers will rightly expect full transparency of the positive and negative aspects of the timetable changes.

## Passengers say south east train companies are only slightly better

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.

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 among others should be seen as an initial, early snapshot of passenger opinion.

## News roundup

- **National Passenger Survey 2008**

You can now see the most recent NPS results on our website at [www.passengerfocus.org.uk/nps](http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/nps)

- **Give us your feedback**

Want to have your say about something you've read in *Passenger Voice*?

Got a burning issue you want to see highlighted? It's your Voice, so contact: [krista.hamblin@passengerfocus.org.uk](mailto:krista.hamblin@passengerfocus.org.uk)

- **Reducing complaints**

Responding positively to passenger complaints is the best way to diminish their frequency.

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. 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. We are seeing fewer appeals and better outcomes for passengers when we intervene. Southeastern has also seen a fall in the overall numbers of complaints.

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

# Kent and Sussex Route Utilisation Strategies

Work has begun on individual Route Utilisation Strategies (RUSs) for Kent and Sussex, each of which will produce a proposed rail strategy to 2019

Looking at the regions' likely future requirements, these strategies will cover the outer services in Kent and Sussex; the suburban parts of these routes have already been assessed as part of the South London RUS.

Passenger Focus managers Sharon Hedges and Tunde Olatunji are members of the relevant Stakeholder Management Group (SMG) which oversees progress, and both have

seats on the Passenger Demand and Modelling sub-group. Our initial work suggests additional capacity and later evening and weekend services are required.

## Changes on the Brighton main line

This summer sees the start of a series of changes on the Brighton main line, which will produce both winners and losers.

Gatwick Express will be taken over by Southern, although it will continue to operate as a separate brand. From December 2008, however, significant timetable changes will be made. These include the extension of six Gatwick Express services to and from Brighton in the morning and evening peaks. This will provide additional capacity between Brighton and Victoria but will mean fewer direct trains to East Croydon and Clapham Junction.

Planned changes to a range of other services are still subject to final confirmation. We hope that West London Line trains will continue

beyond Clapham Junction to Croydon and be extended to Milton Keynes. Proposals to improve Redhill corridor services will also be welcome, as are plans to enhance West Coastway and Arun Valley

services following major changes last December. However, we anticipate passenger concerns about the reduction of Redhill-Tonbridge services and the loss of direct trains to Gatwick Airport.



# South Central franchise consultation launched

Passenger Focus's early involvement in this document gave the Government a good idea about passenger priorities, helping to ensure the new franchise will meet passengers' needs.

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.