

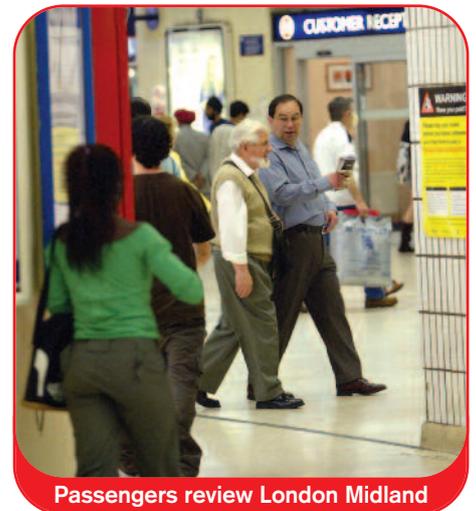
London Midland makes a welcome start

The Spring 2008 National Passenger Survey (NPS) suggests London Midland is starting to make a difference

The Spring NPS is the first barometer reading for the new London Midland (LM) franchise since it took over services in November 2007. Caution is needed in making historic comparisons because the franchise is a geographically new area, but the survey results will provide the benchmark against which the company will be judged in fulfilling its franchise commitments.

First impressions indicate that, as might be expected, passengers have not noted many significant changes since the franchise changed. Improvements in satisfaction with the quality of the train environment, ticket buying

facilities and improved information at stations are welcome, however, poorer satisfaction scores for making connections with other forms of public transport, facilities for car parking and the overall station environment, amongst others, show where investment is needed. However, it must be recognised that some scores are from a relatively low inherited starting point; satisfaction with the availability of train staff may have increased from 24% to 30%, for example, but with more than one-third of passengers remaining very or fairly dissatisfied, this indicates that LM still has some way to go.



Passengers review London Midland

Passenger priorities for future growth

The West Midlands and Chilterns Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS) and the East Midlands RUS commenced work earlier this year. As part of the stakeholder management group, Passenger Focus is playing an active part in feeding passenger views into the process, which should be complete by the end of 2009.

The RUS is intended to plan for the effective use of the rail network. West Midlands and Chiltern is bounded by Shrewsbury, Stafford, Lichfield, Nuneaton, Northampton, Stratford, Hereford and the Chiltern Line to Marylebone. The East Midlands RUS covers the area bounded by London St

Pancras to Sheffield, Thameslink services to Bedford services from the West Midlands to Leicester and Peterborough and from Peterborough to Lincoln.

Both areas have seen considerable growth since the last RUSs were published. Although there are plans to lengthen platforms and renew signalling, much needs to be done to meet the passengers' priorities indicated by our research: sufficient train services at times that passengers want to use them; 19 out of 20 trains arriving on time; passengers being able to get a seat; and conveniently timed connections.

The work of the Chiltern Passenger Board

Chiltern Railways remains one of the few train operating companies to have the obligation to support a Passenger Board written into its franchise. The Board consists of representatives from 12 Rail User Groups, Passenger Focus's Paul Fullwood and local authority representatives and meets quarterly to hear Chiltern report on its plans, proposals and performance.

At a recent meeting we heard that a number of committed projects have been successfully delivered

on time such as the on-line season ticket renewals, website promotion of on-line ticket facility and refurbishments at Aylesbury, Beaconsfield and Gerrards Cross stations. However, some schemes have slipped, such as upgrading customer information systems and relocating and upgrading the toilets at Marylebone, and the Department for Transport will have to consider what other improvements can be delivered if Chiltern does not meet all its commitments on time.

Watchdog supports move to improve access to rail

Passenger Focus has welcomed the Government and industry's commitment to improving access to the railway across Great Britain.

The Station Travel Plan project will involve investment and research into improving passengers' experience on the railway by coordinating every stage of the journey, including getting to the station and arriving at the destination. The idea behind the initiative is to encourage passengers to use environmentally friendly forms of transport when travelling to and from the station.

Passenger Focus said it was delighted to be able to fund a significant part of this research which will explore the ease of the end to end journey for the passenger, including connections, car parking and access to stations. The funding of at least £25,000 comes on top of Passenger Focus contributing to an innovative pilot project with Warwickshire County Council, which is now nearing completion. The Warwickshire County Council project saw the launch of the station travel plan concept and considered the end to end journey at small, rural stations through to intercity transport hubs.

Passenger Focus has long been an advocate for station travel plans and easing the end to end journey. Work began with Passenger Focus's ground breaking 'Getting to the Station' report looking at car parking facilities. This report found that concerns about full car parks are leading people to drive rather than risk not being able to park at the station even if, in reality, there is some space.

Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief executive said: "Passenger Focus is pleased the rail industry and local authorities have enthusiastically embraced station travel plans. Our research shows passengers are put off the railway if they can't get to the station without fuss. And, with passenger numbers set to grow, easy access to stations is increasingly important as emphasis moves to consider the whole journey, not just the train trip."

Winners and losers in delay-repay compensation

Passenger Focus presses for more equitable assessment of refunds

A feature of the new London Midland (LM) franchise is a change to the way passengers are compensated for lateness. Previously, many season ticket holders received a discount of five or 10% through Passenger Charter arrangements when renewing their tickets, because of poor train performance.

Research with passengers had indicated dissatisfaction with the Charter method of compensation, because many passengers didn't understand the Charter arrangements, so Passenger Focus had recommended the introduction of delay/repay-style compensation in the franchise. This directly links compensation to delays in individual passenger journeys. However, there are

winners and losers in this change.

Charter compensation was restricted for some causes of delays whereas delay/repay pays out for all delays. Among those who lose out are commuters whose individual journey delays do not exceed 30 minutes but who regularly suffer delays of five minutes or more. Moreover, many passengers do not claim for small amounts to which they are entitled, and rail travel vouchers received as compensation cannot yet be offset against direct debit payments for their season ticket. In highlighting these concerns to the train company, Passenger Focus expects LM to take these issues into account and review its procedures to make the process of claiming and obtaining compensation for passengers easier and more equitable for passengers who suffer from sustained poor performance.

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, 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 CrossCountry to work with us to develop clear action plans which will address passengers' concerns.

