

Passenger Voice Wales

Independent national rail passenger watchdog



Passengers approve of Welsh rail in National Passenger Survey

The quality of train services in Wales is outshining the Great Britain average, the latest National Passenger Survey (NPS) has found

Arriva Trains Wales' overall passenger satisfaction result (83%) beat the Great Britain (GB) average of 80%. Virgin's (national) results were an impressive 85%. However, passengers who use First Great Western from Welsh stations gave an overall satisfaction rate of 79%.

Passenger Focus's research incorporates comments from more than 50,000 passengers and is the largest survey of its kind looking at the state of the GB rail network.

Passengers across the board still question the value for money they receive for the price of their ticket, with Arriva Trains Wales having a 53% satisfaction rating, Virgin 54% and First Great Western 40%. With so many passengers unhappy with value for money, Passenger Focus has questioned Virgin's

introduction of new ticket restrictions which saw the price of some fares soar.

Simon Pickering, passenger manager for Wales, said: "Value for money fares continues to be the Achilles' heel of the rail industry. We have lobbied Virgin to make sure passengers can turn up at Welsh stations on the day and purchase an affordable ticket."

On First Great Western routes, passengers criticised the operator's ability to provide a service that connected with other forms of public transport, toilet facilities, information provided during the journey and how well the company dealt with delays.

In comparison, passengers noted improvements to Arriva Trains Wales' service, specifically information provided during the journey and the train's cleanliness.



Stella Mair Thomas, Passenger Focus board member, warned all three train companies that passenger feedback showed there was still room to improve: "Passengers were especially critical of Arriva Trains Wales' station facilities and services, its score of 30% being well below the GB average (48%). Arriva Trains Wales and First Great Western also need to address their inability to communicate with passengers during delays."

Fare increases for North Wales passengers

New restrictions on ticket use are hitting some passengers from North Wales to London.

Passenger Focus has lobbied Virgin Trains to reverse its decision to restrict the use of Saver tickets on early morning services from North Wales to London. The decision has resulted in passengers facing fare increases of 150% and more, or alternatively having to travel later in the day or use less flexible tickets. A passenger from Llandudno Junction, for example, who could have used a £67 Saver will now have to pay £173.

Virgin says it has introduced the restrictions to prevent the misuse of unrestricted Saver tickets by passengers

travelling from stations closer to London, such as Chester and Crewe. Passenger Focus says that it is unfair to penalise North Wales passengers because of difficulties the company is having in enforcing its own ticket restrictions elsewhere. We believe that greater efforts to address the misuse issue, such as on-train staff challenging un-punched tickets from Chester and alerting passengers of the conditions of travel at relevant booking offices, are the appropriate way to tackle this issue. Following on from the watchdog's representation, Virgin has told Passenger Focus it has increased the number of Advanced Purchase tickets available on morning trains to London. While this will

offer some benefit to passengers, others will miss the flexibility of turning up on the morning and purchasing an affordable ticket.



Huge fare increases

Faster journey times appeal to long-distance travellers

Faster journey times are a key passenger desire on long-distance rail travel between North and South Wales, Passenger Focus research has found

Passenger Focus recently surveyed more than 650 people travelling on long-distance services in Wales and found that over two-thirds would prefer faster journeys to trains that called at more stations. The majority of passengers (62%), however, indicated that it would take a significant reduction in journey time of 30 minutes or more to make a worthwhile difference to their current journey.

The Welsh Assembly Government, through its One Wales agreement, has already made a commitment to introduce an express north-south rail service. The Passenger Focus research not only offers confirmation that this will meet passengers' desires, but should also help inform the way in which the service is developed. The research found, for example, a significant interest in a

separate business-class section (all Arriva Trains Wales trains are single class) with 24% of respondents indicating they would be willing to pay a premium to use one.

The new service, which will be introduced no later than the end of 2009, will make more feasible a day's business in the capital for passengers in North Wales.

Cambrian rail users look for more frequent services

A Passenger Focus survey has found that only 41% of Cambrian rail users are satisfied with the current service frequency.

Cambrian rail users have indicated their support for the introduction of an hourly rail service. The Passenger Focus research, which interviewed more than 800 people, found that 61% would like an hourly service on weekdays. Punctuality is another continuing area of concern on the route,

with only 62% of survey respondents satisfied with this aspect of their journey.

The prospect of an hourly service on the Cambrian rail line from Aberystwyth to Shrewsbury is getting closer with Network Rail currently working on a £13 million programme to enhance the infrastructure and signalling on the route. This investment will make extra services feasible, but they will still require additional funding support from the Welsh Assembly Government.

News roundup

- **Chester meeting captures users' concerns**

Passenger Focus held a successful meeting for passenger groups from North Wales and North West England in Chester. We had a full house with attendees from eight groups, as well as representatives from Arriva Trains Wales and Merseytravel. The meeting captured a number of areas of local concern for future action, such as station maintenance issues and timetable aspirations.

- **New service to London**

A direct service from Wrexham to London Marylebone began on 28 April. Wrexham Shropshire & Marylebone Railway is Britain's third open-access operator. Passenger Focus has worked with the new operator to develop its Passenger Charter and policy for passengers with disabilities.

- **Ensuring Virgin advance tickets are available**

Following a passenger complaint, Passenger Focus asked Virgin to investigate why Advance Purchase First Class tickets didn't seem to be available from Bangor to London. Virgin found there was an error in its system, which is now corrected.

The importance of the rail route to the region is underlined by the fact that 23% of people interviewed indicated that they had no access to a car and 28% saying there was no other reasonable route available to them by public transport.

Rail passengers in Cardiff suffer long queues

Rail passengers in Cardiff are experiencing long ticket queues at weekends, latest research from Passenger Focus shows.

The rail watchdog found rail users at Cardiff Central station queued longer for tickets on Sundays than any other non-London station observed.

Ten percent of weekend passengers had to queue for more than the off peak industry benchmark of three minutes. However, only two per cent of passengers had to queue for more than the peak time benchmark of five minutes.

Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief executive, said: "Long queues are a problem for passengers when travelling on trains that have penalty fares operating. Train companies are now taking revenue protection more seriously, so it is crucial that passengers are given every opportunity to buy a ticket before boarding. Passengers in a rush to catch a train may abandon a long queue to board without a ticket, and consequently suffer a fine."

Passenger Focus studied passengers queuing for tickets at 12 major stations

around Great Britain, looking at queuing times at ticket machines and at ticket offices. These stations included Birmingham New Street, Cardiff Central, Glasgow Central, Leeds, Liverpool Lime Street, London Bridge, London Cannon Street, London King's Cross, London Liverpool Street, London Victoria, London Waterloo and Manchester Piccadilly.

The watchdog suggested passengers would benefit from train operators putting queue monitoring systems in place and assessing staffing levels to help minimise queuing times.