

## Passengers hit by fare hikes

Rises mean train passengers will have to dig deeper in 2008 – and beyond.

The latest round of New Year fare rises has hit passengers using the new East Midlands Trains franchise, which

combines the previous Midland MainLine franchise with the services previously operated by Central Trains in the East

Midlands and East Anglia.

Not only that, but unregulated fares in the franchise are set to continue to rise above the rate of inflation.

The Department for Transport limits the annual rise of regulated fares in line with national policy, which is currently 1% above the Retail Prices Index.

However, as with all franchises, unregulated fares are the responsibility of the operator.

The average unregulated fare rise this January was 7%, with some fares rising by approximately 10% since the last round of increases – or, if

counted year-on-year, 13%.

And East Midlands Trains has been permitted to raise unregulated fares annually by an average 3.4% above inflation.

Examples of steep fare rises faced by passengers in the East Midlands area include the London to Kettering Standard Open Return (SOR), which has risen by 13.56%. There has also been a 13.3% increase on the London to Derby SOR. This contrasts with last year's modest increase by the former operator Midland MainLine.

The big question is: what will passengers get in return for higher fares, asks Paul Fullwood of Passenger Focus. "Passengers have seen some significant fare rises: will rises in performance match these levels?"



London to Kettering open return rises by 13.56%

## Satisfaction stays steady on Midlands services NPS shows

Customer satisfaction levels for operators in the East and West Midlands regions has remained stable, the latest Passenger Focus National Passenger Survey (NPS) reveals.

Central Trains, Silverlink and Midland MainLine were the main operators in the region when the NPS was carried out. Although these all ceased to exist in November 2007, when London Midland (West Midlands) and East Midlands Trains took over, the stations and trains are broadly the same as before.

In the case of Central Trains, overall satisfaction remains at 81%, but passengers were less pleased with toilet facilities and the availability of staff. Satisfaction with

the amount of room passengers have on trains rose by seven percentage points since Autumn 2006, however.

On Silverlink there was a fall in levels of satisfaction with station services such as information, facilities and connections. Ratings for staff helpfulness and the way delays are dealt with also declined. Overall satisfaction levels remain at 76%.

And on Midland MainLine, although

the overall satisfaction rating was 86%, there were falls in ratings for the upkeep of trains, the amount of space for luggage, the cleanliness of toilets and how delays are dealt with.

Chiltern, which operates Kings Sutton station, comes second only to Gatwick Express when it comes to providing customer satisfaction, the NPS shows. Overall satisfaction levels remain at 90% for Chiltern

passengers, with no statistical difference since the last Autumn NPS was carried out in 2006. This puts Chiltern ahead of both national and sector averages.



Midland MainLine ratings fall

## News roundup

- **Challenges for National Express Passenger Focus** has three top challenges for National Express East Coast. The company took over from GNER as intercity operator on the East Coast Main Line from London to Peterborough in December, and we want to see it:
  - tackle the poor punctuality record
  - deliver consistent high quality service on-board
  - be more empathetic with passengers, particularly when things have gone wrong.

- **New breakfasts**

With the removal of the restaurant car from nine-car High Speed Trains, East Midlands Trains is considering re-vamping its breakfasts. The company is still deciding what should replace the traditional morning meal – if you have any suggestions or comments, you can contact East Midlands Trains via its website at [www.eastmidlandstrains.co.uk/emtrains/contactus/](http://www.eastmidlandstrains.co.uk/emtrains/contactus/)

- **National Passenger Survey 2008**

This year's NPS results are now available 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 in the next edition? It's your Voice, so contact: [krista.hamblin@passengerfocus.org.uk](mailto:krista.hamblin@passengerfocus.org.uk)

## Work starts on new station

Passengers across the East Midlands will welcome the news that Network Rail has finally started on the construction of the new East Midlands Parkway station.

After years of delay, the £25m project will see a brand new station built near junction 24 of the M1 at Ratcliffe-on-Soar.

It also appears that progress is being made in talks on building a station in Corby, a move we at Passenger Focus fully support.

# New timetable for Cross-Country passengers

Big changes are under way at the UK's most extensive franchise. Passenger Focus has been analysing the detail of the new timetable.

Passengers are experiencing CrossCountry timetable changes in the wake of the takeover of the franchise by Arriva in November.

It's no longer possible to make some direct long-distance journeys, and passengers travelling between the South West and North West may need to change trains at Birmingham New Street Station.

Passenger Focus is keeping a close eye on the new timetable. We have already put right an error in the early-morning Birmingham to Manchester service. We'll also be meeting with Arriva to discuss responses to their timetable consultation.

Other concerns in the new timetable include:

- the proposed service between Manchester and Birmingham
- retaining the cheaper advance purchase fares for long-distance journeys
- journey information and customer care for passengers who need to change trains



Major CrossCountry timetable changes

However, the new franchise does mean good news for passengers, too.

CrossCountry plans an extra 20,000 seats on weekdays across Birmingham by June 2009. There will also be more space for luggage.

To free up more space, on-board shops will be gradually replaced by catering trolleys, and there should be more staff on board to help passengers.

The CrossCountry franchise is the most extensive in the UK, stretching from Aberdeen to Penzance and Stansted to Cardiff.

## Jury is out on new East Midlands Trains franchise

November 11 marked the first day of East Midlands Trains operating services to and from the East Midlands.

The company has promised a range of improvements, including more and better trains, faster journey times to Sheffield and Leicester, more staff on trains, improved booking and a £5m station investment programme.

With railway use in the region growing and satisfaction levels rising, the company has a solid foundation to build on in combining two parts of the existing service, operated by Central Trains and Midland Mainline.

The commitments made so far reflect what passengers told Passenger Focus they want from the new franchise – now East Midlands Trains has to deliver.



East Midlands Trains get going