

Passenger Voice London

Independent national rail passenger watchdog



Triple whammy fare increases for Southeastern passengers

London and the South East passengers are facing a three-pronged attack on their pockets.

The annual January fare increases have once again hit Southeastern passengers' pockets hard. Commuters have seen an average rise of 6.8%, the highest increase for regulated fares in the whole country. On some routes the increases are nearly 12%.

Fares in the metro area are capped at 1% above inflation. The knock-on effect is that Mainline commuters are more likely to be paying closer to 8.8% more on average. Even more disappointing is that

Southeastern is permitted by the Department for Transport to continue raising regulated fares by 3% above inflation until January 2011.

Other factors – the introduction of a zonal fares system and the loss of the season ticket discounts in the metro area – combine in a triple whammy assault on passengers' pockets. The hikes are described as unjustified and excessive by some passengers. Whatever description is used, the effect of these increases is

to make travel less affordable and many passengers will be asking whether they are getting value for money.

Tunde Olatunji, the Passenger Focus Manager who represents Southeastern passengers, believes that, because they are paying more, it is only fair that passengers are given a much bigger say in the ongoing development of their railway services.

He says that passengers would find it unacceptable if inflation-busting fares do not lead to measurable improvements.

He is working to encourage Southeastern to consider



Fare hike unjustified

initiatives such as more early bird fares and monthly direct debit payments for the better value annual season ticket.

National Passenger Survey finds satisfaction with status quo in London

The wide-ranging study carried out by Passenger Focus shows overall passenger satisfaction in the London region is back to its Autumn 2006 level.

The latest National Passenger Survey (NPS) reveals passengers overall satisfaction rating with London operators is back to 80% (first recorded in Autumn 2006). Only 7% of passengers gave an overall negative response.

However, there still remains significant room for improvement in key areas for passengers. For instance, the percentage of passengers satisfied with value for money for tickets remains at 41%, with over a third showing dissatisfaction. In the light of significant price hikes in the new year across most

train companies, which are likely to erode this percentage further, we will be demanding a rethink of pricing policies across the board.

The most significant decline – with a seven-point drop from Autumn 2006 – is in passengers' satisfaction with the helpfulness of staff on-board. This is a disappointing result – the continuation of a downward trend – in a key area for passengers. It echoes a national downward trend, making it an area Passenger Focus is keen to improve on, working alongside the train companies.

Only half of survey respondents find station services satisfactory, something we will be working hard to address with the train companies.

Delays remain a hot topic for all passengers, with London showing only a very small improvement in how customers feel train companies deal with them. Only 33% of passengers say they are satisfied, ensuring this remains an area where passengers expect train companies to show greater focus and improvement.

Significantly, passengers' satisfaction with ticket-buying facilities is up five percentage points. Southeastern in particular has shown continued improvements to its satisfaction levels in this area.

Ticket research to help cut the queues

Passenger Focus and South West Trains are to work together on a ground-breaking ticketing study to help the rail industry reduce queuing time at stations.

Passenger Focus and South West Trains (SWT) are about to undertake jointly-funded research on ticketing management which we hope could make long queues a thing of the past.

The research will provide SWT and the whole rail industry with the data they need to plan ticket retailing and reduce queuing.

The study will produce vital information on how passengers buy tickets and how they make the decision on which ticket to buy. SWT feels that many passengers are queuing unnecessarily for tickets which could be bought in advance. The study will focus on finding out how the industry can help passengers use the more convenient ways to buy their tickets.

"Passengers will really benefit from this work, which opens the door to making ticket



Reducing queues for passengers

purchasing more convenient," says Jocelyn Pearson, Passenger Focus Manager for SWT.

The research will start in Spring 2008. Passengers will be asked about their criteria for choosing a particular ticket type and their decision to buy it in a particular way.

It's hoped that the results will help SWT to better manage queues and ticketing, as well as finding out what passengers need to know about ticketing options.

Bruce Akhurst, South West Trains Commercial Director, says: "We believe this work with Passenger Focus will provide valuable information about ticket-buying habits and help us to direct people to the quickest and easiest ticket-buying option for their needs."

Passenger Focus and London TravelWatch – partners in action

Passenger Focus and London TravelWatch have put pressure on First Great Western (FGW) to address an abysmal record of late trains.



Many passengers on the route are facing season ticket price rises of nearly 10% in the new year too, wiping out the Passenger Charter discounts that some had already received. Both organisations reported FGW to the Department for Transport, prompting an investigation which revealed FGW had miscalculated some fare increases on the worst-performing routes.

Thameslink programme research looks at passengers' needs

Passenger Focus is planning two research projects to help ensure passengers get the best deal from the Thameslink programme.

The first study, in partnership with London TravelWatch and the Department for Transport, will look at passengers' needs from new Thameslink rolling stock. The other study, in partnership with the train operators, will look at how the rail industry can minimise impact on passengers during the construction of this £3.5 billion project.

News roundup

- Anger over Liverpool Street overrun**
 The station was closed as scheduled for nine days over Christmas so that a disused bridge could be demolished in preparation for construction of Transport for London's new East London Line. But Network Rail used the closure to carry out other work – and this was not completed in time for the morning rush on 2 January. Services did not get back to normal until lunchtime on 3 January. Passenger Focus Chief Executive, Anthony Smith, wrote immediately to Network Rail and the Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) underlining that the Liverpool Street overrun was completely unacceptable. Passenger Focus Manager, Guy Dangerfield, said: "We have input to the industry's review of how passenger information was handled, highlighting a number of failings. These included the fact that online journey planning systems were telling passengers through trains were running when the line was shut. It is vital that passengers see some benefit from the penalty that will presumably be imposed on Network Rail by the ORR. Passenger Focus has welcomed 'one' railway's decision to refund season ticket holders for days when no effective service ran."

- Three-point plan for London Overground**

The new London Overground line, run by Laing Rail as a contractor for Transport for London, previously scored poorly on the National Passenger Survey when it was the North London Line run by Silverlink Metro. There are now significant plans to improve the service, which include: investing in station services and security, introducing a new fleet of rolling stock in 2010 and increasing the frequency of trains.

- National Passenger Survey 2008**
 You can now see this year's NPS results on our website at www.passengerfocus.org.uk/nps

- Setting the agenda for South Central**

The countdown to the South Central re-franchise in September 2009 has begun, with Passenger Focus making an important contribution early on in the process.

We are currently conducting research into passenger priorities on eight routes across the Southern network, including inner London and suburban and coastal services.