

Passenger Voice

Independent national rail passenger watchdog



Four out of five rail passengers are satisfied

Our National Passenger Survey shows train travellers are generally satisfied with the service they get – but not with the price of their tickets.

The latest National Passenger Survey (NPS) reveals that only 45% of rail users across all train companies believe they receive value for money when travelling by train.

The NPS is used to set the agenda for delivering real changes for passengers. Train operators also use the survey to look at how they are delivering.

Operators whose satisfaction ratings have dropped significantly include: Heathrow Express down eight percentage points (88%) and

First ScotRail's down four percentage points to 84%, with passengers criticising the operator for its inability to manage delays.

However, passengers on Arriva Trains Wales reported significant improvements in its performance with an 85% overall satisfaction rating – up five percentage points on Autumn 2006. South West Trains also showed an improvement receiving an 85% approval rating, up three percentage points. Maintaining their high passenger satisfaction scores

were Gatwick Express (94%), Chiltern Railways (90%) and c2c (89%).

First Great Western's rating dropped three percentage points to 74%, but the company's offer to double compensation will go some way to showing passengers they are getting serious about delivering a quality service. The proof is complete, however, when the trains arrive on time. GNER's results dropped five percentage points to 82%, illustrating how much trust the new owner, National Express East Coast, has to regain from passengers.

However, the Passenger Focus survey found 63% of passengers satisfied with the amount of room they have to



28,000 rail users give their views

sit or stand, up from 60% in the previous year's results. Improvements to ticket buying facilities at the station showed, with 70% of passengers rating these services as good, up from 65% in autumn 2006.

The national findings show operators haven't been able to improve toilet facilities with only 37% of passengers happy with conveniences on board. Satisfaction with staff attitude and helpfulness during journeys dropped to 58% from 63% in the Autumn 2006 survey.

Fare rises 'unjustified'

Inflation-busting New Year fare rises have come under fire from Passenger Focus.

The increases, which came into effect on 2 January, have seen fares rise steeply in some areas. Although Government-capped fares have risen by an average of 4.8%, the fares the train operating companies set themselves have gone up by over 9% in some cases.

"Steep rises on individual routes are

masked by the average figures published by the industry," says Colin Foxall, Passenger Focus Chairman. "This will lead to passengers having to dig deep into their pockets – these unjustified and unfair rises will rankle."

On some routes where performance is poor, fare rises have not only wiped out the discount passengers receive when renewing their season tickets, but actually put prices up.

Among the worst hit are commuters in the First Great Western franchise area, who are facing rises of up to 9.8%. Southeastern passengers 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%.

"Passengers who are not getting what they have paid for must complain to their train company so the message is received loud and clear," says Colin Foxall.

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Unfair start to the New Year

The latest unjustified rises mean the rules governing regulated fares need to be looked at again.

The regulation of rail fares is an important consumer protection. However, the rules governing how the "fares basket" works need to be looked at again to ensure some of the anomalies and behaviours seen this year are stamped out. Crude links between fare rises and service quality, such as the old Fares Incentive Adjustment Payments, did not work. But, as consumer protection and monopoly laws seem unable to help, if train companies cannot exercise any restraint then the Government must step in.

How can passengers find out the rules governing the rises to regulated fares? They can find them in a 2003 document published by the Strategic Rail Authority that is buried on the Department for Transport's website. To its credit the Department has already said they will bring the document out into the light.

New Year, new fares. Some passengers, yet again, face inexplicable and unjustified fare rises. Some passengers' fares, notionally protected by regulation, have gone

up by nearly 10%. Others by "only" 4.8% – 1 per cent above inflation while some have even gone down. No one can explain the differences or what the money is being used for other than "improvements". No one can explain to passengers paying significantly more how they will actually benefit. Passengers may well be paying for improvements on other parts of the network.

To add insult to injury, the link between service quality and fare rises seems to have stretched thin in parts of the country. Having Passenger Charter discounts wiped out by fares increases is bad enough. But some fare rises have gone beyond that so fares have spiralled upwards at times of poor performance. First Great Western has led this worrying trend.

Passenger Focus is lobbying Government to introduce two changes to new franchises:

- Changes to regulated fares should be limited to narrower bands around the average rise. This will stop the wild fluctuations seen this year.
- Regulated fares can only rise by above the RPI+1% formula if certain service quality measures have been met. This would effectively subdivide the fares basket but



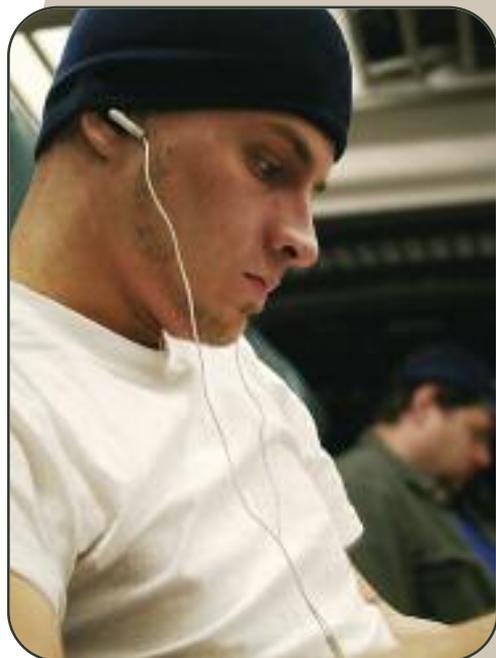
Passengers have to dig deeper

would link fare rises and improvements more closely.

The implications of these changes need to be worked through but we hope the Government will look seriously at these proposals. The laudable intentions behind fares regulation have been stretched thin as train companies seek to boost revenue to meet franchise payments. It is time the franchise specification changed – South Central is the opportunity to do this.

Anthony Smith

Passenger Focus Chief Executive



Passengers' most annoying habits revealed

Passengers say the top three most annoying things that fellow train travellers do are use mobile phones, listen to music and put feet on seats. One third of all rail passengers say their fellow travellers' habits impact negatively on their journey, according to recent research commissioned by independent rail watchdog, Passenger Focus.

"Passengers should be conscious and considerate of their fellow travellers," says Anthony Smith, Chief Executive of Passenger Focus. "It is

unacceptable to put your feet on seats and talk loudly on your mobile. These things appear obvious, but time and time again we need to reiterate these messages. This research clearly demonstrates the issues have not gone away."

Asked what they enjoyed doing most when travelling, over 1000 passengers across Great Britain taking part in the survey highlight reading, listening to music and sleeping as some of their favourite activities.

Smartcards find favour with train passengers

Passengers back proven technology to beat queues and save them from buying a ticket for each journey.

Train passengers think a ticketless smartcard could be the key to solving the problems of long queues, broken ticket machines, penalty fares and complex ticket pricing.

Passenger Focus asked passengers in Cardiff, Newcastle, Glasgow,

Southampton and London for their views on how ticketing can be improved.

The results show that passengers value being able to buy a ticket face-to-face. But they also think technology can help address problems in buying train tickets – and they believe that rail is

lagging behind in adopting high tech systems.

Passengers favour a pay-as-you-go smartcard, such as the London Oyster card, as the best alternative to buying a ticket in person. The idea of incorporating ticketing technology into mobile phones is less popular. Passengers also want to see incentives for using new technology and safety nets if it goes wrong.

Colin Foxall Chairman of Passenger Focus, supports the use of technology to make life easier for passengers.

“We believe there is a real need to capitalise on the momentum of London’s Oyster smartcard and explore the potential for wider application of smartcard technology across the UK’s rail network,” he says.

Focusing on fans

Passenger Focus will be working with train operating companies, British Transport Police and Network Rail to develop a strategy for managing unruly football fans on trains and to improve journeys overall for all football supporters.

Each football season, fans make 3.5 million train journeys to attend matches. The violent and abusive behaviour of a small minority of these has a considerable impact on train services, rail staff, other passengers and, of course, the majority of well behaved fans.

While much effort has gone in to controlling the problem, many front line rail managers and staff believe the risk has grown in recent years.

Now a group has been formed to tackle the issue. TOFA (Train Operators Football Alliance) comprises train operating companies, Network Rail and the British Transport Police. Passenger Focus has been asked to join to represent passengers.

A forum developing joint strategies with the Football Association, football leagues, the police, Home Office and fans’ associations has also been created.

TOFA will look at issues including:

- developing a fans’ behaviour charter
- group travel schemes
- improving the flow of information between

stakeholders

- the impact on travel plans on arranging football fixtures
- establishing best practice travel schemes and links between football clubs and supporter associations.

Passenger Focus is determined to see that all passengers’ views are represented through TOFA’s work.

For further information please contact David Sidebottom, Passenger Link Manager at david.sidebottom@passengerfocus.org.uk

More capacity needed as journeys rise

Figures from the Office of the Rail Regulator (ORR) underline the need for increased capacity to tackle overcrowding, Passenger Focus says.

Passenger journeys have increased by 8.4 per cent on 2006-2007 Q1, according to the ORR report on National Rail trends for the first quarter of the 2007-2008 financial year.

“This ties in with what we already know from our own research on overcrowding and the urgent need for increased capacity,” says Passenger Focus Chief Executive, Anthony Smith.

Re-franchise role for Passenger Focus

Passenger Focus is playing a major role at the start of preparations for the award of a new franchise to operate South Central services from 2009.

As well as being in discussions with the Department for Transport (DfT), we have set up a survey to find out what passenger priorities are in four main areas. These include routes on Inner London Metro, Brighton Main Line, East and West Coastway services and services to Redhill

and Uckfield.

We are planning consultation events and we have also provided the DfT with a copy of our generic policies for franchises. We will be discussing how these relate to the South Central franchise, as well as talking about the implications of the findings of our research. A public consultation on the re-franchise is expected to take place in the Spring.

Passenger Focus current research programme

Recently completed research

- New Ticketing Technology – qualitative research to identify and understand passengers' requirements of new ticketing technologies.
- National Passenger Survey (NPS) – results published on 24 January 2008. (Interviewing for the spring wave has started.)

Research underway

- Queuing Times – mystery shopping research to better understand the queuing times in the 12 worst performing stations.
- Passenger information – qualitative research to establish whether the draft vision for delivery of passenger information within the rail industry is appropriate. Co-funded by National Rail Enquiries.
- Assisted Passenger Reservation Service (APRS) Mystery Shop research – to identify how the service can be improved, research is being carried out in the north of England and Scotland.
- Thameslink Rolling Stock – qualitative research to capture passengers' needs and ensure interests are reflected in the design

of the new Thameslink rolling stock due in 2015. Co-funded by London TravelWatch and the Department for Transport.

- Employer's Requirements – research to inform Passenger Focus and the industry of employer's transport needs.
- Stakeholder Survey 2007 – research to gauge knowledge and attitudes towards Passenger Focus with its key stakeholders.
- Ticket Vending Machines – research in partnership with South West Trains to survey passenger's attitudes and reasons for purchasing tickets at stations.

Future research

- Thameslink Passenger Needs from 2008 – qualitative research to determine what measures the rail industry can take to minimise the impact of the Thameslink Programme construction work.
- Station improvements – research which will identify passengers' satisfaction with Network Rail station improvements.
- Route Utilisation Strategy Research – research is currently being undertaken in Wales.

New timetable for CrossCountry passengers

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

We have now prepared our response highlighting the impact on passengers and giving more feedback on interchange options.

The new CrossCountry franchise came to life on 11 November 2007. It is the most extensive franchise in the UK, stretching from Aberdeen to Penzance and

Stansted to Cardiff. CrossCountry is now operated by Arriva which replaced Virgin CrossCountry services.

Timetable changes in a franchise that affects such a large number of passengers must be thoroughly analysed.

Passenger Focus has 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 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.

However, the new franchise is good news for passengers too. CrossCountry plans an extra 20,000 seats on weekdays across Birmingham by June 2009.

News roundup

- **What we're doing for passengers**
Independent rail watchdog Passenger Focus is determined to get a better deal for train passengers. Here are a few examples of how our Passenger Advice Team – dealing with complaints when passengers don't receive an adequate response from Train Operating companies – have helped:
 - Negotiating a full refund for a GNER passenger who had journey problems and was initially offered £39 in rail vouchers.
 - Getting a compensation cheque for £223 for a passenger who was delayed on Midland Mainline.
 - Securing a £10 rail voucher and flowers for a Virgin Trains passenger who didn't receive pre-booked assistance.
 - Negotiating the refunding of a penalty notice for a Southeastern passenger who had travelled over one station – a price difference of 25p.
- **Passenger Focus conference**
The Passenger Focus conference will take place on 24 April in London. Representatives from Network Rail and the train operating companies will be on hand to answer questions on the big issues facing passengers next year. Secretary of State for Transport, Ruth Kelly, will deliver the keynote address. There are limited places but if you would like to attend contact sophie.harris@passengerfocus.org.uk

- **Passenger Focus calls for action over Rugby debacle**
Passenger Focus Chief Executive Anthony Smith wrote immediately to Network Rail and the Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) underlining that the Rugby over-run was completely unacceptable. "We have input to the industry's review of how passenger information was handled during the Rugby debacle, highlighting a number of failings," says Anthony. "It is vital that passengers, who after all were grossly inconvenienced, see some benefit from the penalty that will presumably be imposed on Network Rail by the ORR."