

Passengers hit by fare rises

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Many commuters across the North East and Yorkshire using Northern Rail's services saw an average fare increase of 4.8% on their journey in the New Year.

This is grim news for the thousands of commuters and students who rely on Northern Rail every day in the North East

and Yorkshire regions to get them to and from work or their place of education.

With only 62% of Northern Rail passengers telling us through the National Passenger Survey that they feel they are getting value for money for the price of their ticket, we hope that Northern Rail makes a resolution this New Year to improve the quality of the services and facilities they offer their passengers.

On CrossCountry too, rises

were above inflation in line with those imposed by other train operators. However, the company has not increased Advance Purchase fares, so good deals are available if passengers are flexible and can book ahead on specific trains.

TransPennine Express (TPE) increases were similarly above inflation. But TPE has introduced Advanced single fares this January which can offer better value for money.

The fare rises will naturally affect passengers' perception of the services they receive.

"Our passenger priorities research in July 2007 showed that value for money was the number one priority for passengers in the North East



Value for money top priority

and Yorkshire," comments Passenger Focus Manager, Sue Tibbett.

Mixed verdict from passenger survey

The National Passenger Survey reveals that lack of helpfulness and cleanliness on trains let Virgin CrossCountry down. Meanwhile, TransPennine Express (TPE) is exceeding its benchmarks in many areas.



Lack of helpfulness hits ratings

Virgin CrossCountry services lagged behind TPE in giving customers what they want, according to the latest National Passenger Survey (NPS). Northern Rail and East Coast Main Line also left plenty of room for improvement in key areas. Satisfaction with Virgin CrossCountry services that provide vital links between the North East/Yorkshire and the rest of the country stood at 81%, but were still below the level for other long-distance operators such as GNER and TPE.

Passengers reported significant improvements in getting a seat, but this is offset by decreases in the cleanliness, upkeep and repair of trains, and the lack of helpfulness among staff. Having staff willing to lend a helping hand is particularly important to

CrossCountry (now Arriva CrossCountry) passengers as they face more changes to their journey with the new timetable introduced in December. Overall, TPE services get a better report.

Although customer satisfaction has fallen, it still stands at 86%. Customers are also happier with the upkeep and repair of trains, the comfort of seating and the cleanliness of the outside of the trains.

The ratings put TPE above benchmarks set for the franchise in most areas, but those relating to having staff on hand at stations and on trains, and dealing with delays, are still below those of other long-distance train operators.

In our regular discussions with Arriva CrossCountry, who took over the franchise on 11 November 2007, Passenger Focus will be paying particular attention to the issue of staff helpfulness. We'll also be talking to TPE about how their ratings can improve in areas that have been found wanting.

News roundup

• **RUG conference success**

Passenger Focus will be taking forward lots of ideas from the North East and Yorkshire Rail User Group (RUG) conference, which was held in October.

Delegates from rail passenger and public transport lobby groups in Yorkshire and the North West, heard from representatives from Northern Rail and Arriva. There was also a lively question and answer session.

• **RUS research**

Passenger Focus is helping passengers make their voices heard in the Yorkshire and Humber Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS).

We'll be carrying out extensive, face-to-face research with passengers in the Yorkshire and Humber area later in 2008 to find out what their train service priorities are.

• **Hull Paragon Station**

Hull Paragon Station, managed by TransPennine Express, has had a major transformation as part of a new transport interchange for the city. In place of the ageing passenger facilities there is now a high-tech train, bus, coach and taxi interchange. Hull also has a new travel centre which opens directly on to the concourse. The development is one of the major changes in this part of Hull city centre which also features the new St Stephens's shopping centre and a new hotel and cinema complex.

• **National Passenger Survey 2008**

This year's NPS results are now available on our website at www.passengerfocus.org.uk/nps



New service starts

Customer satisfaction key on East Coast

National Express East Coast must rise to the challenge and do better than GNER.

National Express Group must reverse the recent downward trend in passenger satisfaction with the previous operator GNER, says Passenger Focus.

The company took over the Intercity East Coast rail franchise from GNER in December and runs intercity trains from London to Peterborough, East Midlands, Yorkshire, North East England and Scotland.

Passenger Focus's top three challenges for National Express on this franchise are:

- tackle the poor punctuality record
- deliver consistent high quality service on-board
- have more empathy with passengers, particularly when things have gone wrong during their journey.

National Express Group does plan to introduce changes which should see



Challenges for National Express Group

benefits for passengers. As well as delivering promised extra capacity, it has also introduced a charter that sets new standards for what passengers can expect when things go wrong, irrespective of cause. This includes food and drink after a long delay and, from April 2008, a refund if booked assistance is not delivered.

"We welcome the proposals for extra trains to York from December 2010, as getting a seat is very important," commented Guy Dangerfield, Passenger Focus Manager.

Makeovers for northern stations

Harrogate and Rochdale stations have seen some fantastic improvements, thanks to work by Passenger Focus and Northern Rail.

We now hope that the makeovers will lead to more improvements

in stations across Northern Rail's network.

The projects came about when, following some disappointing results in the 2006 Spring and Autumn National Passenger Survey, Passenger Focus worked closely with Northern Rail to

find out where improvements could be made.

We agreed that passengers' experience of northern stations was a major area of concern and identified Harrogate and Rochdale as stations to focus on.

Now £100,000 has been spent on giving Harrogate new seating, signs, better lighting and a deep clean, while Rochdale has new signs and has been redecorated.

Grand Central service starts

The eagerly awaited launch of Grand Central's new service from Sunderland to London King's Cross finally took place on 18 December 2007. The launch was delayed by the late delivery of its fleet of refurbished trains, but Grand Central is now operating a once-a-day service in each direction. The operator plans to expand its service on the route when its full fleet of three trains is delivered in the next few weeks.