

Passenger Voice North West

Independent national rail passenger watchdog



Helping the RUS deliver for passengers

Will the Rail Utilisation Strategy mean better services for Lancashire and Cumbria Rail Users?

Passenger Focus has been working hard to get passengers' voices heard in the run-up to the consultation on the Lancashire and Cumbria Rail Utilisation Strategy (RUS).

Our work started a year ago, when we held an event in Carnforth for Rail Users Group (RUG) representatives to discuss the strategy. Network Rail explained the process and timetable and we asked attendees what their top priorities were for improvements to the Settle/Carlisle line, the

Cumbrian Coastal Route and the East Lancashire Route.

Passenger Focus then asked almost 2,000 passengers along the Cumbrian Coast and East Lancs routes what local train services improvements they want to see. Our research showed that passengers want: accurate information about when trains will actually arrive/depart from stations, better information about delays to trains, waiting shelters on platforms exposed to the elements and information

about local bus/taxi services.

Passengers in Cumbria want a Sunday service on parts of the Coastal Route and later evening services, while better links to Manchester and Preston are among the things Lancashire passengers want to see.

At a follow-up meeting for the RUGs in December 2007, the Senior Route Planner from Network Rail gave a presentation on the gaps identified by the steering group and suggestions about how these could be tackled.

The consultation document will be circulated to stakeholders towards the end of April and will also be



Passenger consultation

available on the Network Rail website with a 12-week consultation period. After this, the RUS will be produced, highlighting improvements to local train services for passengers in Lancashire and Cumbria.

Mixed verdict from passenger survey

CrossCountry services are lagging behind TransPennine Express in giving customers what they want, according to the latest National Passenger Survey (NPS) from Passenger Focus.

The latest NPS reveals that punctuality/reliability and overcrowding are letting CrossCountry down. Meanwhile, TransPennine Express (TPE) is exceeding its benchmarks in many areas.

Satisfaction with the CrossCountry services that provide vital links between the North West and the rest of the country stand at 81%, but are still below the level for other long-distance operators such as GNER and TransPennine Express. Meanwhile, Northern Rail scored 79% for overall satisfaction while Merseyrail scored 87%, a good result compared to the national overall satisfaction average of 81%.

Passengers on CrossCountry report significant improvements in getting a seat, but this is offset by decreases in the cleanliness,

upkeep and repair of trains, and a lack of helpfulness among staff.

Having staff willing to lend a helping hand is particularly important to CrossCountry passengers as they face more changes to their journey with the new timetable introduced in December.

Overall, TransPennine Express services get a better report. Customer satisfaction 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 CrossCountry management, Passenger Focus will be paying particular attention to the decline in staff helpfulness. We'll also be talking to TPE about how their ratings can improve in areas that have been found wanting.

News roundup

- **Getting tourists on the train**

TransPennine Express runs trains between Oxenholme and Windermere, but despite advertising, the line is underused. To find out what would encourage people to use the train, Passenger Focus intends to work with the Lakes Line in Cumbria on research with passengers. We will also work with the newly-launched Lancs and Cumbria Transport and Tourism Partnership to find out more about transport issues for tourists.

- **Working in partnership**

After helping to launch the Crewe-Manchester Community Rail Partnership last year, Passenger Focus is working with Northern Rail, GMPTE and the rail officer on a research programme for the line. We will also be working with people who don't use the train to find out their views.

- **Rochdale station makeover**

Rochdale station has seen some fantastic improvements – including new signs and redecorating – thanks to work by Passenger Focus and Northern Rail. Following disappointing results in the 2006 Spring and Autumn National Passenger Survey, we worked closely with Northern Rail to find out where improvements could be made and identified Rochdale as a station to work on.

- **National Passenger Survey 2008**

You can now see this year's NPS results on our website at 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

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.



Representing your views

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.

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 gradually be replaced by catering trolleys, and there should be more staff on board to help passengers.

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

More information needed on WCML changes

Concerns have been raised that passengers won't have enough time to understand the implications of major changes to the West Coast Main Line timetable.

Passenger Focus has been meeting with Virgin West Coast (VWC) and the Department for Transport to get more information and to highlight passengers' concerns about the changes, due in December 2008.

The new timetable will see an increase in the number of VWC services by more than 30%. Long-distance services will be faster, but with fewer stops.

Conference success

Passenger Focus will be taking forward lots of ideas from the North West Rail User conference, which was held in November.

Delegates from rail passenger and public transport lobby groups from across the North

West heard from Northern Rail representatives about work on Rochdale station. There was also a presentation by the Department for Transport on the forthcoming West Coast timetable consultation.



Passenger Focus: working for rail travellers