

# Passenger Voice South East

Independent national rail passenger watchdog



## Triple whammy fare increases for Southeastern passengers

Southeastern 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 Main line 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 initiatives such as more early bird fares and monthly direct



Unacceptable, inflation-busting fares

debit payments for the better value annual season ticket.

## National Passenger Survey finds satisfaction with status quo in South East

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

The latest National Passenger Survey (NPS) reveals passengers' overall satisfaction rating with South East operators is back to 80% (first recorded in Autumn 2006). Overall satisfaction with Southern is at 82% despite a decline in passengers' satisfaction with the overall frequency of trains and the way the company deals with delays.

Across the region 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, this percentage is likely to erode further. We will be demanding a rethink of pricing policies across the board.

The most significant decline – with a seven-point drop from Autumn 2007 – is in passengers' satisfaction with the helpfulness of staff on-board.

It echoes a national downward trend, making it an area Passenger Focus is keen to improve on, working alongside the train companies. This is a disappointing result.

Only half of survey respondents find

station services satisfactory, something we will be working to address with the train companies.

Delays remain a hot topic for all passengers, with the South East 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 points. Southeastern in particular has shown continued improvements to its satisfaction levels in this area.

## News roundup

- **High speed talks needed on December 2009 timetable changes**  
Passenger Focus is working with a wide range of passengers, stakeholders and MPs to represent passengers' best interests when high-speed services are introduced in December 2009.

Although most passengers in Kent welcome the high-speed services, feedback shows that there is concern about the planned timetable changes and reductions. Welcome as high-speed services are, 85% of passengers will still rely on existing trains and destinations. "We expect Southeastern to consult widely on its formal timetable proposals," says Passenger Focus Manager, Tunde Olatunji. "Passengers have the right to expect Southeastern and the Department for Transport to be wholly transparent in the process of developing and consulting on these changes."

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

- **Ticket research to help cut the queues**

Passenger Focus and South West Trains (SWT) are about to undertake jointly-funded research on ticketing management which 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, not just in the South West, but all over the country.



Ticket research to cut queues

# Setting the agenda for South Central

Passenger Focus asks passengers what they want from the re-franchise.

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.

The Government White Paper, Delivering a Sustainable Railway, announced the intention to give Passenger Focus a greater role in the franchise process. Now, following meetings with the Department for Transport (DfT), we are conducting research into passenger priorities on eight routes across the Southern network, including inner London and suburban and coastal services.

Meetings with the DfT have looked at how we might provide input into franchising specification – the mechanism through which most passenger train services are delivered – covering areas such as service issues, ticket sales, station and train environment and access, as well as safety and security.

We also discussed how the views of other passenger groups would be considered and stressed the importance of having direct access to the department.

Monthly meetings with the DfT are now



Representing passengers in the re-franchise process

being arranged and we had a role at two DfT stakeholder consultations. A public consultation is expected to start around late Spring.

"Passenger Focus has achieved genuine input at the very earliest stages of the franchise process and will be well placed to represent passenger needs as it develops," says Sharon Hedges, Passenger Focus Manager for Southern.

## Late service back on track

Good news for Hassocks Rail User Group and passengers using stations between Brighton and Haywards Heath. The train operating company has finally agreed to reinstate late evening services on Friday and Saturday which were withdrawn over 15 years ago because of anti-social behaviour. Passenger Focus raised the issue with First Capital Connect and helped argue the case for the reinstatement of the service.

## Mystery shoppers deliver mixed verdict on Southern Railway

Southern Railway gets good marks for train punctuality, staff politeness, passenger information and station conditions.

But it could do better when it comes to train cleanliness, ticket queuing times and providing more

seats on trains.

Mystery shoppers working for Passenger Voice tested over 600 stations and train journeys, including seven of the nine routes operated by Southern. But while they were pleased with some

aspects of the service, they found some wanting.

"Southern deserves credit for working with us on this research and for their commitment to improve their service for passengers," says Passenger Focus Manager, Sharon Hedges.