

Passenger Voice South West

Independent national rail passenger watchdog



First Great Western fares soar

Passengers in the First Great Western franchise area are facing rises of up to 9.8% in the latest round of train fare increases.

Local Devon and Cornwall passengers have had below-inflation rises, but those using High Speed services are faced with increases which raise the Standard Open Fare from Plymouth to London to a staggering £235 for a return journey.

Meanwhile, season ticket holders in the Thames Valley area, who were expecting a regulated 4.8% increase have

found that, although the increase may average out to that figure across the whole franchise area, some "regulated" season tickets have in fact increased by 9.7%.

This means that an annual season ticket from Maidenhead to Oxford has increased to £2,488 – a whopping £220 up on last year's fare.

We and London TravelWatch contacted the Department for

Transport (DfT) for confirmation that this fares package had been properly validated. This prompted an investigation which revealed that First Great Western (FGW) had made mistakes in calculating some of their fares. These have now been reversed and affected season ticket holders should have been contacted and refunded. Nevertheless many 10% increases remain.

We've objected very strongly to FGW and the Department and have asked for an explanation as to how such inflation-busting increases can be made when the train company is performing so badly.

Passenger Focus is not satisfied with the responses and we will be making further



Staggering fare rises

representations at the highest level of the industry on this point of principle. This will also involve further talks with the DfT.

Although FGW passengers are facing big increases, fare rises on South West Trains are below average.

Disappointing results for First Great Western in NPS

Passengers give the thumbs down to FGW in the Passenger Focus National Passenger Survey. But satisfaction with South West Trains is on the rise.

National Passenger Survey (NPS) results show that passengers have placed First Great Western (FGW) at the bottom of the pile in terms of overall satisfaction with their services.

This is one place lower than the Spring results and comes despite millions of pounds being pumped into refreshing the high speed fleet and major investments

in other parts of the franchise.

There have been increases in satisfaction in terms of the passenger experience at stations, but on-train is where the company is failing. Monthly Passenger Charter figures produced by the company indicate that punctuality is still at 64% in the London Thames Valley area, with four out of the other five service groups performing well below their target level over December.

Mike Greedy, Passenger Focus Manager responsible for FGW, says: "Improving punctuality must be the number one priority for the company. Other areas to address include improving staff attitudes on-train, provision of information, dealing with delays

and the cleanliness of trains – all areas of concern flagged up by passengers in this latest survey.

"First Great Western needs to seriously raise its game in all of these areas if it is to regain the trust and support of passengers."

On a brighter note, the NPS shows passenger satisfaction with South West Trains (SWT) going up to 85%. With punctuality and reliability satisfaction levels at 82%.

However, satisfaction with personal security at stations sits at 65%. SWT is installing more CCTV and more stations will gain secure stations status, so this figure may change over the coming year.

Jocelyn Pearson, Passenger Focus Manager for SWT, says: "Passengers have given their verdict, with 85% saying overall they are satisfied with the service. That's an impressive four percentage point increase.

"However, passengers registered less satisfaction with staff on trains and toilet facilities. This is disappointing and we will be taking it up with SWT."

News roundup

- **Parking chaos sorted**

Major software changes are being put in place to correct the disruption caused by the installation of chip-and-pin machines at car parks in the region, after the matter was highlighted by Passenger Focus with First Great Western.

- **Well done for flooding compensation**

Passenger Focus recently commended First Great Western on how it dealt with stranded passengers during the summer flooding in 2007. The company offered compensation packages that exceeded its Charter commitments.

- **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 to bring relief to FGW passengers

Following regular meetings between Passenger Focus, First Great Western (FGW) and local passenger groups, the train operating company implemented a major timetable revision in December 2007.

Designed to put right a lot of the serious problems caused by the introduction of a new franchise timetable in December 2006, the new timetable reinstates several key services.

It also provides much-needed extra capacity in the Thames Valley area, and better connections and timing on the Cross-Bristol Route.

Passengers experienced chaos under the 2006 timetable last year, and Passenger Focus will be monitoring the situation closely. If problems occur this time we will immediately raise the issues.

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, not just in the South West, but all over the country.

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 easier, more convenient ways to buy their tickets.

"Passengers will really benefit from this work, which opens the door to making ticket purchasing more convenient," says Jocelyn Pearson, Passenger Focus Manager for South West Trains.

The research will start in Spring 2008. Passengers will be asked about their criteria for choosing a particular



Cutting queues

ticket type and their decision to buy it in a particular way.

It's hoped that the results will help SWT to better manage customer queues and ticketing procedures, 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."

Proposed Crossrail extension to Reading gets our thumbs up

The Crossrail Project recently received the green light from the Department for Transport and is expected to receive Royal Assent in the spring of 2008.

To help alleviate growing commuter demand along the Reading corridor, we are supporting calls for the route to extend beyond Maidenhead to Reading.



Crossrail project will help overcrowding