

# Passenger Voice Wales

Independent national rail passenger watchdog



## Passengers hit by big fare hikes

More inflation-busting fare increases came into effect across Wales on 2 January.

Of particular concern to passengers is the big increase on "turn-up and go" fares, particularly Standard Open Returns, on the South Wales to London route operated by First Great Western. These have gone up by nearly 10%.

Meanwhile, Arriva Trains Wales (ATW) has increased its fares by an average of 4.8%, with Arriva's CrossCountry franchise seeing increases of up to 7% on the Cardiff-Nottingham route.

While Wales has generally not seen the large fare increases that have confronted passengers elsewhere in Great Britain, passengers will still feel the impact of the above inflation fares increase across the whole network.

Passenger Focus research has found that value for money is the top priority for improvement for Welsh rail travellers, being rated above other concerns such as frequency, punctuality and overcrowding. In our latest National Passenger Survey, only 61% of ATW passengers were satisfied with the value for money of their rail ticket. For Virgin West Coast (59% satisfied) and First Great Western (44% satisfied) this



Fare increases across Wales

figure was even lower.

"With tough economic conditions expected for the year ahead, these above-inflation fare increases are bad news for Wales's rail passengers, who are unlikely to see similar increases in their pay packets this year," says Stella Mair Thomas, Passenger Focus board member for Wales.

## National Passenger Survey finds Welsh stations wanting

The latest National Passenger Survey (NPS) shows good overall satisfaction levels for train services in Wales. Some train operators are showing notable improvements with Arriva Trains Wales showing significant progress.

Passengers gave positive feedback on many aspects of Virgin West Coast's services, and Arriva Trains Wales (ATW) has improved in most areas, particularly in terms of overall satisfaction (now 85%) and on-train services and facilities. However, some work is still required across Wales to improve low ratings given by passengers on stations, including the facilities and services provided, as well as the overall environment.

Of the long-distance operators in Wales, Virgin

West Coast managed to maintain and build on the solid performance of a year earlier, with an overall satisfaction rating of 86%, although overall satisfaction with First Great Western fell by three percentage points against last year to 74%.

Simon Pickering of Passenger Focus for Wales, says: "ATW's latest survey results provide encouraging news of improving passenger satisfaction."

"It is particularly pleasing to see that the areas of biggest improvement include punctuality and the frequency of services, two of the top priorities among rail users. This not only reflects the work of the train company but also the investment coming from the Welsh Assembly.

"A continuing area for concern, however, is the low levels of passenger satisfaction for stations in Wales."



# Highlighting the issues for Wales

Passenger Focus has been telling the National Assembly about priorities for train passengers and what improvements they want to see in Wales.

**T**rain passenger priorities in Wales have been highlighted by Passenger Focus in evidence given to the National Assembly.

Passenger Focus was supplying information for Wales's Enterprise and Learning Committee report, Future Railway Provision in Wales. Some of this has formed the basis of recommendations made by the committee to the Welsh Assembly.

We identified the train fleet, stations, integrated transport initiatives and car parking as areas for improvement.

The Assembly heard that recent growth in demand for passenger services in south east Wales has exceeded forecasts and that this seems likely to continue, given the programme of improvements and enhancements that are being implemented.

However, Passenger Focus believes that

in order to see a significant change in passenger perceptions of train travel in Wales, a fleet of new trains needs to be introduced. We also believe that Wales needs an integrated public transport system, built around the backbone of a rail network with reliable and frequent services.

Stations are another major issue for Wales. Passenger Focus told the committee that dissatisfaction with stations is higher in Wales than elsewhere in Britain, and called for further investment, particularly at unstaffed stations.

Car parking was another area we highlighted to the committee that has gone on to feature in the report. We believe that car parking is a fundamental part of rail journeys and that there needs to be greater planning and integration.

## Free travel scheme aims to boost rural rail use

A concessionary fare pilot scheme on the Heart of Wales and Conwy Valley lines is currently under way.

The scheme, which runs until May 2008, allows passengers to use their concessionary

bus passes to travel free on the train. It aims to encourage people in rural areas to travel by train rather than by car.

Passenger Focus is organising focus groups to find out what benefits

passengers are gaining from the scheme.

We're working with the Community Rail Officers from both the participating lines, as well as the Wales Transport Research Centre at the University of Glamorgan to help with the evaluation of the scheme.



Trains for fans!

## Rugby fans get extra trains

Rugby fans benefited from extra services during the Rugby World Cup to take them home from late-night matches.

Arriva Trains Wales, First Great Western and Network Rail worked together to provide extra trains to and from the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff, following meetings with Passenger Focus, the Welsh Assembly Government and the venue.

## News roundup

- **Passenger Focus helps improve booking office hours**

Passenger Focus has worked with Arriva Trains Wales to improve the opening hours of the company's booking offices. Operating times at many stations have been adjusted to fit better with passenger demands, particularly in peak times.

- **Disability work with WSMR**

Passenger Focus is working with new open access operator Wrexham, Shropshire and Marylebone Railway (WSMR) to make sure it is ready to begin operating shortly. Current work includes advising the company on its disabled people's protection policy to ensure passengers with a disability are properly catered for.

- **Research for Wales Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS)**

Passenger Focus is working on the development of the Wales RUS, a document that will form the basis of Network Rail's work for the next 10 years. We are about to start research with passengers to inform our response to the strategy.

- **Public Transport Users Committee for Wales**

The Welsh Assembly Government is currently working on the formation of a Public Transport Users Committee for Wales. Passenger Focus responded to the recent consultation, expressing our preference for the proposed structure. For a copy of our response, contact [simon.pickering@passengerfocus.org.uk](mailto:simon.pickering@passengerfocus.org.uk)

- **Transport Applications Cymru**

Passenger Focus Manager Simon Pickering recently spoke and chaired a session at the Transport Applications Cymru conference in Llandudno. He has been invited to give a similar presentation to a national conference in Reading in early 2008.

- **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)

- **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](mailto:krista.hamblin@passengerfocus.org.uk)