

## Passengers feel the pinch

Prices go up – but passengers escape steep increases.

**T**rain passengers in the West Midlands have experienced a mixed bag of fare rises in the latest round of increases, but on the whole have escaped the huge hikes suffered by passengers in other areas of the country.

On London Midland, fares have gone up by 4.8%, except Cheap Day Returns in West Midlands, which saw a 3.8% rise.

“Passengers will be relieved that London Midland has not imposed the scale of rises seen elsewhere, or allowed for in their franchise, but will expect to see demonstrable improvements in performance before accepting

further rises,” says Passenger Focus Manager Paul Fullwood.

On Chiltern, which operates longer-distance services from Birmingham to London Marylebone, as well as London commuter services from Aylesbury, the average rise on unregulated fares was 5.1%. Regulated fares rose by the standard 4.8%.

Chiltern stated that Peak Returns will increase by about £5 to £6 at the north end of the line and by £1 or £2 in the south. However, Paul Fullwood says that this disguises some significant fare rises. For

example, the previous Open Single fare between Birmingham Snow Hill and London Marylebone was £41.50. This rose to £45.50 – a rise of nearly 10%. The Saver fare (off-peak single) has risen by 7.5%.

“These exceed the RPI + 1% formula considerably and also exceed the average of all TOC unregulated proposals,” says Paul Fullwood.

He adds: “Despite their innovative ways of marketing



Mixed bag of fare rises

and retailing tickets, only half of their passengers are satisfied with the value for money offered by Chiltern Railway’s fares.”

## Satisfaction stays steady on Midlands services NPS shows

Customer satisfaction levels for operators in the East and West Midlands regions has remained stable, the latest Passenger Focus

National Passenger Survey (NPS) reveals.

Central Trains, Silverlink and Midland MainLine were the main operators in the region when the NPS was carried out. Although these all ceased to exist in November 2007, when London Midland (West Midlands) and East Midlands Trains took over, the stations and trains are broadly the same as before.

In the case of Central Trains, overall satisfaction remains at 81%, but passengers were less pleased with toilet facilities

and the availability of staff. Satisfaction with the amount of room passengers have on trains rose by seven percentage points since Autumn 2006, however.

On Silverlink there was a fall in levels of satisfaction with station services such as information, facilities and connections. Ratings for staff helpfulness and the way delays are dealt with also declined. Overall satisfaction levels remain at 76%.

And on Midland MainLine, although the overall satisfaction rating was 86%, there were falls in ratings for the upkeep of trains, the amount of space for luggage, the cleanliness of toilets and how delays are dealt with.

Chiltern comes second only to Gatwick Express when it comes to providing customer satisfaction, the NPS shows. Overall satisfaction levels remain at 90% for Chiltern passengers, with no statistical difference since the last Autumn NPS was carried out in 2006. This puts Chiltern ahead of both national and sector averages.



Midland MainLine ratings fall

# New timetable for CrossCountry passengers

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



Big changes

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.

## Bright future with new franchise?

New franchisee, London Midland, has promised a range of service improvements.

So far, commitments made by London Midland, which took over the franchise in November 2007, reflect what passengers told Passenger Focus they want from the new franchise. But will their plans come to fruition – and will passengers face higher fares to pay for them?

The number one priority for passengers is getting a seat – London Midland has

promised more and better trains.

Punctuality and reliability are also clear priorities. London Midland has promised to improve performance, although its targets are not as challenging we would like.

The new franchisees also promise:

- investment in stations
- more car park spaces
- a ticketing and information revolution with new technology to improve booking, access to tickets, reservations and information for passengers
- better compensation arrangements for passengers when things go wrong.

However, a major Passenger Focus concern is that passengers may have to pay through the fare box for the improvements – some unregulated fares may be set to increase by up to 3% above inflation.

"Passengers have heard lots of promises and London Midland now has to deliver," says Passenger Focus Manager, Paul Fullwood. "Passenger Focus hopes it is successful but will be waiting and watching with interest along with millions of London Midland passengers."



New franchise, new promises?

## 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.

## News roundup

• **Welcome for the tram shuttle**  
London Midland has ordered the Parry People Mover, a lightweight tram with flywheel technology, to operate on the Stourbridge Town to Stourbridge Junction line. The tram shuttle will operate on London Midland's smallest service (just one-and-a-half miles long), freeing a conventional train for the main line. The People Mover was tried out last year and showed excellent reliability – could this be the model for other tram/train routes?

• **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.

• **Locked out of the lounge**  
Passenger Focus has taken up the cudgels on behalf of passengers who've found themselves unable to use Virgin First Class lounges. The lounges, such as those at Stoke on Trent and Birmingham New Street, are managed by Virgin Trains, which held the CrossCountry franchise until November 2007. Now Arriva has taken over, CrossCountry passengers can't use them. We've encouraged CrossCountry to make sure passengers don't lose the service and will continue to press the issue.

• **Improvements to our website**  
Work is under way to enhance our website in order to better meet passengers' needs. We now offer an improved complaints section, as well as documents relating to complaint handling, such as the National Rail Conditions of Carriage. Look out for further changes to the site coming soon.

• **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)