



Passenger Focus' response to c2c's proposed franchise extension

July 2008

Passenger Focus – who we are and what we do

Passenger Focus is the independent national rail consumer watchdog. It is an executive non-departmental public body sponsored by the Department for Transport.

Our mission is to get the best deal for Britain's rail passengers. We have two main aims: to influence both long and short term decisions and issues that affect passengers and to help passengers through advice, advocacy and empowerment. With a strong emphasis on evidence-based campaigning and research, we ensure that we know what is happening on the ground. We use our knowledge to influence decisions on behalf of rail passengers and we work with the rail industry, other passenger groups and Government to secure journey improvements.

Our vision is to ensure that the rail industry and Government are always

‘putting rail passengers first’

This will be achieved through our mission of

‘getting the best deal for passengers’

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1. Introduction

Passenger Focus welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Department for Transport's (DfT) consultation on the proposal to extend c2c's franchise by two years. Although the consultation process has not been formally set out we were aware of informal discussions for an extension since last year.

We view the extension proposal as a very good opportunity for the c2c franchise to be revitalised with a fresh mandate to develop and improve operational performance as well as customer services.

Our response takes account of Passenger Focus policy, knowledge of the current franchise issues and passenger experiences, as captured through the National Passenger Survey (NPS) results. We also canvassed views from local passenger groups who not only use c2c services but are prominent advocates for service improvements.

2. Executive summary

Passenger Focus has no objection to the proposal to extend c2c's franchise period. We have consulted with local rail user groups and our position reflects the broad consensus that c2c is meeting passengers' fundamental expectations.

c2c has a favourable reputation with passengers because it has continued to provide reliable and punctual train services to its passengers. Passengers travel on modern and well maintained trains which are regularly cleaned. This is reflected in overall satisfaction ratings for c2c which have remained consistently high with an average NPS score of 85.9% since autumn 2003.

Any extension must ensure that c2c continues to deliver the current levels of service that passengers have come to expect, in addition to improvements to meet passengers' increasing aspirations and expectations.

Passenger Focus specifically welcomes the early implementation of the Government's High Level Output Statement [HLOS] programme and the opportunity for c2c to play its part in meeting the needs of passengers, tourists, spectators and athletes alike during the 2012 Olympics. From the passengers' point of view, the expectation is that this will translate into more trains and services, and more seats and capacity, which should deliver a more comfortable and safe journey experience.

Now that c2c performance is consistently reliable, passengers' increasing expectation is for much better customer services generally but particularly during service disruption. We would strongly support targets for improving NPS results especially '*overall satisfaction*', '*how well c2c manage delays*', '*the helpfulness, attitude and availability of staff*' and '*personal security on trains and stations*'.

Passenger Focus supports proposals for delay repay but we will wish to ensure that the terms for implementation are suitable for c2c passengers.

Key passenger issues

First, Passenger Focus wishes to highlight the following:

Priorities for the franchise

1. The key priority over the life of the franchise must be significant and sustained investment, creating increased capacity by providing more trains and more services to respond to demand from passengers.
2. All the existing Class 357 trains must be retained and the proposed additional Class 321 rolling stock should include a refurbishment proposal to ensure it meets the equivalent standard of the Class 357 trains, which are very well regarded.
3. The existing levels of operational performance at 94.7% must be protected, and the new target of 95.5% must be achieved without extending existing journey times.
4. We would like firm targets and commitment to improved NPS results, particularly those factors measuring perceptions of security, dealing with delays and staff customer services.
5. We would like to see faster journey times with a commitment to improving the full line speed from 75 to 90 mph wherever achievable.
6. The extension proposal should also set out how it will aim to deliver the increased frequency of services, especially on the Tilbury Loop, and longer trains to meet demand for later evening and weekend services and during known events such as football matches and other festive occasions such as Christmas.
7. We would not expect to see any change to the regulated fare level at RPI + 1. Fare structures should be transparent, simple to understand and promote value for money and social inclusion.
8. Passengers' demand for quality information, especially during delays, should be addressed. The franchise extension should seek improvements in information provision, particularly in terms of consistently reliable technology, backed up by well informed staff.
9. The statutory passenger representative bodies should be involved in monitoring NPS and Service Quality Management System [SQMS] results and action plans.

Response to DfT consultation document

Our following comments are made in direct response to and in the order in which issues are raised within the consultation document.

Section 2 – Meeting performance targets

2.1 Passengers do not take current performance for granted as the occasional severe delays from time to time are a sharp reminder of the importance of reliable services. The proposed target of 95.5% by May 2013 is welcome as long as it does not involve extending existing journey times. Indeed the expectation is for faster journey times and we would like to see this as one of the firm commitments in any extended franchise term.

We strongly support an extension if it supports the early implementation of the High Level Output Statement as well as facilitates the development of c2c's key role in providing rail services to the 2012 Olympics.

Section 3 – Assistance with the 2012 London Olympics and Paralympics

3.1 Passenger Focus and London TravelWatch have formed a task force to ensure that passengers' views are considered in the development of rail and public transport services for the Olympics and as such we would expect to be consulted on c2c's involvement.

Section 4 – HLOS capacity targets

4.1 We note that there are lower peak loadings on c2c trains than on other London and South East TOCs. However passengers are unlikely to feel better just because the overcrowding they experience isn't as bad as elsewhere. Therefore the additional 10 x Class 321 trains is a very welcome relief for passengers who can't get a seat from places such as Benfleet. Passengers will however feel disappointed that the overcrowding and relevant NPS targets are not more ambitious.

4.2 We would like assurances that the proposal is to extend all platforms to 12 car lengths across the whole of the c2c network, particularly on the Tilbury Loop, and a commitment that this will be completed in time for the December 2010 timetable.

One area where we would also like to see a short term solution is the off peak overcrowding which occurs around late night services during festive occasions such as Easter or Christmas or events such as the London Marathon and football matches.

Traditionally c2c have been hesitant at strengthening the four car formations resulting in uncomfortable journeys for passengers on very crowded trains. We would strongly support efforts and a commitment to strengthening services to meet known or anticipated increases in passenger demand during the off peak.

4.3 We would like assurances that East Ham has the capacity to accommodate the additional Class 321 fleet with no adverse effect on the maintenance and reliability of the Class 357 or on operations and performance. This is particularly pertinent because of our concerns at the operational difficulties which resulted from implementing the now aborted December 2006 timetable.

4.4 We would like to see modifications to Class 321 to the equivalent Class 357 standard. In addition, the interior refresh should ensure that sufficient grab rails are provided for the convenience of passengers who either have to stand or move through carriages.

We understand that the London Midlands [Silverlink] Class 321s are extremely reliable in terms of mile per casualty [MPC] although that is partly a function of running fast on the West Coast Main Line with relatively few stops. We would expect them to be equally reliable for the shorter distances and stopping patterns on the c2c routes.

We note that the plan is to provide seating capacity of 305 seats. We refer you to the Thameslink rolling stock research which gave a unanimous view that three seats side by side is not appreciated by passengers who would prefer to have the third seat taken out to create room for standing in reasonable comfort and safety. We feel that it is important that options for the seating and capacity configurations are properly consulted and that any final decision is based on research and evidence of what c2c passengers want.

4.5 Traincrew and operations - The proposed increase in ticket office staff is welcome but not the suggestion that this may be substituted if Ticket Vending Machines [TVM] are chosen as the preferred retail outlet. Often TVMs do not provide the full range of tickets and transactions are also much slower. Passengers who are not regular rail users usually require the reassurance of discussing their needs with a member of staff before travelling.

We would expect to be fully consulted on the development of this proposal. Please note further comments on ITSO ticketing in Section 7 of this report.

4.6 Car park constraints – We support the development and increase of car park capacity if it is based on the wider strategies for sustainable travel and station travel plans. As part of the Greater Anglia RUS, Passenger Focus undertook research into ‘*Getting to the Station*’ which is instructive in the considerations for meeting the demands of passengers travelling to stations by various modes.

Section 5 – Station Facility owner at Barking to transfer to Transport for London

5.1 We would not support any change which resulted in a reduction in the services to national rail passengers in terms of adequate retail opportunities and the provision of customer assistance for instance to passengers who have booked through the Assisted Passengers Reservation System (APRS) and require assistance. We would also expect to be consulted on any station changes at the appropriate time.

Section 6 – Timetable changes

6.1 Passengers’ recent experience with c2c’s major timetable change in December 2006 means that understandably they are likely to be very wary of future changes. Therefore passengers will need reassuring about the full intentions of any timetable changes and Passenger Focus will expect to be thoroughly consulted on their behalf.

We support the three principal schemes specified by the DfT. However, we feel that passengers also have a legitimate expectation of an additional scheme which should aim to improve the speed of services wherever possible. At present, the timetable does not seem to operate to its optimum efficiency. Class 357s are capable of much faster speeds than the current 75mph line speeds.

Our response to DfT’s principal schemes is as follows:

1. **Grays service enhancements** – We very much welcome the increase in service frequency to four trains per hour (tph) and the 15 minute clock face timetable. Outside the core hours where less than 4tph is provided, we would expect the trains to be of sufficient length to meet demand rather than simply expecting passengers to cram into four car length trains.

Also, any opportunity to use trains in passenger service which would otherwise have been an empty stock movement is also supported.

2. **December 2009 West Ham calls** – We support the proposal for a 50% increase in weekday peak services calling at West Ham. However, bearing in mind the previous attempt to achieve this in the December 2006 timetable change, we would need assurances that the operational requirements including re-signalling are delivered and fit for purpose before any changes are made. Passengers would not wish to re-live the avoidable disruption which they had to endure in December 2006.

3. **Initial HLOS to December 2009 and full HLOS to December 2010** – We expect capacity improvements to meet the forecast growth in demand. We accept that growth forecasting is an inexact science. Improvements should focus therefore on firstly providing as many additional seats as possible, whilst equally ensuring the relative comfort and space for those passengers who may not have a seat or choose to stand rather than sit in the middle of a three seater. Passenger Focus would be opposed to any changes which

seek to reallocate seating capacity from existing customers, as was attempted by the removal of the Laindon starters in December 2006.

The expected growth in passenger numbers by the development of the Thames Gateway should be used as an ideal opportunity to generate additional services, but not at the expense of the needs of existing passenger services.

7 – ITSO ticketing

7.1 Passenger Focus supports the objective of simplifying the retail of tickets. This is a laudable objective but not without potential concerns for passengers. We have real concerns that the two systems Oyster and the ITSO card, will lead to serious confusion. We would expect that passengers will not be subjected to undue penalty fares during the phased introduction and or convergence of the systems.

It is imperative that adequate passenger research is undertaken to ensure that c2c and indeed other TOCs develop the new ticketing based on a good understanding of passengers' needs and expectations. We are reassured that National Express has experience in this area.

Developing smart ticketing as part of an overall strategy would be very welcome. As for passengers it is not an end in itself. It should aim to make ticket retail easier, to reduce the need for queuing and ultimately to get away from the penalty areas approach which sometimes ignores the inadequacies of rail ticket retailing. The vast majority of passengers want to pay their fares, but they do not want to be faced with the choice of joining lengthy queues and missing an appointment or risking a penalty fare. Therefore, anything that makes it easier for passengers to buy their tickets is welcome.

8 – Market development and fares

8.1 Passenger Focus believes that the extension proposal is a good opportunity for c2c to reinvigorate itself and we endorse their vision of *'Making travel simpler'*.

The 'c2c' name and brand have strong support from local rail users who do not see the need for a name change. Whilst adding National Express to c2c's name retains the c2c brand, it would be wise to consult with user groups about this proposal.

We would strongly support c2c's efforts to improve customer services. From the National Passenger Survey results, we have also identified two of the three areas that c2c aim to target. These are how well a train company deals with delays and personal safety. We believe that c2c is very capable of improving overall passenger satisfaction beyond the current level of 89% and would like this to be included as an achievable target.

There is considerable scope for c2c to improve the scores for managing delays with only 37% of passengers rating this as being good or satisfied. We note the ongoing initiatives in this area such as C.Comms. We feel it is important that c2c seeks the views of passengers, local passenger groups and the c2c Passenger Panel to ensure they get direct passenger feedback of how they are implementing their plans. We welcome proposals which will see Passenger Panel members and Passenger Focus involved in post incident reviews. We feel that c2c can go a step further by giving post incident review reports to passengers via its website and newsletter.

Quiet zones – We commend c2c for this initiative but would urge them to explore further opportunities to ensure passengers respect the purpose of the quiet zone, perhaps with occasional reminders using Customer Information Systems [CIS] and by announcements.

Cycling policy review – We recommend that this review is included within the wider agenda of sustainability and the development of travel plans. A lot more needs to be done to encourage cycling as part of a move to overcome the limitations of car park expansion. We understand the underlying concerns of transporting bicycles, especially during crowded peak trains, and accept that the balance will be in favour of using existing capacity primarily for passengers rather than bikes.

In addition to providing basic storage, we would also expect that cycling to the station is actively promoted as part of a wider campaign with support from Local Authorities.

Assisted travel/disabled traveller policy – Passenger Focus has carried out extensive research in this area and we would expect c2c to factor this in any review they undertake. In particular we have provided feedback to c2c on our research in to the Assisted Passenger Reservation Service and we would like to see the adoption of National Express East Anglia internet booking service take into account our findings and the recommendations.

Educating passengers in using TVMs – c2c must be credited with efforts to encourage greater TVM usage. However, passengers' confidence in using TVMs appears low and very often there are long queues for the ticket office with only a handful of passengers using the TVMs. TVMs also appear to be much slower at processing credit and debit cards than at ticket offices. We welcome further efforts to address this issue. We would recommend that the DfT set a target for c2c to increase TVM usage by passengers and improving the speed for processing payments on TVMs.

National Rail Enquiry Service – Passenger Focus has pointed out to c2c that it was not keeping information on NRES up to date. We are yet to receive confirmation that this is being addressed. Passengers and staff alike should be able to rely on this and we therefore strongly commend all efforts to keep it up to date.

Revenue protection – We are unclear about the current establishment of Revenue Protection Inspectors (RPIs), so we would want clarification of how many 'additional' RPIs will be recruited. We have previously raised a concern that RPIs may not possess the necessary customer service skills to deal with non revenue enforcement issues such as anti-social behaviour. We would urge c2c to consider ensuring that RPIs are properly trained to deal with passengers in a customer friendly manner, even when it involves difficult situations such as enforcing revenue protection. We understand that RPIs are provided by an outsourced company but as far as passengers are concerned they represent c2c.

It would be useful to understand whether the generally low NPS scores on availability and helpfulness of staff on board trains is due to poor perceptions by passengers of RPIs.

Securely yours – In addition, we would recommend greater staff presence at weekends and during late night services to reassure passengers travelling on trains that can often feel rowdy and threatening. However, as mentioned we would like to see staff who are good at customer services, perhaps along the lines of a team of 'volunteer night time conductors' involving c2c staff.

Commitment2Customers programme - As mentioned above this programme must include training of all outsourced staff, especially RPIs but also cleaners.

Customer service training – We will continue to encourage and support c2c's efforts to improve customer services.

Brand strategy – Any changes to the current c2c brand should involve focus groups and market testing in addition to the usual consultation with local passenger groups. Passengers may be disinclined to support a re-branding in a franchise with three or more years to go, especially if this involves significant but unnecessary cost.

8.2 Campaign plans – We would support any efforts aimed at encouraging more travel by rail especially during the off-peak. c2c must also match passengers' expectations by ensuring that sufficient capacity is anticipated and provided.

Ongoing customer service initiatives – We reiterate our view that c2c is capable of improving overall satisfaction to 90% and support their initiative to incentivise staff to reach this target. In particular, we would hope that all staff, especially frontline staff, are involved in this objective.

8.3 Delay repay – c2c performance is now so reliable that perhaps the connection between generally good performance and the need to compensate passengers on those occasions where they suffer severe delay has been lost. Introducing '*delay repay*' will restore that relationship and ensure that c2c fulfils an expectation by passengers that they should be compensated where their specific journey suffers delays beyond the norm.

We firmly believe that, **in addition** to the delay-repay element, the franchise must require the implementation of a 'safety-net' compensation scheme for season ticket holders should they experience frequent delays.

We would expect c2c to demonstrate a commitment to a proactive policy of informing passengers of their right to claim in any given situation and to set out procedures that would be adopted to make it easier to claim e.g. reply paid cards distributed on trains and at stations at the time of severe delays.

We strongly urge the DfT to include this in the extension and for c2c to work with Passenger Focus to develop and agree terms of implementation.

8.4 SQMS for stations, people, retail transactions – In support of an SQMS regime, we would urge that DfT sets targets for improvement of the overall station environment and NPS satisfaction scores over the remaining life of the franchise. SQMS should also be an integral measure for monitoring and identifying issues for improvement.

Station improvements - We envisage that all station improvements will benchmark existing NPS and customer satisfaction scores and undertake bespoke research into passengers' expectations.

Passenger Focus has proposed that, in particular, c2c aims to improve the overall station environment on the Tilbury Loop under the theme of 'TLC' caring for the Tilbury Loop. Developing the station environment on the Tilbury Loop should be part of an overall strategy alongside the Thames Gateway regeneration. c2c efforts should involve working with potential partners such as local authorities, local user groups and with the Thames Gateway Partnerships. TLC should also aim to improve the station environment for staff, safety and security, including gaining secure station accreditation at Purfleet and West Horndon.

We would expect any regime agreed to include the following measures: lighting, cleanliness (including graffiti removal), seating and waiting room facilities, regular maintenance, general ticket office opening times and staff availability, targets for reliable TVMs and cleanliness of station and on board toilets. Passenger Focus would be willing to

provide an independent verification role for general reports, especially where remedial action plans are required.

Access for All – c2c has shown real commitment when applying for funding from Access for All. We would urge c2c to ensure that they work closely with the passengers and passenger groups for whom the improvements are aimed at.

Conclusion

Any extension must be aimed at improving services for passengers. c2c passengers have very high expectations and from the generally favourable satisfaction scores, it is clear that c2c’s efforts are being acknowledged. We would support even higher targets for performance and NPS to motivate even greater efforts by c2c. The capacity targets for 2012 are rather modest in their ambition and we feel there is even greater scope to meet passengers’ expectations for more seats and capacity.

Overall we would expect passengers to be at the heart of any extension proposals. Once agreement has been met we would also urge c2c to maintain an ongoing and effective engagement with passengers, passenger groups and c2c’s Passenger Panel alike, so that changes are passenger focused.

Appendix A - Summary of Consultation responses

This list contains the summary of responses and issues raised in response to Passenger Focus consultation with passengers and local passenger groups.

The groups and organisations consulted include the following:

- London TravelWatch
- Southend Rail Travellers Association
- Thurrock Rail Users Group

Summary of responses and issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • keep the c2c brand and maintain it as a separate franchise from National Express East Anglia • ensure better management of engineering works • provide 12 car platforms at all Tilbury Loop stations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • expectation that the timetable will meet the achievable service provision • improve poor communication and strong rejection of any franchise extension
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • refurbishment of Class 321 must be of a good standard • concern about existing depot capacity and ability to look after extended fleet
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • code of conduct for covering engineering works wanted as well as a limit on the maximum extension of journey times.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all class 357s must be retained
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dates for the extension of platforms to be committed on all Tilbury Loop stations and soon. This should dovetail with the cascade of rolling stock • support for the alignment of Grays with TfL zones and for Purfleet to be part of the zone containing Rainham (rather than Grays)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support for full Oyster functionality as far as Grays • correct all fare imbalances across the franchise as soon as possible and before January 2009
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • specific endorsement for refurbishing Class 321s with improved seating, lighting, CIS and air-conditioning • early consultation requested for any proposals for additional West Ham stops • view that ITSO is a low priority as pre-pay is more relevant and rushing its introduction would cause confusion • concern at TfL's apparent haste to adopt further parts of the Tilbury Loop • request that if Barking is transferred to TfL, that staff should cover until the first and last trains • support for delay repay and the provision of readily available claim forms • current service levels to be maintained with improvement included in the extension period • support for a maximum increase to journey times of 30 minutes; and all station buses used during planned possessions • support for real and early consultations • concern that there was no prior consultation on the franchise extension and that decisions may have already been taken
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • first and last trains to be improved to meet London TravelWatch's policy • support for an earlier first and last train from Rainham on Monday to Saturday to arrive by 6.00 am and for a much earlier Sunday service to arrive by 7.30 am (currently 9.42 am) • support for a later last train to Rainham every day at or after 12.30 am (currently it is 12.15 am on Monday to Fridays, 11.35 pm on Saturdays and 9.10 pm on Sundays) • also support for a through train on the Rainham Line rather than the current shuttle between Barking and an increased frequency from 1 to 2 tph.

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