

Passenger Voice

East of England

Independent national rail passenger watchdog



Gearing up for Thameslink

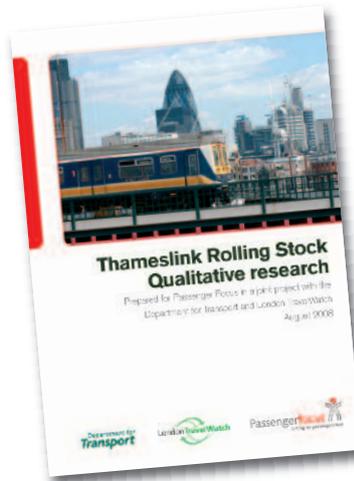


Passenger Focus has recently completed research projects designed to bring passengers' needs to the heart of decision-making about the Thameslink Programme

In work with the Department for Transport and London TravelWatch, Passenger Focus looked at what passengers want from the new trains to be built for introduction from 2012. Passenger Focus manager Guy Dangerfield highlights two things: "First, passengers want a spacious train they can get in and out of easily. Second, they want a step change in passenger information, going well beyond the destination and calling

pattern now standard on new trains."

For instance, real-time information about connecting routes would provide added value and help to minimise stress, particularly as the route serves the airports at Luton and Gatwick and the Eurostar terminal at St Pancras.



Other helpful information might include connecting services from London Bridge, or how the London Underground is running.

In addition, in joint work with First Capital Connect and Southeastern, Passenger Focus investigated how inconvenience to passengers can be minimised during Thameslink construction – for example, when the 'central core' from St Pancras to London Bridge is closed.

Guy Dangerfield said: "Probably the most significant finding is that communication

with passengers is absolutely key." Passenger Focus is working with the industry to make sure these findings are taken onboard.

More seats at last actually on the way!

Strong economic growth has seen demand for rail travel boom in the East of England, leading to crowding problems on several routes. Seven out of the 10 most overcrowded

trains in Britain in 2007 served this region. After sustained lobbying by Passenger Focus and other organisations over many years, real change is now on the horizon. By spring 2009 virtually all peak trains on the First Capital Connect Thameslink route will be eight coaches, and in May 2009 peak fast trains between Cambridge and King's Cross will be extended to 12 coaches. Passenger Focus manager Guy

Dangerfield said: "That in itself will make a big difference to passengers in the peaks – but it's just the start. First Capital Connect and National Express East Anglia are both allocated more trains under government rolling stock plans – and then there's the brand new Thameslink fleet coming between 2012 and 2015. It can't come soon enough, but passengers will soon notice the difference."



Cleaning those trains – quality counts

Train cleaning and presentation on National Express East Anglia ('one' railway, as was) has improved markedly in the three years since Passenger Focus first engaged in an effort to drive up standards. Despite the strides made, National Passenger Survey satisfaction with train cleanliness is at 58%, still below the average for London and South East train companies. Passenger Focus will therefore continue work to help achieve even higher standards. Passenger Focus manager Guy Dangerfield said: "We will help National Express East Anglia understand the remaining gaps between the standard they are achieving and what passengers want to see."



Keep people on trains wherever you can

2009 sees work get underway to renew overhead line electrification equipment on the route out of Liverpool Street station

Until recently, Network Rail didn't seem to regard this as a priority. But a run of problems, together with lobbying from Passenger Focus, National Express and others, forced a rethink on the 'mend it when it falls down' approach.

Updating the 1940s and 1950s equipment will give passengers a more reliable service, but for weekend travellers it comes at a price. The route from Liverpool

Street to Essex and East Anglia will be closed somewhere on Saturday, Sunday or both on 46 out of 52 weekends in 2009. Passenger Focus manager Guy Dangerfield said: "This investment is crucial to providing passengers with a decent service in the future. But the rail industry must demonstrate its willingness to use bus replacement services as the last, not the first, resort while the work is going on."

News roundup

- **NPS in the field**

Work is currently underway on the Autumn 2008 National Passenger Survey. The Spring results can be found at

www.passengerfocus.org.uk/nps

- **Passenger Focus on video**

The Passenger Focus corporate video explaining the watchdog's role is now available to view at

www.passengerfocus.org.uk

- **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? It's your Voice, so contact:

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Station standards

Focus on East Coast

'At station' factors in the National Passenger Survey lagged behind those for 'on train' – and all too often it is clear why

Passenger Focus is working closely with National Express East Coast to help them understand what needs to change for their stations to excel in presentation and most particularly cleanliness. Passenger Focus manager Guy Dangerfield said: "Whether the station looks are spotless or not will never rival train punctuality in terms of importance to passengers. But being able to rely on finding clean facilities, where the locks and hand-driers work and the soap dispensers have been filled



Clean facilities are important

is important – whether you have paid £200 or £10 for your ticket."

Managing delays is the new challenge

Now that c2c is consistently delivering reliable and punctual train services, passengers' expectations are shifting to improvements in areas of customer services – especially during times of disruption. Current satisfaction levels, as measured by the National Passenger Survey (NPS), show only 37% of passengers are satisfied with how well c2c currently manages service disruption. Passengers want to know why their train has suddenly stopped, how long disruption will last and alternative journey arrangements where the delay is significant.

Passenger Focus manager Tunde Olatunji is keen to see c2c set very high standards as a company. He also wants c2c

to use research by Passenger Focus and the Association of Train Operating Companies on passenger information to make changes that will begin to address the needs of passengers. Tunde says that because c2c services are usually so reliable, it can be even more frustrating for passengers when unexpected disruption occurs.

He says 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, especially in reviewing major incidents such as the week-long disruption caused by the Bromley-by-Bow bomb incident.