

Passenger Voice London

Independent national rail passenger watchdog



Influencing the next South Central franchise

For the first time Passenger Focus has participated in discussions between the Department for Transport (DfT) and bidders for a franchise

Passenger Focus has met with the four short-listed bidders for the South Central franchise, to run for five years, 10 months from 20 September 2009. Public consultation over the specification of the Invitation to Tender (ITT) closed in August, and in September a series of meetings was held in which Passenger Focus shared with bidders the key findings of our research into passengers' priorities for the new franchise. These are based on interviews with over 6000 passengers.

The key priority we emphasised is sustained investment to provide more trains

and more services to increase capacity in response to demand from passengers. A target Public Performance Measure (PPM) of 93% for punctuality and reliability should be set for 2014, with a minimum of 90% set for each individual route. Other priorities highlighted include: better information, especially during disruption to services; more late-evening and weekend services; simple, transparent fares which are good value for money; staffing at stations; and a culture of continuous improvement.

Passenger Focus is continuing to discuss with the DfT the detailed specification for the



ITT which is to be published in November. The DfT expects to see plans to cope with the disruption associated with major projects to deliver increased capacity, including the East London Line extension and redevelopment at London Bridge station. Another proposal includes the introduction of smartcards across the network.

Penalty fares on Gatwick Express



Passenger Focus manager Sharon Hedges has been discussing with Southern its plans for penalty-fare arrangements on the Gatwick Express services that will extend to Brighton from December. The non-stop Gatwick Express (GEx) services between the airport and Victoria allow for payment on board the train, but for all other Southern services it is necessary to have a ticket prior to travel. Passengers will want to know what ticketing requirements will apply on the GEx services south of the airport.

Minimising Thameslink inconvenience

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, passenger manager, said: "Probably the most significant finding is that communications with passengers is absolutely key." Passenger Focus is working with the industry to make sure these findings are taken onboard.

Gearing up for Thameslink

In a groundbreaking exercise, Passenger Focus has asked passengers what they want from the new trains to be built for the Thameslink Programme

Department for
Transport

London **TravelWatch**

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.

While getting a seat is important, the research also revealed that having enough space to stand in comfort and safety was a priority. "Passengers are realistic about the future as new research shows more space to stand, let alone sit, is key to new Thameslink trains," said Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief executive. Although passengers would naturally prefer to sit, they accept that trains are crowded, especially during the peak times. Designing carriages with flexible seating arrangements was suggested. Passengers also said

improvements should be made in the provision of enhanced personal security through CCTV and better staff presence.

The Thameslink Programme will see new trains designed and rolled out initially on to the First Capital Connect Bedford to Brighton route from 2012 before taking over other services. Platforms will have to be lengthened and Blackfriars and London Bridge stations will be substantially rebuilt.



Passenger Focus chief executive Anthony Smith

SWT ticket office hours reduction

Passenger Focus has collated responses to South West Train's (SWT) proposal to cut ticket office hours at 114 stations. In the three-week consultation period, Passenger Focus received over 3100 postcards and 360 letters and emails from MPs, rail user groups and many county, district and parish councils.

Although Passenger Focus recognises that there is likely to be an increased use of ticket machines by some passengers, there are compelling reasons why it is sometimes necessary to speak to staff. They include uncertainty over the right type of ticket, non-availability of certain tickets from the machine – including extension tickets, queues at the machines,

and faults with machines. Since SWT has a robust penalty fares scheme, it is vital that passengers can obtain the necessary advice so that they do not fall foul of the regime through no fault of their own.

But equally important, passengers find the presence of staff at a station reassuring. Passengers told us there must be a correlation between the incidence of vandalism and antisocial behaviour and the number of hours a station is unstaffed. A saving in one budget may impose costs on another.

Passenger Focus has now sent SWT an objection to the proposals. A copy of our paper is available at www.passengerfocus.org.uk

News roundup

- **Ticket gates at Waterloo**
Waterloo serves more passengers than any other London station and it's in the middle of the biggest gating project in Europe. By October the hoardings on the concourse should have been removed to reveal the huge amount of work that has been going on over the last few months.

The gates won't be in use for a while yet but Passenger Focus manager Jocelyn Pearson is working with Network Rail (NR) and South West Trains (SWT) to represent passenger views.

- **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



Passengers want staff at stations to help with tickets