

Passenger Voice

Independent national rail passenger watchdog



Passenger Focus chief executive Anthony Smith and chairman Colin Foxall with Stephen Hammond MP

Fare conclusions

Work continues on the research requested by the Secretary of State for Transport earlier this year looking into fares and ticketing

Passenger Focus's interim findings set out the significant pointers that will shape future research, and value for money has proved to be the dominant theme. So far, Passenger Focus has identified a need to:

- increase awareness of the lowest fares and how passengers can get hold of them
- improve passengers' trust and confidence in the fares system
- improve satisfaction with value for money among season ticket holders

In our National Passenger Survey, passenger satisfaction with value for money consistently scores poorly. Satisfaction with 'value for money for the price of your ticket' is lowest among season ticket holders (22%) and passengers that were the least satisfied with this aspect were those in London and south-east England.

"Passenger satisfaction with value for money consistently scores poorly"

The Department for Transport has endorsed plans for further research and we hope to publish conclusions in early 2009. Research will look at the drivers of passenger satisfaction with value for money, and a key part of this will be to identify and test ideas which might improve satisfaction and trust. For instance, is it all about the core service or can a difference be made by measures including:

- Direct debit schemes for season tickets
- Loyalty schemes for season ticket holders
- Provision of Carnet tickets for irregular commuters
- Boosting the availability of Advance fares

In addition, Passenger Focus will be commissioning research to compare the situation in Britain with other European railways, looking at prices, frequency and speed of journey on a range of routes.

Getting on the bus

Passenger Focus arrived at the three main GB political party conferences in a double-decker bus to highlight its up and coming role as bus and coach passenger watchdog outside London. The move was to encourage passengers, politicians and stakeholders to visit Passenger Focus at the conference and put across their



Aboard: Rosie Winterton MP

views on the state of public transport. Anthony Smith Passenger Focus chief executive said: "The bus gives us a perfect platform to listen to our most important stakeholders – the passengers. Using our consultation and research we

are making sure we represent passenger priorities at the highest level."

Passenger Focus also held party fringe events at the conferences in Bournemouth, Manchester and Birmingham on the theme 'Can we give passengers world class train and bus services?' Speakers over the three weeks included Norman Baker MP, Rosie Winterton MP and Stephen Hammond MP among other key industry players.



Anthony Smith, Norman Baker MP, Mark Hunter MP and Colin Foxall

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More trains, longer trains, better trains

The National Passenger Survey tells us that four out of five passengers were satisfied overall with the journey they just undertook. What is driving that satisfaction? Our analysis shows the overwhelming reason why passengers say they are satisfied is because the train is on time. The main reason driving dissatisfaction? How train companies and Network Rail dealt with delays and poor punctuality. While the results vary by train company and route this sends a clear message to government and the industry – keep up the attention on performance and focus on how planned and unplanned delays are dealt with and you will get more happy passengers.

In the meantime an eerie, uneasy silence reigns. The effect of the

turmoil in the financial markets is yet to really play out – the impact on passenger numbers, revenue and the Government's ability to fund the industry are unknown. The standoff between the Office of Rail Regulation and Network Rail continues. The new Government transport team is bedding in. Work continues towards the New Year deadline for the completion of the majority of work on the West Coast upgrade.

Talking to passengers at recent TravelWatch meetings, the party conferences and on trains and platforms around the country one theme comes up again and again. The rail industry is suffering its own liquidity crisis as the 'currency' of rail – the rolling stock – is in short supply. Everywhere passengers are calling for more trains, longer trains and better trains. The success of the industry on performance may well be poisoned if crowding continues to dominate as it is starting to do. This partly explains why, as overall satisfaction is relatively high, value for money ratings remain low – crowding is part of the explanation for this. Whether it's the Liverpool to Norwich services, cross Bristol or my own trains from Balham it's getting very crowded out there.

Anthony Smith



Anthony Smith

Role in franchising

For the first time Passenger Focus has participated in discussions between the Department for Transport (DfT) and bidders for a franchise, in this case the four short-listed for the South Central franchise.

Public consultation over the specification of the Invitation to Tender (ITT) closed in August, and a series of meetings will now be held in which Passenger Focus will share with bidders the key findings of our research into passengers' priorities for the new franchise. These are based on interviews with over 6000 passengers.

Key priorities are sustained investment to provide more trains and capacity and using trains of maximum length during peak hours. A target Public Performance Measure (PPM) of 93% should be set for 2014, with a minimum of 90% for each individual route. Others include: better information, especially during disruption to services; more late-evening and weekend services; simple, transparent fares which are good value for money; staffed ticket offices; and a culture of continuous improvement.

Passenger Focus is now waiting to see what will be included in the specification for the ITT. The DfT expects to see plans to cope with a 10% increase in capacity, which will include the East London Line extension, scheduled to open in 2010. Another proposal includes the introduction of smartcards across the network.

West Coast Main Line disruption has long-term benefits

The West Coast Main Line (WCML) upgrade will deliver passengers extra services to Manchester, Birmingham and other places, will mean more trains at the weekend and a substantial cut to journey times along the route

The additional trains and shorter journey times should go some way to addressing passenger priorities for extra services and more trains running on time.

The industry acknowledges the engineering work needed to bring these massive changes has caused years of weekend pain and disruption to passengers on an ongoing and frequent basis.

Therefore, it is now essential that engineering works do not overrun into 2009 and cause further delay and disruptions to passengers.

Passenger Focus has raised its concerns to the industry that many passengers have had to pay full-price fares for disrupted and longer journeys, often on bus replacement services. This has sometimes been because of

train timetables being loaded on to the website too late to offer lower Advance fares.

There is now also concern about how the upgraded line will cope with the increase in services from December 2008. However, Passenger Focus will be monitoring this situation very closely. And, Network Rail



Engineers work to upgrade the line

assures us that its plans are running to time and from January 2009 the inconvenience and distress caused to passengers will fade into a distant memory.

Developing the bus role

Work has begun to shape the approach and structure needed to fulfill Passenger Focus's new position as champion of the bus passenger for England (outside London)



To develop this initiative, Passenger Focus's bus project manager David Sidebottom has begun a round of talks with bus operators, local authorities, passenger transport executives and other stakeholders. He has received a very positive response to the central idea that our role is to use research to lobby for improvements for passengers.

Passenger Focus proposes a series of six intensive regional case studies each year that will compare and contrast bus operations, assess passenger satisfaction, identify areas for improvement and work with focus groups of both users and non-users. To help shape Passenger Focus's strategy

for these studies, three pilot projects are proposed, one in a large Passenger Transport Executive (PTE) area, a large town or city without a PTE, and a rural area. It is hoped that field work on these will begin before the end of this year.

Another early goal is to establish benchmarks for the future, looking at towns and cities where the bus services have an excellent reputation and places that fall short of expectations. Such comparative research will help Passenger Focus dig deeper into the fundamental question, 'what makes a good bus service?' Research will also help to identify why passenger satisfaction varies in different parts of the country.

Disabled passengers let down by rail companies

As part of an ongoing programme of work into accessibility issues on rail, Passenger Focus has published a report on the Assisted Passenger Reservation Service (APRS) and its delivery to disabled passengers

We set a group of mystery shoppers the task of booking assistance and testing the delivery. The results were not encouraging.

While train companies answered phone calls quickly and were polite, they couldn't always provide the information required. When passengers arrived at the station, one in three of the mystery shoppers were not met as arranged.

Some mystery shoppers received excellent service from helpful staff but others did not have such a positive experience. In a large number of cases, when things went wrong with the journeys, station/train staff tried to put things right. However, when assistance isn't delivered as booked, it causes many passengers anxiety and uncertainty.

The APRS just isn't consistent and we are asking the industry to get this right. We have requested the industry to build in a tracking system which is regularly monitored and the results are published to ensure passengers are aware of improvements.



National Passenger Survey online

An online database version of Passenger Focus's twice-yearly National Passenger Survey (NPS) is now available. Besides providing all the information in the report, the Reportal database allows registered users to review previous years' surveys and devise their own comparisons based on specific interests.

The NPS is the largest study of rail users in Europe with over 53,000 passengers completing questionnaires about their rail journeys each year. The results are used industry-wide, helping train operating companies, Network Rail and others determine how they can improve services based on passenger priorities.

In addition to Reportal, Passenger Focus has created an on-line facility which will allow the user to access comments made about services provided on the train and at the station, giving a clear idea of passenger feedback. For further information, go to www.npsreportal.org.uk

Buying your fare

New research reveals what passengers like and dislike about using ticket machines to pay their fare.

South West Trains and Passenger Focus have released research showing passengers are still queuing at ticket offices despite knowing that ticket machines are available. Although 78% of people questioned in the survey said they had used ticket vending machines, a variety of reasons were highlighted for those who had not tried them including wanting a more personal service, being unable to get the ticket they required and not being sure how to use the machine.

Passenger Focus and South West Trains have jointly funded the research to understand the way people buy their tickets.

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.

Passenger Focus manager Guy Dangerfield highlights two findings: "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 Underground is working.

While getting a seat is important, the research also revealed that having enough 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 by better security through CCTV, more luggage storage and better staff presence.

The work was commissioned with the Department for Transport and London TravelWatch.

Passenger Focus champions passenger cases

Each train operating company (TOC) has in place complaints' procedures to make certain passengers have an opportunity to seek advice and compensation when their journey goes wrong. If unhappy with the response, however, passengers can apply to Passenger Focus for help in resolving an issue with a TOC. This is a sample of the kind of problems that the Passenger Advice Team has dealt with recently:

- A passenger made numerous calls to the Trainline about a written complaint but received no response. After contacting us we secured £10 for call charges.
- An overhead-line failure meant there were no trains out of Euston and staff advised a passenger to come back the following day. This was not an option as she was due to fly to Spain. The passenger had to get a taxi to get her home in Runcorn, costing £320. On

our appeal, we gained agreement to reimburse the passenger.

- A passenger bought two tickets for a sleeper on a First ScotRail service. The carriage was very noisy and kept the passengers awake. The TOC offered £103 compensation but the passenger refused to accept this. On our appeal, we obtained two first-class return tickets on the overnight sleeper (retail cost of £257).

- **NPS in the field**
Work is currently underway on the Autumn 2008 National Passenger Survey which is planned to be released early in 2009. The Spring 2008 results can be found at www.passengerfocus.org.uk.

- **Further fare simplification**
The second stage of fare names simplification by the Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC) was implemented in September, addressing Passenger Focus's research showing that passengers were confused by the array of ticket types. The names reflect the period of validity or time of purchase:
 - **ANYTIME:** Buy any time, travel any time
 - **OFFPEAK:** Buy any time, travel off-peak
 - **ADVANCE:** Book in advance, train specific.

Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief executive says: "Fare simplification is intended to standardise names and make it easier for passengers to buy the right ticket for them.

"We are now undertaking research looking at how passengers have found the new fare names."

- **Putting passengers first**
Congratulations to Southeastern, winner of this year's National Rail Award for Putting Passengers First. The award, supported by Passenger Focus, recognises flexibility, responsibility and quality of customer service. Northern Rail and South West Trains were highly commended by the judges.

Passenger Focus research

Behind all Passenger Focus's work lies solid research that is of great benefit to the transport industry at large. Headed by Janet Cardell, the research team undertakes a number of studies each year to identify passenger attitudes, needs and priorities for improvements. Stakeholders almost invariably contribute to reports through consultation.

Janet says: "I am thrilled to be able to work on the production of the National Passenger Survey, the largest piece of rail research undertaken throughout Europe if not the world! The

work undertaken by our organisation plays a vital role in helping us gauge passenger opinion and represent rail users at every level of the industry and government."

Among the subjects currently being worked on are the National Passenger Survey Autumn 2008; fare and ticketing research; employers' transport needs; Network Rail's Route Utilisation Studies; the Intercity Express Programme (and passengers' aspirations for the next generation of high-speed trains); how fares and ticketing arrangements in Great Britain compare with other European countries; and Station Travel Plans. Future research will include passengers' reaction to Network Rail's station improvements.