

# Passenger Voice South East

Independent national rail passenger watchdog



## Gearing up for Thameslink

Department for  
**Transport**



In a groundbreaking exercise, Passenger Focus has asked passengers what they want from the new trains to be built for 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, as one approaches Kentish Town, whether the London Underground is operating normally.

While getting a seat is important, the research also revealed that having enough space to stand in comfort 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 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 line 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

### 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. 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.





## Southeastern fares in the spotlight

Like most people across the country passengers will have spent most of summer paying nervous attention to the economy and the credit crunch

This concern is brought closer to rail passengers with Southeastern fares set to rise in January 2009 by RPI+3%, which is well above the increases that other train operators are allowed on their regulated fares. With inflation having nearly doubled, passengers – especially in Kent and East Sussex – are likely to see an average of nearly 10% fare increases.

This added burden will raise even more questions as to whether these increases are fair or offer value for money. Passenger Focus measures passengers' perceptions of value

for money using the National Passenger Survey. The scores for Southeastern show that only 32% of passengers were satisfied with the 'value for money for the price of your ticket' which is below the average for the London and South East.

Passenger Focus manager Tunde Olatunji says that Southeastern has been upfront about the fact that they are applying the RPI+3% increases, as permitted by their franchise agreement with the Department for Transport (DfT). However, Southeastern passengers will want to know why they are being asked to pay more than other rail passengers and what they can expect in return. Tunde says that Southeastern needs to do more to highlight improvements in train punctuality and reliability but also by promoting and developing more affordable fares and easier ways of paying.

## Sussex Route Utilisation Study

Passenger Focus is continuing to contribute to work on Network Rail's Route Utilisation Studies (RUS) for both Sussex and Kent, which began in early 2008. The separate studies are crucial in understanding what future developments will be needed to address growth in passenger numbers and overcrowding. Baseline information about the routes has already been shared with stakeholders.

The scope of the Sussex RUS is main-line services from London to Brighton and the coast, including services to Redhill, Reigate, Tonbridge and the Arun Valley, as well as East and West Coastway services from Havant Junction to Bexhill.

For Kent it will cover the main line services from Victoria, Blackfriars, Charing Cross and Cannon Street to Ramsgate; Dover; Hastings and Ashford. It will also look at the services -



Strood to Paddock Woods; Ashford to Hastings; and Sittingbourne to Sheerness-on-Sea.

Although RUS are very technical in nature and driven mainly by rail industry experts, Passenger Focus will be playing a key role in representing the interests of current and potential passengers. Formal public consultation is expected to begin in the winter with a view to completion of both RUS in early summer 2009.

## Passenger vision for rail future

Passenger Focus co-hosted 'a Vision for Sussex Rail' event with Railfuture (Coastway Division) in Lewes. Delegates included local authority members and officers as well as passenger representatives. It looked at rail services in the county and their potential for future development.

Passenger Focus set the scene with a presentation on the current situation, including the 2007 rail White Paper, the

High Level Output Specification and progress on the South Central franchise. Network Rail gave details about the Sussex RUS, and other speakers set out aspirations for a range of possible future developments. Among them were the reinstatement of the Wealden line between Lewes and Uckfield, new stations at Glyne Gap and Langley, cycle-hire facilities at selected stations, and overcoming the difficult east-west link at Brighton.

## News roundup

- **Penalty fares on Gatwick Express**  
Passenger Focus manager Sharon Hedges has been discussing with Southern its plans for penalty-fare arrangements on 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.

- **Ashford service to Brussels restored**

Passenger Focus is pleased that community lobbying has paid off and has welcomed news that Ashford International will soon have a daily return service to Brussels. The station has three trains a day to Paris, a further connecting service to Brussels and weekly winter services to the French Alps and Avignon in summer.

- **NPS in the field**

Work is currently underway on the Autumn 2008 National Passenger Survey. The Spring results are at [www.passengerfocus.org.uk/nps](http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/nps)