

Passenger Voice South West

Independent national rail passenger watchdog



SWT ticket office hours reduction

Passenger Focus has collated the responses to South West Trains' (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 sent SWT an objection to the proposals. A copy of our paper is available at www.passengerfocus.org.uk.

Buying tickets

Passenger Focus and South West Trains (SWT) have completed a research programme to look at how passengers choose to buy tickets

Although four out of five passengers queuing at ticket offices told us they had used machines in the past, one in five passengers said they just hadn't thought about it this time. Others rejected them because they did not trust the machines or because they needed advice from station staff.

However, four in five passengers said they would consider using the machines in the future. The big challenge for train companies is to increase passengers' trust by making sure the machines are reliable and offer the right ticket and the best deal.

In response to the findings, SWT is putting in place some initiatives it hopes will improve ticket buying.

With passengers saying they were wary of using ticket machines for the first time, SWT is going to help tackle this by increasing the visibility of floorwalkers – employees who help answer queries or demonstrate how they work.

SWT will also be promoting the existence of the ticket machines better and explain what they can do.

A pre-pay collection facility and the ability to renew season tickets are part of a range of improvements currently being introduced across all 444 ticket machines.

SWT customer service director Ian Johnston said: "We were really pleased to get involved with Passenger Focus to produce this joint research on what people like and don't like about our ticket machines. This report is not just a document we have put on a shelf to gather dust, we have used the findings to address the ways we tell people about what they do and improvements we are making."

Passenger Focus takes bus to party conference



Passenger Focus arrived at the Liberal Democrat Party conference in Bournemouth on a double-decker bus to highlight its up and coming role as bus and coach passenger watchdog for England in 2009.

The move was to encourage passengers, politicians and stakeholders to visit Passenger Focus at the conference and put across their views on the state of public transport. Passenger Focus also attended Labour and Conservative Party conferences in its bus.

Pictured are Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief executive, Norman Baker MP, Mark Hunter MP and Passenger Focus chairman Colin Foxall.

News roundup

- **Putting customers first**

Passenger Focus has been working with First Great Western (FGW) on its new training package designed to address the poor passenger satisfaction ratings in Passenger Focus's Spring National Passenger Survey. By August 2010, all 2700 FGW staff will have attended the experiential and scenario-based events to develop their customer skills.

- **Paignton and Plymouth to lose SWT services**

Passenger Focus has been in discussion with the Department for Transport (DfT) about the implications of South West Trains ending services beyond Exeter to Paignton and Plymouth from December 2009, when the frequency of Waterloo-Exeter trains is increased to hourly. The DfT had indicated that additional resources would be made available to First Great Western (FGW) to fill the gaps, but this now appears not to be the case.

Passenger Focus manager Mike Greedy has been working closely with Devon County Council and local passenger groups to ensure adequate capacity is maintained. Discussions between DfT and FGW are taking place over additional funding for two critical evening peak services, in particular.

- **Passenger Focus on video**

The Passenger Focus corporate video explaining the watchdog's role is now available to view at www.passengerfocus.org.uk

- **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. 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 on this issue.



Better service for disabled passengers

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) for disabled passengers

The research found assistance was often unreliable and too many people are not receiving their booked assistance.

As a consequence of the research, Passenger Focus is working with the industry to drive improvements for passengers with disabilities.

South West Trains (SWT) used this research to review its service and then took it a stage further. In discussion with Passenger Focus's research department, a questionnaire

was devised to ask passengers to pinpoint issues needing improvement.

SWT now offers passengers a contact number to use during their journey if they need additional help or advice. Every effort will be made to ensure that customers using the pre-booked service are warned if their journey is likely to be disrupted. Also a 'Try the Train' day was planned with advice from Passenger Focus for disabled people who live on the SWT network to learn about rail travel.

Station security upgrades

Both First Great Western (FGW) and South West Trains (SWT) are tackling passenger concerns over

information and personal security, using Passenger Focus's research. Passenger Focus identifies inadequate information at stations and on-train as a major

irritation for passengers. A current partnership between FGW and Network Rail will see major investment in Customer Information Systems (CIS) – help points at every station, public address and more CCTV on stations. In the next few months FGW should install new CIS systems at Oxford and Slough plus a pilot scheme on the Severn Beach line providing 'live' train-running information.

On SWT, Passenger Focus manager Jocelyn Pearson has been working

closely with the company on a new scheme to reduce crime and bothersome behaviour. Together with British Transport Police (BTP), SWT has launched seven new Rail Community Officer Teams. Each team is led by a BTP constable who looks after a neighbourhood area and is able to respond to 'hot spots'. Besides reducing the small number of serious crimes, they can help keep rowdy behaviour to a minimum with powers to confiscate alcohol and cigarettes from minors.



Watchdog welcomes improvements

First Great Western (FGW) is maintaining its month-on-month improvement in terms of punctuality and reliability.

Punctuality figures in the Thames Valley area are now in excess of 90% and those around Plymouth and in Cornwall above 97% for the past six months.

Passengers are currently enjoying double compensation on season ticket

renewal as compensation for last year's poor performance. Passenger Focus has also been advised that this compensation package will continue until 26 January 2009 for those passengers who missed out originally.

Passenger Focus continues to work with FGW to drive improvements for passengers.