

# The passenger experience at unstaffed stations

Independent national passenger watchdog

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Stations are the gateways to the rail network and an essential element of passengers' overall journey experience. Passenger satisfaction with stations in Wales lags behind the average for Great Britain. Wales also has a high number of unstaffed stations. These factors led Passenger Focus to commission the Wales Transport Research Centre at the University of Glamorgan to undertake a detailed investigation of passengers' experiences of using unstaffed rail stations in Wales, as well as highlight areas for improvement.

## The research comprised two phases:

- A quantitative phase was undertaken via a sampling boost of the Autumn 2009 Nation Passenger Survey (NPS). The booster survey resulted in the journeys of 347 rail passengers using unstaffed or part-time staffed stations (i.e. less than 8 hours per day) being compared with the results for the Arriva Trains Wales (ATW) network as a whole. The booster surveys were drawn from two routes, the Cambrian Coast Line in West Wales and the Penarth – Rhymney Valley corridor in the Valley Lines network radiating out from Cardiff.
- The second, qualitative phase consisted of four focus groups that were used to better understand the issues identified at the unstaffed stations in the quantitative stage. Two focus group sessions were completed with users of each route targeted in the NPS booster survey.

## Research Findings

The National Passenger Survey (NPS) results for Wales for a number of waves have highlighted that passengers are generally less satisfied with stations in Wales compared to other regions of Great Britain. Areas of dissatisfaction include station facilities and services, availability of staff, the upkeep and repair of the station and the overall station environment.

Analysis of NPS data, as well as other studies, has demonstrated that there is a relationship between the size of the station and the level of passenger satisfaction. A National



Audit Office study, for example, showed that the 95 largest rail stations enjoyed the highest levels of passenger satisfaction. The evidence suggests that passengers are consistently less satisfied with medium- to small-sized stations, which are often unstaffed or only staffed for part of the day, and have few station facilities.

## The key findings of our work were:

- A lack of station staff can cause problems for passengers when purchasing tickets, particularly for Advance Purchase tickets and season tickets. 30% of passengers on the Cambrian Coast Line identified ticket buying facilities at stations as very poor.

***'If there was an automated machine at the station that would be useful. I think everyone would agree, in the mornings it's just impossible, unless the guard is at the door where you get on, you can't get a ticket, and the queue at Cardiff can take at least 15 minutes.'***

[Male, Commuter, Penarth – Rhymney]

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- Passengers felt that station shelters were often inadequate at providing the required levels of shelter from the weather. Coupled with poor visibility this often results in passengers feeling less secure. The size of the shelters can also be a problem at busy commuter stations. However, the new shelter at Aberdovey was reported to have helped reduce vandalism.

*'It's [shelter at Aberdovey] absolutely perfect, we've had no vandalism, it is very well lit and the visibility is excellent, as a result the youths no longer gather at the station.'*

[Female, Leisure, Cambrian Coast Line]

- There are access issues at a number of unstaffed stations that can make using the train difficult for some passengers. This includes low platform heights on the Cambrian Coast line, and large gaps between the train and platform edge at some stations on the Valley Line corridor.

- Passengers place a high value on being able to access real-time information via Customer Information Screens, particularly at times of disruption when passengers experience delays and cancellations.

*'Real time information would be good, I was once stuck for 30 minutes at the station, there had been an accident affecting the line, but I had no way of getting any information.'*

[Female, Leisure, Cambrian Coast Line]

- With 54% of passengers rating their personal security as good, 9% lower than for the ATW average, personal security at unstaffed stations is a concern for many passengers, particularly on the Penarth – Rhymney Line where only 42% rated it as good.



## Next steps

The study makes a number of recommendations including:

- Installation of real-time information systems to provide details of train running times should be a priority for unstaffed stations. Consideration should be given to lower cost systems at the smallest stations to help accelerate their introduction.
- Older style shelters that offer inadequate weather protection and/or visibility should be replaced with more modern enclosed shelter designs.
- Schemes enabling community groups and volunteers to be actively involved in maintaining and enhancing stations, such as Arriva Trains Wales' station adoption scheme, should continue to be promoted.

Passenger Focus will explore with the rail industry and Government how these findings can best be taken forward. This will include input into the National Station Improvement Programme (NSIP) and the Wales Enhanced Station Improvement Programme.

### Contact us

If you want to know more about the work we are doing on your behalf to ensure you get a better deal when you travel by rail, bus or coach contact us:  
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