

# Passenger Voice

## East of England

Independent national passenger watchdog



## Route-level NPS results

CrossCountry has accepted Passenger Focus's recommendation that the results of the National Passenger Survey (NPS) will be more effective if broken down to route level

The train operator has the widest and most diverse franchise of any train operator, running services in the South, South West, East of England, Midlands, North East and Scotland. Its huge geographic spread means that NPS results averaged across its entire network

are not always meaningful enough for detailed business planning.

To demonstrate the value of route-level NPS results, Passenger Focus developed reports based on the results for key CrossCountry lines. This showed the main passenger concerns on

different parts of the network and highlighted areas for targeting improvements.

CrossCountry is now providing Passenger Focus with essential information about a number of key routes radiating from the core of its network in Birmingham so that the watchdog can provide data on passenger perceptions at a route level for the Autumn 2009 wave of the NPS.

Passenger Focus manager Sue Tibbett, said: "The results from this wave will provide a much clearer indication of passenger satisfaction with CrossCountry journeys and enable us to work more effectively together to target and deliver improvements with the resources available."

## Shaping a new franchise

Passengers want punctual and reliable trains, value for money and to be able to get a seat on services run under the new East Coast franchise.

As National Express handed back the franchise to the Government, Passenger Focus completed research asking what passengers want delivered by the future operator.

Guy Dangerfield, Passenger Focus manager, said the return of the franchise to the

Government brought an end to the period of uncertainty. He commented: "Passengers were relieved that the transfer was smooth and will welcome assurances that the level and quality of service will not suffer.

In the last two months we have surveyed over 6000 passengers on this route and have fed their views to the Government – we hope passengers' concerns and aspirations are central to

"Looking forward, it is most important that passenger needs and priorities are at the heart of any future franchise." Guy Dangerfield



Passengers surveyed

the next franchise."

Passenger Focus is also working with the Department for Transport to understand passengers' views about various service quality issues to be addressed during the period

when the Government has direct responsibility for the East Coast franchise.

## East Anglia franchise decision

Passenger Focus will be making sure that passenger views and opinions will be centre stage as preparations start to award a new contract

to operate East Anglia rail services. This follows on from the Government announcing that the National Express East Anglia franchise will come

to an end in March 2011.

The watchdog said passengers will also want reassurance that trains will run on time and the level and quality of services will not slip in coming months.

Passenger Focus will work

with the Government and industry to ensure that passengers' priorities are fully understood and front of mind throughout the process to award a new East Anglia franchise to run from 1 April 2011.



Guy Dangerfield

## Focussing on stations

Passenger Focus continues to champion improvements to station standards on National Express East Anglia and First Capital Connect, working with

key staff to help them understand what passengers need. Passenger Focus manager, Guy Dangerfield said: "We will highlight where station

standards are not good enough and seek actions to turn things round. This is particularly important at a time of belt-tightening when, for example, cleaning budgets may be under pressure."



## Board in Focus David Burton

## News roundup

- **East Anglia disruption**

National Express East Anglia passengers were inconvenienced by a series of strikes on Thursdays and Fridays recently. Passenger Focus manager Guy Dangerfield said: "This cannot be the right way for disputes between staff and their employer to be resolved. It is passengers who suffer in the event of industrial action and we urge all parties to get around the table to keep talking and find a solution without resorting to strikes. The process of compensating season-ticket holders is a huge logistical challenge, with many passengers having to wait many weeks for their claim to be paid.

- **New trains for Stansted Express**

Thirty new trains are to be built by Bombardier in Derby for use on Stansted Express and some West Anglia services. Passenger Focus will be engaging with National Express East Anglia to ensure that passengers' views are at the heart of their design.

- **How complaints are handled**

Passenger Focus recently assessed the quality of National Express East Anglia's complaints-handling procedures. Passenger Focus manager Guy Dangerfield said: "We found plenty of room for improvement, but also that in the majority of cases reviewed passengers received an acceptable or better outcome. We have presented our findings to the company, are discussing an action plan and will carry out a further assessment in the new year to measure the progress made."

David Burton brings over 30 years' experience as a railwayman to his work as a board member at Passenger Focus. Apart from the rather poisoned chalice of being given the task of selling Red Star parcels, most of his time was spent on the passenger side.

He was deputy general manager of the Southern Region under British Rail, helped prepare many of the train operating companies around London and the south east for privatisation, and was managing director of West Anglia Great Northern in shadow and privatised forms.

Asked whether he feels there is an element of gamekeeper turned poacher in his work for Passenger Focus, he rejects the idea; the same business principles apply whatever the form of ownership or management, the most important being the necessity of looking after customers. His understanding of railways from a passenger perspective is perhaps his greatest contribution to the board, and his main areas of involvement with the team are timetables, franchise renewal and Route Utilisation Strategies.

David Burton sees ticketing and fares as a major unresolved challenge. Despite the Association of Train Operating Companies' (ATOC) recent simplification of fare names, he feels there is still far too

much complexity and a lack of clarity for passengers. There remain too many subdivisions within each ticket type, and the times at which they can be used vary from one TOC to another. Nor is there consistency over the times that Advance tickets become available to book. Equally he thinks a major marketing exercise is needed to let those who seldom use trains realise what good value fares can be obtained through advance booking.

He is looking forward to the challenge of championing bus, coach and tram passengers. Although research to find out what passengers want is at an early stage, he believes it may offer the opportunity of improving integration between modes. While there are good examples of bus/rail integration, they are the exception rather than the rule. David Burton sees the new role as a natural extension of Passenger Focus's current remit. He has been impressed by the dedication of the team, and he stresses how much he enjoys working for what he sees as a successful and well-run organisation.

## Work starts on new rail study

The steering group working on the London and South East Route Utilisation Strategy met for the first time in October. The Route Utilisation Strategy looks at the future needs of the rail network and identifies gaps which need to be addressed by Network Rail in its future planning. Passenger Focus has agreed to contribute to work on London issues and on a specific update looking at services for passengers in the South Hampshire area. It will also follow overall progress and the freight workstream through the steering group. A consultation draft document is expected in spring/summer 2010. Updates on progress will be published on the Passenger Focus website.

## Views on 2010 timetable changes

During the summer, Passenger Focus invited passengers to comment on planned changes to the National Express East Anglia timetable in December 2010. Proposals involve boosting capacity with 47 extra four-coach trains coming to East Anglia, of which 30 will be brand

new, and redeploying the existing diesel fleet to increase frequency and reduce crowding on routes serving Norwich, Ipswich and Cambridge.

Although designed to address crowding into Liverpool Street station at peak and off-peak times, improve service

reliability and improvements to inter-urban services in East Anglia, the plans do have their downsides. Principal amongst these is that trains on some routes, such as the Harwich and East Suffolk lines, will no longer run to and from London, forcing passengers to change trains.

After considering the views, Passenger Focus concluded that the benefits outweigh the disadvantages, although with important caveats. These include the need for improvements at two key interchange stations – Ipswich (for Lowestoft and Bury St Edmunds passengers) and Manningtree (for Harwich passengers) before the through trains are taken off.