

Passenger Voice

Independent national passenger watchdog



Regulated fares to fall in 2010

Passenger Focus warns of a 'sting in the tail' for some passengers as unregulated rail fares will go up in price

Passenger Focus, the independent passenger watchdog has highlighted that while commuters will welcome a slight reduction in most season ticket prices, many unregulated fares will rise significantly more than inflation.

Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief executive, said:

"After years of punishing, above inflation, fare rises some passengers will see a little light in the New Year. The formula that sets the limits of regulated fares will finally work in passengers' favour. Particularly welcome is the fact that, following pressure from Passenger Focus, the

Government has limited the amount by which train companies could raise individual regulated fares. We hope the Government will continue this policy in future years. "However, there is a sting in the tail. Many unregulated fares will continue to soar above inflation as the average figures published today will mask steep rises on individual routes. We call upon the industry to be clear about which fares are going up and to publish average increases for unregulated fares for each train

operating company. "We are also concerned that some train operators will tinker with off peak tickets restrictions, forcing passengers into buying more expensive tickets."

Research published by Passenger Focus earlier this year showed that Britain has some of the most expensive fares in Europe. As passengers pump over six billion pounds a year into Britain's railways Passenger Focus is working to ensure that fares do not soar wildly above inflation.

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Counting down to buses

Passenger Focus is now only months away from officially being appointed as bus and coach passenger champion in England, outside London. Legislation is expected to extend Passenger Focus's remit and officially make it bus and coach passenger champion in April 2010.

A range of research has now been completed looking at passenger views of bus services.

The research aims to understand passengers' needs, concerns and expectations, including which factors drive bus passenger satisfaction, where they want to see improvements and how complaints are handled.

Bus passenger project manager

David Sidebottom has been coordinating the work to gain a clear understanding of the industry's structure and passenger



concerns, both of which are different from rail, though the objectives are comparable.

He commented: "The time allowed before taking up the role formally has been invaluable in building up our capability and capacity to become an effective champion at both the local level and in influencing key national decisions."

From April this year Passenger Focus took over, from the Department for Transport (DfT), the management and publication of the Mystery Bus Traveller Survey covering the six Passenger Transport Executives as well as Bristol, Leicester and Nottingham.

A stakeholder board has also been formed to provide strategic support and guidance for the research programme. For further updates on Passenger Focus's bus work, see the latest edition of Busfocus at www.passengerfocus.org.uk

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Anthony Smith

High-speed railway lines, passengers and fares

Passenger numbers continue to rise and trains and rail lines are getting more crowded. The long-term solution is to ensure there is a step-change in the space on the rail network to handle more trains, longer trains and more punctual trains.

While the various plans for new 'high-speed' lines are welcome, some consideration must be given to where the funding will come from. Passengers using existing services will not be happy if investment is diverted – 'new money for new lines' must be the mantra.

While it is early days, it is worth giving some thought to what sort of new railway this might be. Passenger Focus is an advocate of the 'turn up and go' railway. Research and experience shows that this is what many passengers do and want – it also suits the size of country we live in. The new high-speed lines represent a potential opportunity to think afresh about longer-distance ticketing. With fewer stops and gates at stations, smartcard ticketing could be a reality. What has bedevilled smartcards on longer-distance services is the huge

variability in the price that could be paid and therefore needs to be stored in advance. The current Virgin timetable has a train every 20 minutes, a timetable more like bus services but all lashed to an advance purchase airline booking system.

Just imagine. Set prices for turn up and go travel. Say, a £21 single to Birmingham in the Off-Peak, £66 in the Peak. Yes, cheaper Advance purchase tied to one train for those that want it. Simple, clear, understandable and no quibbling over restrictions. It could be that simple. It could be different.

What do passengers want from government ?

Whichever party forms the next government, passengers will want the same things from them. Drawing on our research this is Passenger Focus's draft 'manifesto' for passengers:

Investment

- long-term infrastructure planning and funding – Keep up the high level of rail investment set out in plans for 2009-14 (more carriages in particular please!)
- plans for electrification bring about long-term passenger benefits – keep these plans moving forward
- keep putting passengers' priorities at the heart of the new franchises. The new Southern franchise set a good precedent.
- concessionary bus fares have to continue, pass-holders and non pass-holders alike have welcomed this scheme

- high-speed trains? – yes please, if done to bring about a step-change in more trains, longer trains, more reliable trains with high speed as a bonus
- review fares – the move towards a 25% taxpayer, 75% fare payer split cannot be sustained.

Performance

- don't lose the focus on performance – one in 10 trains still arrives late at the final destination, let alone at stations en route
- right-time railway, right now! Tightening up on performance would also help with capacity issues as well.

Trust

- the longer-distance fares system is in disrepute and needs a fundamental reform. Passengers don't understand or trust the system.
- invest in more staff, ticket windows, smart tickets and ticket machines. Make it easy to use rail.
- require train companies to clearly put ticket restrictions on ticket machines, websites and tickets. Passengers need to know what is on offer before they buy.
- train companies to publish details of what tickets they actually sold the year before - build trust that cheap tickets do exist!
- during engineering works only use bus replacement services as a last resort
- invest in more passenger information. Passenger Focus's research shows passengers cannot get enough of it.
- more visible staff! Key passenger requirement to help when things go wrong and reassure passengers about personal security.

This should give politicians from all parties a list to start working from!
What do you think? Have we missed anything?

Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief executive

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.

"Looking forward, it is most important

that passenger needs and priorities are at the heart of any future franchise. 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 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.

Passengers on political parties' agenda

September and October saw Passenger Focus host events at the Liberal Democrat, Labour and Conservative Party Conferences in Bournemouth, Brighton and Manchester respectively. Passenger Focus held fringe events at all three conferences, with the question, 'Do we need government more or less involved in rail and bus services?', posed to keynote speakers as well as those in the audience.

Various panellists were invited to take part in the debate, with Chris Mole MP, Norman Baker MP and Stephen Hammond MP providing insight into their respective party's opinions on the issue of government involvement.

All three events were well attended, and numerous passenger issues were discussed including high-speed rail, accessibility, local bus services and Department for Transport funding.

Board meeting in Liverpool

The national passenger watchdog is taking its Board to Liverpool for a meeting in public and a stakeholder event on 15 and 16 December.

The stakeholder event will take place at the ACC Liverpool Balcony and the board meeting is being held on the 16th at the ACC Liverpool Hall 3A. For information about either function or to see the meeting agenda, go to www.passengerfocus.org.uk

Getting to grips with antisocial behaviour

Passenger Focus surveys show that passengers worry about antisocial behaviour on trains and at stations.

To help the rail industry and British Transport Police (BTP) tackle antisocial

behaviour and assist passengers to feel more safe and secure, a better understanding of what people view as antisocial behaviour is needed. Passenger Focus manager Julie Warburton is leading

research that looks at passenger views.

In addition, Passenger Focus and senior BTP officers are exploring ways to reflect passengers' needs in policing plans. Through close collaboration, a good practice guide is planned that will engage passengers at a local level.

Passenger Focus welcomes Southern back

Passenger Focus welcomes the continuity, new investment and improvements passengers will receive with the new South Central franchise deal, being run by Southern Railways.

Passenger Focus is also delighted that the operator has taken up its suggestion of improving the fares system and is proactively advertising at the station the cheapest walk-up through-tickets to popular destinations. The poster was devised in response to a recommendation in Passenger Focus's fares and ticketing study.



Pictured are Southern managing director Chris Burchell with Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief executive, and Lord Andrew Adonis, Secretary of State for Transport, at the franchise launch in Eastbourne recently. The poster was designed in response to a recommendation in Passenger Focus's Fares and Ticketing Study.

What passengers want from stations

Passenger Focus has welcomed government funding and commitment to improve stations across the country.

Transport Secretary Andrew Adonis launched a new £50m fund for improvements to 10 stations in England following the release of a report which looked at the state of facilities for passengers across the country.

The report highlighted that for too long passengers have waited

at small stations with no access to information.

Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief executive, said: "Passengers standing on windswept platforms across Britain should be able to find out if their train is coming or not. There are all too many stations that do not have any real-time information and in the 21st century this is outrageous. Today's report highlights this issue, and supports our position that real-

time information should be standard, not a luxury.

"Furthermore, passengers tell us that at larger stations there needs to be available staff for advice and security. There should also be passenger satisfaction targets for stations in the franchise deal that means train companies have to tackle station cleanliness, lighting, provision of seating, removal of graffiti and maintenance of lifts."

At the same time Passenger Focus also launched its report summarising its passenger research which considers views and opinions on stations.

Passenger Focus has also found that passengers' levels of satisfaction with the station still vary greatly according to the size; satisfaction is highest at the major stations and lowest at those small, unstaffed stations. Passenger Focus will continue to ask passengers their views on stations and feed this back to the industry in an effort to improve standards.

Train company profile



First Great Western turns around performance

At the beginning of 2008 First Great Western (FGW) was in serious trouble. It was at the bottom of the railway performance league with only 79.1% of trains arriving on time

In February 2008, a Remedial Plan Notice was issued by the Secretary of State for Transport requiring FGW to explain how it was going to put its house in order.

Andrew Haines was brought in as managing director to save the franchise, and with his and Mark Hopwood's efforts, the remedial period ended in July 2009.

Analysis of the figures in Passenger Focus's National Passenger Survey (NPS) shows performance appears to have turned around. In the Autumn 2007 NPS, passenger satisfaction with train punctuality and performance was at 65%. By Spring 2009 it had climbed to 80%, and only 8% of passengers were very or fairly dissatisfied with FGW overall.

The Spring 2009 survey showed all scores had moved in the right direction since Spring 2008, and a measure of FGW's success is that the

highest scores for train factors were for journey time followed by punctuality and reliability. Some scores improved dramatically: the percentage of passengers satisfied overall rose from 73 to 81%, and the helpfulness and attitude of staff on trains from 56 to 66%.

However, there continues to be room for improvement with passengers indicating more dissatisfaction with value for money, toilet facilities, space for luggage, availability of staff and the way delays are handled.

Turning to station factors, car parking was the biggest cause of dissatisfaction, with 28% of passengers very or fairly dissatisfied, followed by station facilities and services. But FGW station staff won plaudits from customers, with 85% of passengers very or fairly satisfied with the way station staff responded to a request.

As is the case with

most train operating companies, punctuality and reliability is by far the most important factor influencing overall satisfaction. The next most important factors were comfort of the seating, value for money and sufficient room for passengers to sit/stand. In terms of passenger dissatisfaction, how well the train company dealt with delays is the factor that most influences the proportion of passengers who are dissatisfied overall.

Looking to the future, FGW faces major challenges in maintaining the progress of the last 18 months

because of the scale of the improvement projects that will affect its routes. By the time the FGW franchise expires in December 2015, work should be well underway on electrification of lines from London to Bristol, Swansea, Newbury and Oxford, installation of the European Rail Traffic Management System, the Reading Station Area Redevelopment and CrossRail.

Passenger Focus will be looking to FGW and Network Rail to structure plans to minimise the degree of disruption to passengers during these welcome enhancements.

Overall Satisfaction and Station Factors

		% satisfied/good	
		Spring 2009	Spring 2008
Overall satisfaction	↑	81	73
The train toilet facilities	↑	45	36
The helpfulness and attitude of staff on the train	↑	66	56
The provision of information during the journey	↑	64	54
Punctuality/reliability (i.e the train arriving/departing on time)	↑	80	67