

Passenger Voice

Independent national passenger watchdog

North East



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 surveyed



Colin Foxall

Passenger Focus Board in the North East

September saw the Passenger Focus Board travel to Newcastle where it met for a meeting in public. The independent passenger watchdog also held a stakeholder reception at St James' Park where Bernard Garner, chief executive of Nexus, outlined his vision for Newcastle transport and Metro improvements to be

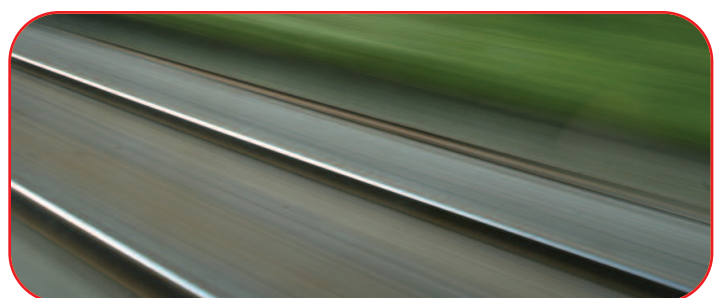
undertaken in the future. Passenger Focus chairman, Colin Foxall, also spoke about passenger issues in the region and the work the watchdog undertakes with train companies and passenger groups. The board meeting was held at the Life Bioscience Centre and included representatives

from Grand Central (Tom Clift, managing director), National Express East Coast (Mike Hogg, operations director) and CrossCountry Trains (Sarah Kendall, production director). All guests commended Passenger Focus on the work it does and expressed their desire to continue to work closely with the watchdog in the future.

Addressing overcrowded trains

Passenger Focus continues to raise its concerns about Northern Rail's overcrowded trains.

The Passenger Focus team is working with Northern Rail, the Department for Transport (DfT) and local rail user groups to resolve these problems and represent passengers' views as decisions are made. The watchdog has also raised its concerns about overcrowding issues in the North East with Secretary of State for Transport Lord Andrew Adonis.



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, 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, which delivers improvements to passengers.

To demonstrate the value of route-level

NPS results, Passenger Focus developed mock reports based on the results for key CrossCountry lines, which showed the main passenger concerns in different parts of the network and highlighted areas for targeting improvements.

CrossCountry is providing Passenger Focus with essential information about a number of key routes radiating from the core of its network in Birmingham so that



it can provide data on passenger perception at route level for the Autumn 2009 wave of the NPS. While CrossCountry is unique in not having responsibility for any stations, the NPS also provides details of passengers' needs at the stations it serves.

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. We will monitor the usefulness of the building blocks and adjust if necessary for future waves."

Board in Focus David Burton



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.

News roundup

• New timetable on East Coast

When National Express won the East Coast franchise in 2007 it proposed an enhanced timetable (in terms of service frequency and new destinations) to start in December 2010. Guy Dangerfield, Passenger Focus manager, said: "Passenger Focus will work with the Government to ensure passengers have the chance to comment on what is proposed in the future".

• How complaints are handled during the Summer

National Express East Coast presented its action plan to improve the quality of customer complaints-handling, following an assessment by Passenger Focus earlier in 2009. Passenger Focus manager, Guy Dangerfield, said: "We will now work with the new East Coast operator to ensure these improvements are driven through".