

Passenger Voice North West

Independent national passenger watchdog



West Coast RUS research begins



Passenger views sought

Network Rail's West Coast Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS) is one of the last geographic RUSs to be undertaken, and Passenger Focus has begun research to inform its input. 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. Besides the trains that use the route from end to end, there are numerous sections used by the cross-country, regional and local services run by seven train operating companies. Therefore, for research purposes, the route is being divided into six key areas:

Euston–Milton Keynes; Nuneaton–Tamworth; Crewe–Wilmslow; Chester–Llandudno; Euston to Manchester and Liverpool; and Lancaster–Glasgow.

The draft RUS consultation document should be sent out late Autumn 2010 with a final document published in 2011.

Passenger Focus manager Julie Warburton is also starting work on planning passenger research to feed into the specification for the West Coast franchise from 2012 when Virgin Trains' contract comes to an end. This has to be finalised 18 months before, so research will be underway in April 2010.

BlackBerries for all Northern conductors

Train operator Northern Rail is providing BlackBerries (hand-held) computers to more than 1000 conductors so that they can give customers faster and more accurate information. The £140,000 investment has been welcomed by

Passenger Focus manager Kerry Williamson: "This is a very positive move for passengers and addresses the need for better information during disruption, which ranked second lowest of the satisfaction scores in the last

National Passenger Survey."

The initiative will help conductors give passengers more and better-quality information about current services, delays, onward connections and planned engineering works.

Rural transport on the agenda

Passenger Focus and TravelWatch NorthWest recently ran the conference: 'Transport Solutions in Rural Areas' in a bid to explore issues surrounding the provision of rural public transport.

Presentations were given by the Dales and Bowland Community Interest Company, Shropshire County Council, Norfolk Green Buses and the Lake District National Park Authority. Delegates who attended included transport providers, local authorities, rural protection and development agencies and local tourism agencies.

Watchdog puts passengers on party agenda

September and October saw Passenger Focus travel to the Great Britain political party conferences, including to Manchester to attend the Conservative Party event. As part of its future role as bus and coach passenger champion (subject to approval by Parliament), the independent passenger watchdog discussed its future bus role with delegates. It also held a fringe-event where the question 'Do we need government more or less involved in rail and bus services?' was posed to several guest speakers and the audience.



Network Rail chief executive Iain Coucher visited Passenger Focus chief executive Anthony Smith at the Conservative Party Conference

Frustrated by disruption

Passengers travelling in and around Manchester have been asked to voice their views on how the rail industry can do better when trains are delayed or disrupted. The national rail watchdog has set up an online panel to allow passengers to provide feedback on their experiences as part of its efforts to get the industry to step up its performance when things go wrong.

Passenger Focus's Spring 2009 National Passenger Survey shows only 35% of passengers are satisfied with how well train companies deal with delays. Passengers have also told the watchdog

that being kept informed during delays was in their top five priorities for improvement on the railway.



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.

Board meeting

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 go to www.passengerfocus.org.uk

Catering restored

Passenger Focus has welcomed the announcement that East Midlands Trains has reintroduced an at-seat weekday trolley service between Nottingham and Stockport on its busy Liverpool to Norwich route. Passenger Focus manager Guy Dangerfield said: "This is good news. It is unreasonable to operate a train route taking five and a half hours without providing some form of catering for at least part of the journey."

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 concerns with both Lord Adonis and the DfT about overcrowding issues in this part of the country.

Crowding problems existed on these lines prior to the closure of the Oldham Loop – although this move has forced more passengers onto already overcrowded alternative train services. Kerry Williamson, Passenger Focus manager said she had been advised that although rolling stock from the Oldham loop services have been returned to Northern Rail, the train company required the trains for urgent maintenance issues. Kerry commented: "We have challenged Northern on this point and will continue to do so."

Passenger Focus has been reassured that passenger counts are happening to establish exactly where problems exist. However, more trains are desperately required and capacity problems will not be resolved until more trains are running on the network.