

Passenger Voice South West

Independent national passenger watchdog



Watchdog puts passengers on party agenda

September and October saw Passenger Focus travel to the main Great Britain political party conferences, including to Bournemouth for the Liberal Democrat 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.



Passenger Focus chief executive Anthony Smith (right) at the Passenger Focus bus with the Association of Train Operating Companies' chief executive, Michael Roberts (left) and its interim chair Tom Smith (middle).

Giving rail user groups a voice

Passenger Focus organises regular forums for representatives of Rail User Groups (RUGs) to meet managers from Network Rail and South West Trains (SWT). At rail users' request, Tina Cook from SWT spoke about her company's work to improve information during disruption. The RUGs used the opportunity to feed back their examples of passengers' experience in an effort to help shape SWT's decision-making. Everyone found it a productive meeting and it was agreed to continue the dialogue.

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.

Passenger Focus wins concessions from FGW

When Passenger Focus manager Mike Greedy demonstrated some of the unfortunate consequences of First Great Western's (FGW) restrictions on new off-peak tickets, the company was commendably quick to make adjustments.

The tighter time restrictions would have disadvantaged passengers from Cornwall and Pewsey

in particular and forced them to pay the additional 20% for the off-peak fare if their journey was to arrive into London before 3pm. Cornish passengers buying the new Super Off-Peak fare would have had the choice of only two trains in each direction from Monday to Thursday, and they could not have returned from London between 3pm and 7pm.

However, FGW has now agreed that passengers can travel towards London on the 8.44am service from Penzance, and Pewsey passengers can use the 10.15am train. The 10.15am and 3.05pm trains out of London towards Cornwall have also been designated as Super Off-Peak trains for the entire journey. These changes have been welcomed and indicate that FGW is prepared to listen and make changes where passengers are shown to be clearly disadvantaged by changes such as these.

Car park scores

The National Passenger Survey shows that nationally passengers are dissatisfied with car-parking facilities at stations. This prompted South West Trains (SWT) and Passenger Focus to ask passengers why. SWT passengers told us that the cost of parking was a big issue. SWT has invested in extending car parks and improving security so it was good to see that passengers were more satisfied with security and the condition of car parks. Passengers don't start their journey at the station so car and bike parks, and the availability of buses are challenges that need to be met by all train companies and local authorities.



South West bus project



Passenger Focus has been exploring bus passenger issues and meeting with stakeholders in the South West (SW) as its new bus and coach remit in England takes shape.

The SW team has met with many bus operators, officers from the 15 SW local transport authorities and other stakeholders, including the Traffic Commissioner Sarah Bell, the Regional Development Agency and the

SW Government Office.

Bus passenger satisfaction surveys have been carried out in Bristol and Dorset, while work is due to commence in Cornwall, Plymouth and Swindon. The next phase of its programme is to use the research results to identify issues on which bus passengers think improvements are required and to work with the identified stakeholders to achieve a better service for passengers.



Passenger Focus is looking at bus passenger issues



Guy Dangerfield



Mike Greedy

Dealing with unplanned disruption

The major issue of the way train operating companies cope with unplanned disruption came to the fore recently when signals failed between Keynsham and Bathampton Junction (east of Bath). Trains had to reverse and bus replacement services

provided. By chance Passenger Focus manager Mike Greedy was caught up in the chaos and has therefore been able to input first-hand experience to the investigation into communication failings.

Meanwhile, Passenger Focus manager Guy

Dangerfield is currently leading a major research project into the way the industry approaches contingency planning. It will be used to promote best practice in managing delays and disruption across the industry.

FGW car-park charges rise

Passenger Focus has been critical of the 25% average increase in First Great Western car-parking charges at a time of low inflation and economic adversity. When taken as part of the journey cost, such rises may have an adverse effect on total revenue by deterring passengers from making the journey by rail. Passenger Focus has negotiated a reduction in the increases at Bath and Charlbury in recognition of the inconvenience that major work is causing at both stations.

Greater Western rail priorities

Passenger Focus will be asking passengers in Reading, Bristol and Exeter for their views on the Greater Western Draft Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS) which was recently issued by Network Rail. The RUS looks at the future needs of the rail network and identifies gaps which need to be addressed by Network Rail in its future planning.

Three focus groups will be held to ensure that passenger views are included in the watchdog's formal response to the consultation.

The RUS is taking a forward view of what services are likely to be required

between 2014 and 2019 and beyond and has undertaken a great deal of analysis across the routes involved in an effort to inform the process. The draft document includes details of suggested gaps and options and includes crowding on peak services into London Paddington, Reading and Bristol Temple Meads, journey times between regional centres and station capacity. Some changes to track layouts are also included.

Schemes which are already committed between 2010 and 2014 do not form part of the review but there are other recently announced schemes such as the

Try the train

Passenger Focus has welcomed South West Trains' efforts to encourage more disabled passengers to 'Try the Train' with an initiative being held at Guildford station recently.

The event was intended to encourage local disabled people who don't currently use the rail network to try the train and provided them with an opportunity to ask questions and find out more information about rail services. Passenger Focus attended to discuss with disabled people improvements which could be made to make rail services more attractive and accessible to people with disabilities.

Intercity Express Programme, electrification plans and the possible extension to Crossrail which will impact on the RUS in due course as more details are released by government. The RUS will therefore be reviewed and updated as and when further details on these additional projects are announced.