

# Passenger Voice Wales

Independent national passenger watchdog



## ATW improves ticket-buying facilities

A decline in last year's National Passenger Survey (NPS) satisfaction scores for ticket-buying at Arriva Trains Wales' (ATW) stations, prompted Passenger Focus to work with the train company to look for solutions

Further analysis of the NPS scores revealed that satisfaction was lowest at unstaffed stations and on the Valleys Lines network around Cardiff. ATW has followed up

on the discussions with Passenger Focus by recruiting more conductors on Valley Lines services and installing ticket vending machines at a number of stations, including all stops on

the Ebbw Valley line as well as at Wrexham Central and Flint. New ticket machines for conductors will also improve the speed and reliability of ticket-issuing on board trains, which will be

particularly useful for commuters.

Passenger Focus has also met ATW management to discuss the recommendations of its Fares and Ticketing Study published in February.

## Towards improving unstaffed stations

Passenger Focus has started a project aimed at improving the experience for people using unstaffed stations.

Surveys will be carried out on two routes – the Cambrian Coast Line and the Rhymney Line – as part of the Autumn 2009 wave of the National Passenger Survey. These lines have been chosen to allow a comparison of passenger satisfaction with unstaffed stations on both rural and urban lines. The findings from the survey will be followed by focus groups in early

2010. Passenger Focus will be working with the Wales Transport Research Centre at the University of Glamorgan on the project.

Passenger Focus has recognised for some time that passenger satisfaction with stations in Wales has lagged behind the rest of Britain, reflecting the fact that most Welsh railway stations are unstaffed or staffed for only part of the day.

Simon Pickering, Passenger Focus manager for Wales, said: "Data collected



Review of stations underway

from these additional surveys and focus groups will help us gain a better understanding of passengers' needs at unstaffed stations and help influence future station development plans."

## Research into anti-social behaviour

Passenger Focus is carrying out surveys to find out what passengers mean by, and how they view, anti-social behaviour on the rail network.

The project is being undertaken in partnership with Arriva Trains Wales and British Transport Police. Surveys have been carried out on the Valley Lines network and in North Wales.

## Minimising Christmas disruption

Passenger Focus, the independent watchdog, will be watching closely to make certain that disruption to passengers is minimised and passengers have plenty of information and help with their journey planning when the rail link between South Wales and England closes at Christmas for engineering works.

Worried about the extent of disruption to passengers, Passenger Focus has told the industry of concerns and the watchdog is talking with Arriva Train Wales, First Great Western and Network Rail to make sure that communication strategies are in place to alert passengers that the works are happening and provide details of alternative travel

arrangements. Network Rail has said that the work is part of a £450 million scheme to resignal the South Wales Main Line and it will require complete closure of the railway between South Wales and England from 24 December until 4 January 2010. Simon Pickering, Passenger Focus manager for Wales, said: "Although investment in the railway is important, it is vital these engineering works finish on time and passengers need to be properly informed so that they can consider their travel arrangements. Where bus replacement services are required they must be made as simple and comfortable to use as possible."

## News roundup

- **Attracting new passengers**

Simon Pickering, Passenger Focus manager for Wales, will be speaking about how to attract non-users to the railway at the 5th Annual Transport Applications Cymru Conference on 26 November 2009 at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff.

- **20% rise in fares**

First Great Western (FGW) has introduced new restrictions on its cheapest tickets for flexible travel, which mean many passengers travelling into London now have to pay 20% higher fares.

FGW has replaced its previous Off-Peak ticket with a new Super Off-Peak fare at the same price but with much tighter time restrictions. It has also introduced a 20% more expensive 'Off-Peak' fare to cover times excluded by the new Super Off-Peak rules.

Stella Mair Thomas, Passenger Focus board member for Wales, said: "This adds even more complexity to an already complicated system. "The introduction of Off-Peak single fares at least allows passengers to mix and match different ticket types in one return journey. But passengers shouldn't have to wade through a forest of complexity to get the best deal."

- **Welsh Affairs Select committee report**

The House of Commons Welsh Affairs Committee recently released a report on the cross-border provision of transport for Wales.

Passenger Focus presented written and oral evidence to the committee highlighting the key areas of railway passenger dissatisfaction.

- **Electrification brings big benefits**

Passenger Focus has welcomed the Government's announcement that the main rail route between London and Swansea on the Great Western Main Line is to be electrified.

Stella Mair Thomas, Passenger Focus board member for Wales, said: "Extending electrification will improve services in the long term, reducing the pressure on the industry's costs and potentially lower fares. Electrification will also improve reliability and should speed up services reducing journey times."

## Tackling disruption issues

Rail users around Cardiff are playing their part in a project aimed at helping the rail industry better respond to passengers' needs when trains are delayed or disrupted.

Passenger Focus has set up an online panel to allow passengers to feed back on their experiences as part of its efforts to get the industry to step up its performance when things go wrong. Panel members have been drawn from Cardiff, Manchester and London.

The Spring 2009 National Passenger Survey shows only 35% of passengers are satisfied with how well

train companies deal with delays. Passengers have also told us that being kept informed during delays was in their top five priorities for improvement on the railway.



To take part visit [www.passengerfocus.org.uk/disruption](http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/disruption)

Simon Pickering, Passenger Focus manager for Wales, said: "This is a chance for passengers in Wales to highlight what the industry needs to do when passengers are stuck on the platform or waiting frustrated on a stationary train. We also want passengers to give their opinion on what is best practice and what companies do well. We will use this feedback to campaign at a Great Britain and local level for improvements in the service train companies provide when things go wrong."

## Helping deliver better access

Passenger Focus is working with Arriva Trains Wales (ATW) to help the train operator improve its travel assistance booking procedures. It follows Passenger Focus mystery shops which tested the Assisted Passenger Reservation System (APRS) and found that too often passengers are let down by train operators' failure to provide assistance when requested.

ATW has already implemented a number of changes, including reviewing its back-office processes. At Cardiff Central station, it has introduced a designated meeting point for people who have booked assistance and assistance staff are now wearing distinctive, high-visibility coats. These initiatives are expected to be introduced soon at other staffed stations, including Swansea.

## Green transport in tourism

Passenger Focus has been part of a Welsh Assembly project examining ways to improve partnerships between the tourism sector and the transport industry so that more visitors to Wales are encouraged to use public transport.

The Sustainable Transport & Tourism Task and Finish Group released its findings at the Association of Community Rail Partnerships (ACoRP) conference in Cardiff on 4 November 2009.

## Plan aims to improve rail in Wales

Passenger Focus has responded to the consultation on the National Transport Plan, which aims to create a more integrated and sustainable transport system for Wales. It includes a commitment to develop the rail network as a cornerstone of its policy.

Simon Pickering, Passenger Focus manager for Wales (pictured), said: "Passengers will be pleased to see the explicit support for investment in new and upgraded stations, as well as park and ride facilities, in the National Transport Plan. Equally welcome is recognition of the need to invest in new trains to tackle capacity issues, to give passengers a more comfortable journey and relief from the old carriages they're often forced to use."

