

## West Coast RUS research begins

**N**etwork 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



Rail future analysed

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.

## Access at New Street station reviewed

In a bid to make sure that Birmingham New Street station meets the needs of disabled passengers, Network Rail has welcomed Passenger Focus's advice on accessibility issues.

To help with detailed planning of the reconstruction – both for access during work and for the final outcome – Passenger Focus manager Julie Warburton organised a group of passengers with various disabilities to tour the station. Passengers were asked to advise on any barriers to their journey through the station which need to be borne in mind for the new construction.

The passengers went through every possible action – looking for timetable information, buying tickets, using the toilets, purchasing refreshments and taking the lift to the platforms. The tour revealed many issues such as unclear signage, difficulties at the drop-off point, problems with using ticket vending machines from a wheelchair and the need for a guide dog toilet.

Passenger Focus is pressing for some of the problems currently encountered to be addressed immediately

to make travel easier for disabled passengers.

A report has been produced giving recommendations about what could be addressed immediately and what needs to be considered in the station's new design.

Work has already started on the New Street upgrade. There will be some disruption for passengers while the work is underway and it is important that passengers have clear, accessible and accurate information during the disruption. Therefore, to find out what the information requirements are of passengers using the station, Passenger Focus is organising focus groups involving passengers that use New Street station. They will help Network Rail in its planning of information requirements during the work, when one platform at a time will be taken out of service and rebuilt.



Improving stations for passengers

# West Midlands bus pilot progresses

Paul Fullwood is leading the pilot in the West Midlands, testing how Passenger Focus can take forward bus passenger representation in the region



**B**y attending a number of bus surgeries and other passenger forums, Passenger Focus has started to learn

what passengers are saying about their bus services and how satisfied they are with their journeys. The watchdog is also sharing these experiences when

in discussions with Centro, bus operators, local authorities and others across the region.

Passenger Focus has already fed concerns and views into Centro's reviews of bus services, its strategy for integrating transport and also into several operators' management teams.

## Work starts on new rail study

The steering group for the London and South East Route Utilisation Strategy met for the first time in October and agreed to establish working groups to develop and test ideas for additional capacity in various areas. Passenger Focus has agreed to contribute to work on London issues and on a specific update for South Hampshire. 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.

## Chiltern timetable consultation

Chiltern Railways has revealed details of timetable changes proposed to come into effect in December 2009.

Among the proposals are changes to Stratford-upon-Avon line services including introducing a new fast Clubman service to and from London Marylebone. Additionally, morning and evening peak services between Marylebone and Aylesbury via Amersham are to be slightly retimed in order to accommodate London Underground timetable changes, which share the same section of the network. Chiltern also wants to make some changes to evening peak services out of Marylebone in order to improve reliability.

Some passengers will struggle to accept some of these changes if they go ahead.

Changes to the Stratford-upon-Avon service will provide an irregular service with some big gaps in the timetable. A proposal to remove the 7.30am Kidderminster to Birmingham Snow Hill service is also unlikely to be popular as the remaining trains at that time of day are already crowded. And, a proposal to stop running the 9pm London Marylebone to Birmingham service through to Stourbridge will mean that the last train of the day between Birmingham and Stourbridge will now be at 10.59pm.

Passenger Focus's National Passenger Survey shows that Chiltern's passengers are largely satisfied with the frequency of trains and the service they receive and Passenger Focus has therefore asked Chiltern to tread with caution when making changes to its timetable.

## Toilet inquiry

Chiltern Railways is generally a high scoring train operating company in the National Passenger

Survey, but its toilets' score is lower than they would like to see. Passenger Focus is working with Chiltern's Passenger Board to try to find out why. Discussions

are underway to undertake a short survey on trains asking passengers their views and taking photos where toilets don't come up to scratch.

## Concessionary fares support



**C**oncessionary fares are proving to be an overwhelming success, but senior citizens and disabled passengers have concerns about using their pass outside their local area.

Passenger Focus has published its full results looking at England-wide concessionary bus travel. Results show 94% of non pass-holders and 96% of pass-holders support the scheme. Of the pass holders who are using the concession to travel outside their local area, 35% were undertaking journeys that they had previously made by car and 12% were making journeys by bus that they had not previously made by any means.

The research found that older passengers and disabled passengers are using buses much more frequently to visit friends and relatives, for shopping and to take advantage of leisure and recreation opportunities. However, the research also shows that there are barriers stopping passengers from travelling by bus outside their local area. These include:

- concessionary pass-holders report a general anxiety about travelling on unfamiliar services as they lack information on timetables, service frequencies and stops outside their local area
- confusion over whether local enhancements to the concessionary scheme apply in other areas



Colin Foxall, Passenger Focus chairman, and Minister of State for Transport Sadiq Khan MP launched the watchdog's concessionary fares research in Birmingham recently

- journey time differences between travelling by bus and travelling by car
- reliability and connection issues.

For further information or to contact us go to [www.passengerfocus.org.uk](http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk)