

Passengers' views on trains should be paramount

Passengers have high expectations from the next generation of trains and want more luggage space, better toilets and more comfortable seating included in new designs.

Passenger Focus has revealed the findings of research looking at passenger satisfaction with a range of intercity train interiors. The study is intended to help with the design of the Super Express trains. Passenger Focus is now calling on the industry to build mock-ups of the new trains to run on the East Coast Main Line and Great Western Main Line, giving passengers the opportunity to provide feedback on design.

The national passenger watchdog's research looked at passengers' views



Anthony Smith

Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief executive, said: "Some trains currently running on these lines are at least 30 years old. Modern, comfortable trains with better performance and passenger capacity are urgently needed.

"Passengers will be buying tickets to travel on these trains for the next 30 or 40 years, so it is only right that they're given a say on how trains for the 21st century should be designed."



Passengers comment on train design

on the design of trains currently running across the British rail network. The findings show that while passengers want improved luggage space, this should not impact on the comfort of their journey. They also expect seating and legroom to be of a standard which at least meets current best practice.

The design should include improvements to grab rails, seat reservation systems and better designed toilet facilities. The report, 'Designing the future: Passengers' preferences for new national intercity rolling stock from 2012' is available to download from www.passengerfocus.org.uk

Passengers report satisfaction with journey

More than 25,000 passengers have given their view of the country's railway in Passenger Focus's Spring 2009 National Passenger Survey.

The survey found the majority of passengers (81%) across Great Britain say they are satisfied with their rail experience.

The national passenger watchdog is now working with Great Britain's train companies to improve those areas passengers have identified as being problematic.

Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief executive, said: "Despite the credit crunch and train companies cutting staff, reducing cleaning and other services in some locations, passenger satisfaction has held up since last spring. This must be

partly due to continued overall improvements in trains arriving on time – the key factor that underpins rail passenger satisfaction."

The National Passenger Survey is

now classified as Official Statistics and is named in the Official Statistics Order 2009. Full National Passenger Survey results can be found at www.passengerfocus.org.uk

North Eastern

Train Operating Company (TOC)	Overall % satisfied	Passengers' satisfaction up	Passengers' satisfaction down
CrossCountry	85	Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	–
First TransPennine Express	87	Punctuality/reliability	How well the train company dealt with delays
National Express East Coast	87	Facilities for car parking	Connections with other forms of public transport
Northern	80	–	Train toilet facilities

Catering on CrossCountry

CrossCountry has analysed passengers' preferences for catering on its services, comparing the at-seat service with the 'shop' facility which was provided on Voyager trains.

Passenger Focus research shows that getting a seat is the number one priority for CrossCountry passengers and having to get up to buy refreshments can mean passengers run the risk of losing their seat. Many passengers also favour the at-seat service because they are reluctant to leave luggage unattended. Passenger Focus manager Sue Tibbett said: "The important thing for passengers is that CrossCountry provides access to affordable, good quality refreshments on its long-distance services. We will be reviewing how passengers react to this new at-seat service."

More trains needed for TransPennine passengers

The independent passenger watchdog has taken up passengers' concerns about fares, ticketing, overcrowding and plans for more carriages with TransPennine Express (TPE)

Sue Tibbett, Passenger Focus manager, has been looking at the region's services and checking where passengers are struggling to get a seat, and possible solutions; how TPE plans to accommodate growth on its routes; how trains promised by government will help solve problems; and what can be done to improve information given to passengers during delays.

Because of the routes TPE runs, there are often large numbers of travellers on the train at times when other

companies' trains are less busy. Trains are particularly busy at weekends and around events like the York races, the Edinburgh Festival, football and sporting fixtures. Despite investment to increase capacity, TPE faces a real and growing challenge to meet demand.

TPE has responded by pricing tickets in a way that encourages passengers to avoid travelling on services that are predicted to be busy. TPE is also looking at its fares and retailing strategy



More trains are needed

to address overcrowding.

The most pressing need, however, is for more trains on TPE routes to cope with increasing demand.

Board in Focus Christine Knights



Christine Knights sits on the Passenger Focus board, coming to the position from the then Rail Passengers Committee for North East England, which she chaired

Christine has had a long interest in consumer organisations, having worked for Consumers International in the emerging markets of Eastern Europe. Her portfolio on the board includes personal security on trains and at stations, and she brings to it her experience as a member of the British Transport Police Authority (BTP), the Community Safety Steering Group and involvement in the Rail Safety and Standards Board Personal Security Group.

For Christine improving station security is a priority. National Passenger Survey scores indicate a higher level of satisfaction with on-train security, thanks to a generally better staff presence and the CCTV cameras that are fitted to many new trains. She believes a key improvement to station security would be for local authorities to see railway stations as part of the community space, helped by moves to

use stations and surrounding buildings for complementary activities. Christine also believes that better co-ordination is needed between train operating companies, BTP and other stakeholders in making plans to cope with major events.

Better information to smooth the door-to-door journey using car, bus or bike is another of Christine's aspirations, as well as tackling overcrowding on commuter services in regional centres. Christine points out that huge improvements have been made in recent years' citing Network Rail's transformation of Hull Paragon station and the fulfilment of wide-ranging promises for a better passenger experience made by TransPennine's Managing Director, Vernon Barker, at the beginning of the franchise. However, Christine argues there is still more to be achieved to improve the railway for passengers.

National Express rail future reviewed

The future of a National Express-run franchise is under review following the company predicting that without a renegotiation of franchise arrangements it would have to hand back its East Coast business.

The Government has established a publicly owned company to take over the franchise if National Express defaults on its deal at the end of the year. Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief executive, said:

"This potentially brings an end to a period of uncertainty as passengers became increasingly squeezed between government and the train operating company in an unrealistic deal. Passengers will welcome the assurances from government that the level and quality of service will not suffer in the meantime. Passenger Focus will monitor this very closely.

"Now we must begin the task of building a new passenger-focused franchise that puts passenger needs first."

Andrew Adonis, Secretary of State for Transport, said: "I can assure the travelling public that services will continue without disruption and all tickets will be honoured". Lord Adonis said he was now considering whether National Express will be able to keep its c2c and East Anglia franchises.