

Passenger Voice

North Eastern

Independent national rail passenger watchdog



Opinion-sounding for new bus role



Passenger Focus is progressing its bus, coach and tram work

Passenger Focus manager David Sidebottom and his colleagues have been laying the groundwork for our new bus passenger representation role by visiting a range of national stakeholder organisations as well

as local authorities, Passenger Transport Executives and bus operators. He has sounded out their views on issues affecting passengers and the industry and what Passenger Focus's priorities should be, as well as fact finding about operations, routes and contractual arrangements.

Issues common to all are concessionary fares, punctuality and quality partnerships. Local authorities are looking carefully at the latter, and David has been talking about how Passenger Focus could influence them in the same way as rail passenger franchises. This would also entail a methodology for measuring their effectiveness.

First TransPennine Express station programme rewarded

First TransPennine Express (TPE) has won many awards for its work in improving station facilities

for passengers. The Passenger Focus Spring 2008 National Passenger Survey placed TPE

as the number one train operating company for overall station environment, reflecting the £12 million investment in stations as part of its franchise commitments. This position was endorsed at two awards evenings, the first of which was the 2008 National Rail Awards

where Grange-over-Sands was winner of the Small Station category in Station of the Year. TPE also won at the International Station of the Year awards 2008 in Belfast, at which Windermere was Best Small Station and Manchester Airport was Best Medium-sized Station.

Passenger managers to work for better north east train services

Passenger Focus has found record numbers of people across Great Britain are satisfied with their train journey

Launching the Autumn National Passenger Survey 2008 in the Winter 2009 Passenger Voice bulletin, the rail watchdog has reported that 83% of passengers are satisfied with their rail journey.

Although passengers rate their overall experience quite high, Passenger Focus has identified several areas where improvements must be made. Passenger Focus managers Susan Tibbett, Kerry Williamson and Guy Dangerfield will be working with train operators in the north east, including open access operators Hull Trains and Grand Central, to make certain passengers' concerns are addressed in 2009.

Full results can be found at www.passengerfocus.org.uk

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Train Operating Company (TOC)	Overall % satisfied	Passengers' satisfaction up	Passengers' satisfaction down
CrossCountry	84	Car-parking facilities	Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand
First TransPennine Express	83	No significant improvements in satisfaction scores	Train toilet facilities
National Express East Coast	88	How well the train company dealt with delays	Connections with other forms of public transport
Northern	82	Personal security on the train	Car-parking facilities

Yorkshire and Humberside RUS

Passenger Focus recently carried out research on the Calder Valley and Airedale lines to inform the Network Rail (NR) Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS) for Yorkshire and Humberside

The draft was out for consultation until 18 December, with a view to publishing the final document in Spring 2009. Proposals include the now customary range of improvements such as platform lengthening, station expansion, longer

and more frequent trains, and a range of capacity enhancements. The key issue for this RUS is addressing overcrowding, and Passenger Focus welcomes the efforts of NR to alleviate the problems passengers are experiencing, particularly

during peak hours.

Passenger Focus managers Sue Tibbett and Kerry Williamson held a focus group in York with regional Rail User Groups, to gain detailed knowledge that can make RUSs much more effective.

Rebuilding King's Cross station



Passenger Focus is carrying out research to understand passengers' needs and concerns about the redevelopment of King's Cross station, now underway. In a joint project with Network Rail, First Capital Connect, Grand Central, Hull Trains and National Express East Coast, we are probing views about aspects of the project, including arrangements on the small number of occasions when timetables will have to be amended, and how the rail industry should communicate with passengers during the project.

New timetable changes

There are winners and losers in the timetable changes that came into effect in December. CrossCountry timetable changes aim to create a simplified service, making better use of limited capacity at Birmingham New Street station and providing consistent journey patterns across the day. Clock-face timetables will also be easier to understand and hopefully encourage more people to use trains. Punctuality should be improved as there will be fewer train conflicts at Birmingham New Street, and crowding is being addressed by the introduction of five eight-car trains on the busiest route, Edinburgh–Plymouth. Extra seating will also be available on refurbished Voyagers across the

CrossCountry network.

However, changes to CrossCountry services mean that some passengers will find they need to change trains to complete their journeys. As well as Birmingham New Street, there will be alternative interchange options. Passenger Focus encouraged the Department for Transport to insist bidders for the new franchise had an interchange strategy as Birmingham New Street is extremely busy and due to undergo major redevelopment throughout the life of the CrossCountry franchise. CrossCountry has produced leaflets and posters explaining the interchange options and has begun briefing staff so they can better assist passengers who require help.

News roundup

- **Customer excellence**

Passenger Focus helped judge the TransPennine Express (TPE) Customer Excellence Awards. TPE staff were commended for their exceptional contribution in 12 categories.

- **Parking costs up**

On top of the annual fare increases, passengers parking at National Express stations had to dig deeper into their pockets from January. National Express has applied more inflation-busting increases. For example, parking at Wakefield Westgate jumps 20% to £12. We will be asking government to review the fact that car-park pricing continues to be unregulated, despite the train companies' effective monopoly at many stations.

- **Ticket gates proposed**

The prospect of ticket barriers at York and Sheffield stations as part of National Express East Coast and East Midlands Trains' franchise commitments have raised concerns among some passengers. Whilst Passenger Focus is broadly supportive of ticket gates at stations because of their potential to reduce ticketless travel, anti-social behaviour and criminal activity, we judge each case on its merits.

We are asking questions about the York scheme, including how it will still give Grand Central passengers the convenience of buying tickets on the train. At Sheffield, the proposals will prevent easy interchange between the tram and the new bus station on opposite sides of the station. We have written to East Midlands Train and met the Department for Transport to set out our concerns and asked them to find a way to ensure that interchange between different modes of transport is not impeded.

- **Catering changes on East Coast**

5 January saw changes to catering offered on National Express East Coast services. On many trains the traditional restaurant car has been replaced with a concept of at-seat dining in first class, with food still cooked to order on board many trains. Passenger Focus will be monitoring how the new style is received by passengers.