

Passenger Voice North West

Independent national passenger watchdog



Merseyrail on top

Merseyrail deserves congratulations for being one of the top National Passenger Survey performers across Britain with 90% of its passengers satisfied overall with their train services and 88% satisfied with punctuality and reliability. Merseyrail is so confident that its trains will arrive on time that the amount of compensation given to

passengers has been increased. Its Passenger Charter states that passengers should expect to receive a 20% refund of the cost of their ticket if their train is delayed by an hour or more. Merseyrail has now increased the amount of refund to 100% of the cost of the fare if the train is delayed by more than 30 minutes with immediate effect.



Merseyrail will, however, need to try to improve the way it deals with delays, as less than a quarter of passengers are satisfied with this important aspect of their

journey. Only a third of passengers are satisfied with the availability of staff on Merseyrail trains and only 57% are satisfied with car-parking facilities.

Encouraging NPS results for Virgin



Virgin Trains scored well in Passenger Focus's Autumn 2008 National Passenger Survey: 84% of its passengers are satisfied overall with Virgin's rail services and 82% are satisfied with reliability and punctuality. This is despite frequent delays on the West Coast Main Line. However, there is still room for improvement. Only half of Virgin's passengers think it deals well with delays

and that toilet facilities on the trains are satisfactory. Although currently only 43% of passengers are satisfied with car-parking facilities, this should improve in future surveys as the car-park improvement programme progresses. This will create new car-parking spaces either at ground level or in new multi-storey car-parks at all Virgin-managed stations.

Rail User Group conferences

Passenger Focus organised and chaired regional conferences to give Rail User Groups the opportunity to speak to train operating companies and Network Rail about their plans. Conferences were held for Yorkshire and the North East at York on 7 March and for the North West at Preston on 21 March.



Northern Rail NPS results

There was some good passenger feedback on Northern services in the Autumn 2008 National Passenger Survey (NPS) with speed of journey achieving the best overall satisfaction rate at 85%. The survey showed passenger satisfaction had improved on sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand and cleanliness of train interiors.

Overall satisfaction with Northern services was 82%.

Results are encouraging, but there is still much room for improvement. Satisfaction with the way delays are dealt with remains the lowest score at 34%, and toilets were little better at 36%. Percentages for train cleanliness and upkeep trail badly in both national and regional comparisons,

as does provision of information.

Ageing rolling stock on some lines is a handicap, but Passenger Focus manager Kerry Williamson will be working with Northern to see what can be done to improve cleanliness pending arrival of new trains. The manner in which delays are handled will also be examined.

Merseyside Rail Utilisation Strategy

As part of Network Rail's consultation on the Merseyside Rail Utilisation Strategy, Passenger Focus commissioned research to understand better the views, aspirations and priorities of passengers in Merseyside. A total of 1593 passengers were surveyed, 960 of whom were on the Northern Line and 633 on the Wirral Line. On the Wirral Line researchers focused on passengers between Bidston and the Liverpool loop.

Surveys were conducted every day of the week between 07.00 and 22.00. The findings identified that:

- 63% of passengers walk to the station,
- 22% drove and 6% caught the bus
- of those passengers who travel to the

station by car, most park in the station car-park (44%) but a good proportion of passengers park in the street (21%). Given that station car-parks are free in Merseyside, this would suggest that some passengers are having problems finding a space.

Besides better car-parking, passengers are calling for better stations in the industry's plans.

Passenger Focus found that getting a seat, greater frequency and new trains were top of passengers' wish list.

Passenger Focus also included comments received from Rail User Groups to inform its comprehensive response. Copies of Passenger Focus's

response are available on request; alternatively go to the website www.passengerfocus.org.uk



Car-parking a priority at stations

West Coast Main Line tribulations

The first few weeks of 2009 saw the West Coast Main Line dogged by unrelated problems. At the start of the year a car and a plane crashed on to the track, two further fatalities occurred on the track, and there were eight separate incidents with overhead-wire failures and speed restrictions caused by high winds. In February the full Virgin High Frequency timetable was introduced and things seem to be settling down with the majority of customers enjoying more frequent intercity services.

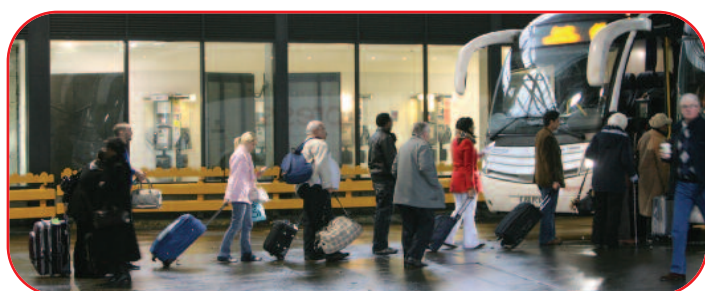
However, many passengers along the Trent Valley route continue to feel aggrieved that Virgin has reduced the number of stops at their stations in order to speed up the long-distance services. Passenger Focus will be undertaking passenger research later this year



to gather passenger views about how they think the new timetable is working for them. The data will be used to support its response to the West Coast Route Utilisation Strategy

consultation. Passenger Focus will also be holding Rail User Group and Community Rail Partnership meetings at various points along the West Coast Main Line in early summer.

Exploratory bus research in the North West



As part of its work to help define its new role, research has been carried out in Blackpool and stakeholder interviews have been held with local operator Blackpool Transport to look into complaint-handling arrangements.

Meetings have been

held with Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive, local bus operators and Blackpool Trams to explore how Passenger Focus can work with them. Research has also been carried out in Manchester to look into the operation and impact of the concessionary fares scheme on passengers, local authorities and operators. The scheme allows those over 60 to travel free on buses outside peak hours.