

Passenger Voice Scotland

Independent national passenger watchdog



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. Passenger Focus will be undertaking passenger research later this year to gather passenger views about how 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.



A High Frequency Service timetable has started

Passenger perceptions of personal security

Passenger Focus has highlighted the importance of staff at stations and staff walking through the train at the Railway Community Safety

Forum 2009 held recently. Passenger Focus's latest document 'Passenger perceptions of personal security on the railways'

was presented at the forum, which explored how to reduce crime on Britain's railways. The national rail watchdog's document brings together all of Passenger Focus's research looking at safety and security at the station and on the train. The report notes that passenger satisfaction with security has increased over recent years but there is still room for improvement.

Robert Samson, Passenger Focus manager for Scotland, commented: "In the current climate where train companies

are looking to reduce costs, the industry must be mindful that passengers want a staff presence on trains and at the station for security reasons. Staff are needed to provide advice, help for passengers with accessibility issues and can sell tickets. But importantly, passengers tell us staff offer a sense of security. CCTV, lighting and help points all go a long way to make passengers feel safer at stations, but a staff presence is the one thing that really reassures passengers."



ScotRail unveils new trains to passengers

Passenger Focus welcomed the announcement of an order for 38 new Class 380 electric trains, providing 130 new carriages. Prior to that announcement, Passenger Focus had discussed with Transport Scotland its qualitative research findings with rail passengers which

gives an understanding of their views on the design of new trains.

Now a mock-up of the train is being shown to passengers in the next few months. This will allow passengers to give their final say on what is proposed. The value of

mock-ups has been well established with other train operating companies, and it will also give Passenger Focus manager for Scotland Robert Samson the opportunity to see how many of the recommendations he made have been incorporated into the design.

Calls for better planning of engineering works

Passenger Focus has voiced concerns about Network Rail shutting parts of the East and West Coast Main Lines at the same time for essential engineering works over recent weekends.

The issue has also been raised with the rail company by Lord Andrew Adonis, Minister of State for Transport, Westminster.

Robert Samson, Passenger Focus manager for Scotland commented: "Passengers will be mystified how the two main North to South rail routes can

be cut at the same time. Passengers understand that engineering works have to be done but they must be planned by the whole industry to lessen the effect on passengers. Passenger Focus is seeking a pledge from the train companies and Network Rail that they will always seek to ensure that during planned engineering work trains use alternative routes and bus replacement services are only used as a last resort. Just as importantly information should make it clear that passengers can use other routes and



Image: Keeping Track

this should be at no extra cost."

Passenger Focus's research shows passengers would prefer to spend up to an hour longer on a train than change to a rail replacement service.

Network Rail has since given assurances that works would be planned to allow passengers to travel by alternative rail routes.

Slight improvement on CrossCountry trains

Spring 2008 saw the first set of National Passenger Survey (NPS) results for the reprofiled CrossCountry franchise. Comparisons and trends across time are difficult as CrossCountry has taken on some routes from Central Trains and lost routes between the North West and Scotland, but overall there are slight improvements, with overall passenger satisfaction now at 84%.

Overall satisfaction is now better than most of the other long-distance operators after several

years of running behind – passenger satisfaction with long-distance operators has been dropping since 2006. For train attributes, NPS scores have been going down for CrossCountry since peaks in 2006/7 – but CrossCountry has reversed this in the latest wave.

Comparing CrossCountry with other long-distance operators, room to sit and stand remains the key issue for passengers. On this aspect there has been a significant decline in satisfaction to only 59% – the lowest

satisfaction rating amongst long-distance operators. There are plans to improve capacity as part of the franchise terms which should help to address this concern and improve NPS results.

There have been significant improvements in passenger satisfaction with station cleanliness and car-parking facilities. However, CrossCountry is the only franchised operator not directly responsible for any stations on its routes.

Passenger Focus is encouraging CrossCountry to consider NPS results by route or business areas so that more detailed results can be produced which highlight particular areas of improvement or concern.

News roundup

- West Highland accolade**
 Readers of Wanderlust magazine voted the West Highland line the most beautiful train journey in the world. Passenger Focus has been working with the Friends of the West Highland Line and Network Rail to look into the possibility of opening up some views from the train by selective tree felling.
- Kilmarnock frequency increased**
 From the December timetable change, Kilmarnock will gain a half-hourly service with Glasgow. Passenger Focus is looking at the delay in trains that travel on to Stranraer, which wait at Kilmarnock on occasions for 10–15 minutes.
- Highland proposals**
 Among the items on the agenda for a meeting between Passenger Focus and the Highlands & Islands Transport Partnership are new stations at Conon and for Inverness Airport.

Safeguarding service quality



Robert Samson

A number of train operating companies (TOCs) are looking to reduce staff in the face of economic difficulties. Slower growth levels may not match the projections on which franchise subsidies/payments were based. While it is not for Passenger Focus to be prescriptive about the way TOCs organise their business, any reduction

in staff numbers should not impact on the quality of service passengers receive or on their perceptions of personal security.

Job cuts have been announced by South West Trains, Southeastern and ScotRail, First Capital Connect has applied to make reductions to ticket office hours and both National Express

East Coast and National Express East Anglia have shed catering staff, ending the restaurant service on most trains.

Some train operating companies are reducing carriages on off-peak services but this has caused complaints as passengers regard some of the shorter trains as overcrowded.