

Passenger Voice Scotland

Independent national passenger watchdog



More trains needed for TransPennine Express (TPE)

The independent passenger watchdog has taken up passengers' concerns about fares, ticketing, overcrowding and plans for more carriages

Sue Tibbett, Passenger Focus manager, has been looking at the train company'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 new 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 leisure 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 other 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 those services that are predicted to be busy. TPE is also looking at its fares and retailing strategy to address overcrowding.



More trains are needed

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

Passengers rate Scotland's rail services

The majority (89%) of ScotRail's passengers are satisfied with their overall rail journey, the Spring 2009 National Passenger Survey (NPS) has revealed.

Commenting on the NPS, Passenger Focus said that across Scotland overall satisfaction with rail services was generally higher than the GB average of 81%. National Express East Coast received a score of 87%, Virgin Trains an 86% approval rate, First TransPennine Express 87% and CrossCountry 85%.

However, punctuality and reliability continue to cause concerns for passengers on the West Coast Main Line. Satisfaction with punctuality and reliability has fallen by six points to 79% on Virgin Trains. The independent passenger watchdog is calling on Network Rail and the train operators to focus on problematic routes to restore passenger faith.

Passengers reported that on ScotRail services the helpfulness and attitude of staff on the train (79%) had improved, satisfaction with station facilities and services were up 10 points to 58% and the overall station environment up seven points to 79%.

Robert Samson, Passenger Focus

manager for Scotland, said: "Once again passengers have told us train operators in Scotland are doing a good job but there is still room for improvement. Train operators should listen to customer views, both positive and negative and strive for even better results".

Passenger Focus is now a producer of Official Statistics and is named in the Official Statistics Order 2009. As part of the changes, the watchdog will need to comply with the

Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Under the new rules, the Spring 2009 National Passenger Survey was published on the statistics section of the Passenger Focus website, and at the same time it published and circulated a media release providing commentary, thoughtful analysis and quotes.

Full National Passenger Survey results can be found at www.passengerfocus.org.uk

Scotland

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
First ScotRail	89	Station facilities and services	-
National Express East Coast	87	Facilities for car parking	Connections with other forms of public transport
Virgin Trains	86	Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	Punctuality/reliability

Sunday services from Newcraighall

Passenger Focus has been pressing for the introduction of a Sunday service on the Edinburgh Crossrail line between Fife and the current terminus on the Waverley line at Newcraighall, where there is an extensive park and ride facility. The Edinburgh Crossrail project involved opening over one mile of track for passenger services and two new railway stations at Brunstane and Newcraighall. It opened in 2002 at a total cost of £11 million, but without a Sunday service.

Robert Samson, Passenger Focus manager for Scotland, believes that consideration should be given to piloting a Sunday service, as has happened on other routes. A cost-effective solution could involve using the rolling stock and train crews that operate North Berwick Sunday services; with careful timetabling, a robust Sunday service could be provided also to Brunstane and Newcraighall.

Virgin to improve disruption information



Information a priority

Train companies' failure to keep passengers informed about disruption is one of passengers' major gripes with the railway.

At Passenger Focus's suggestion, this problem and possible solutions will be discussed in depth at a Virgin Passenger Panel meeting. Virgin will create a scenario of a major route blockage, and the panel will split into three groups to discuss what information they would expect/require at home preparing to travel, at the station and on the train. The outcomes will assist Virgin in planning how to improve this very important passenger requirement.

West Coast Route Utilisation Strategy underway

Passenger Focus is exploring passenger priorities for West Coast rail services as part of the biggest Rail Utilisation Strategy (RUS) Network Rail has undertaken to date

These strategies look at the future needs and potential development of the route and members of the Network Rail stakeholder management group (SMG) will analyse the current West Coast Main Line, looking at capacity, capability, infrastructure and performance. It will examine the gap between the current situation and aspirations for the route. It will run in tandem with the West Midlands RUS.

Informal consultation will be undertaken throughout the rail industry and with the wider community to ensure passenger views and ideas are considered and where appropriate included in the strategy. Passenger Focus has already facilitated meetings in Crewe, Carlisle and Northampton between Network Rail and 39 rail user groups/community rail partnerships. After a presentation about the timetable and scope of the RUS, attendees split into workshops to consider the issues for passengers in their area, the possible solutions and their top three priorities for inclusion in the RUS.

A follow-up event will be held later in the year when the SMG has considered



Passenger priorities under review

the gaps and identified a range of possible solutions. In the autumn, Passenger Focus will undertake route-specific passenger research for a report to the SMG before the end of the year. It will underpin Passenger Focus's response to the draft consultation, due for circulation in January 2010 with completion by June 2010.

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. Passenger Focus has reported its concerns over recent months about increases in parking costs, seat reservation charges and staff cuts.