

Passenger Voice South East

Independent national rail passenger watchdog



Premium fares for Javelins

It is less than a year now until the introduction of a high-speed service from Kent to St Pancras. The new service is welcomed as a first step in improving some of the notoriously slow journey-times in Kent – for instance in the case of Ashford to London, a distance of only 56 miles, can take anything up to 90 minutes. However,

Passenger Focus fears that premium fares will be too high. Passenger Focus manager, Tunde Olatunji, said: "Unless introductory fares on Javelin services are attractive and at a level which recognises the current economic difficulties, passengers will be reluctant to burden themselves with the extra cost of premium

fares despite the journey-time savings on offer.

"Evidence suggests that people are cutting costs wherever they can and are seeking better value. We would therefore expect introductory premium fares to be affordable, discounted and offer flexibility for the occasional user. The new service will succeed only



if passengers who use the service, think it offers value for money."

Impact on South Central franchise

Passenger Focus has had success in influencing the South Central franchise deal. Following extensive research to evidence passenger priorities for the new franchise, we were pleased to see requirements for more trains at weekends and late in the evening. The level by which regulated fares can be increased will also be limited, in direct response to our suggestions. The inclusion of targets for National

Passenger Survey satisfaction measures will mean that passengers' views will directly influence the franchise. The operator will be assessed on satisfaction with trains, stations and customer services/information, with financial penalties for failure to deliver.

The input from Passenger Focus has been judged useful by the Department for Transport and we expect to have the opportunity to influence other franchises.

Passengers first

The Passenger Focus-supported 'Putting passengers first' National Rail Award for 2008 was won by Southeastern for the overhaul of its customer complaints service. It took a remarkably honest look at its procedures, and resolved to respond to passengers in plain English, devise better standard wording of complaints policy in consultation with Passenger Focus and London TravelWatch, treat compensation claims sympathetically, and ensure that 'comebacks' are reviewed by a head of department. A senior managers' committee was also established.

Passengers report train journey improving

London and south east passengers have said train services are getting better with a greater percentage of people reporting they are satisfied with their overall journey.

Passenger Focus has launched the results of its Autumn 2008 National Passenger Survey (NPS).

In London and the south east, 82% of passengers said they were satisfied with their overall journey and reported significant improvements with several aspects of train facilities.

Passenger Focus warned there was still room for improvement with low percentages of passengers satisfied with value for money (41%), train toilet facilities (34%), availability of staff on the train (31%), and how train companies deal with delays (35%).

South East

Train Operating Company (TOC)	Overall % satisfied	Passengers' satisfaction up	Passengers' satisfaction down
First Capital Connect	77	How a request to station staff was handled	Connections with other forms of public transport
First Great Western	80	How well the company dealt with delays	No decline in satisfaction scores
Heathrow Express	93	Personal security at the station	No decline in satisfaction scores
Southeastern	80	Helpfulness & attitude of staff on the train	Car-parking facilities
Southern	83	No significant improvements in satisfaction scores	Car-parking facilities
South West Trains	87	Punctuality/reliability	Overall station environment

Thameslink

Passengers' views at the heart of decision making

Passenger Focus has worked with the Department for Transport (DfT) and London TravelWatch to ensure that passengers' views are at the heart of the decisions made about new trains to run on Thameslink routes. Passenger Focus manager Guy Dangerfield said: "In the research, passengers told us they want a spacious train that they can get in and out of easily, unlike the existing Thameslink rolling stock. They also want a step change in passenger information, going well beyond the destination and calling pattern now standard on new trains." Passenger Focus is pleased

that these, and a number of other points made to the DfT following the research, have been reflected in the specification.

Passenger Focus has also published another major report, 'Passenger needs during Thameslink Programme construction: findings of qualitative research', which looks at what passengers are concerned about and how the rail industry can minimise disruption to best maintain passenger satisfaction while works are going on. Mr Dangerfield said: "Shining through was the message that passenger

communication has a vital role to play in delivery of the Thameslink Programme. Getting the communications right, so that passengers do not feel that they are being kept in the dark, will be key to the rail industry meeting passengers' expectations during Thameslink construction." The research was carried out jointly with First Capital Connect and Southeastern, and is available at www.passengerfocus.org.uk.



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.

Eurostar managing disruption

When fire broke out on a lorry in the Channel Tunnel last year, passenger safety and the level of customer service provided by Eurostar were key Passenger Focus priorities. Eurotunnel's closure of the tunnel forced Eurostar to re-schedule the journeys of, or refund, some 100,000 passengers booked to travel over the next four days. Passenger Focus, London TravelWatch and the European Passengers Federation met with Eurostar to discuss the complaints received and the overall

handling of the disruption.

The fire incident highlighted the importance of passengers knowing their rights when faced with severe delays. In this instance, the little-known rules dealing with the Contract of International Carriage of Passengers by Rail govern consumer rights. These cover the reasonable cost of accommodation, the cost of letting others know of the delay and extending the validity of tickets where connections have been missed.

Refurbished trains for extended Gatwick Express services

Passenger Focus manager Sharon Hedges has visited Southern's 'Lovers Walk' depot in Brighton with the Department for Transport's (DfT) Franchise Manager and London TravelWatch. They were shown one of the first refurbished Class 442s, prior to the launch of the extended Gatwick Express services to Brighton in the morning and evening peak.

Lobbying and representation by Passenger Focus influenced the adoption of an 'enhanced specification', despite additional costs, which has delivered benefits for passengers and will reduce station dwell times through improvements to carriage access. Passenger

Focus senior policy advisor Phil Wilks's suggestions of grab rails in the vestibule and a wheelchair space incorporating tip-up seats and tables have also been adopted.

Standard carriages have table seating in the middle of the coach for commuters, leaving easier-to-access space at ends of carriages for travellers. Though the gangway is considerably wider than the previous layout, it would still be preferable for passengers with luggage to be able to sit nearest the doorways. Commuters will be encouraged to sit at the front end of the train where the catering trolley will be located for Brighton departures.