

# Passenger Voice South West

Independent national passenger watchdog



## First centralises Assisted Passenger Reservation System

First Group sets up a service that could be a blueprint for all train operating companies

The experience of passengers who have booked assistance varies across the country. Passenger Focus has therefore highlighted this issue nationally to influence improvements with individual train companies and to encourage the industry to adopt a common Assisted Passenger Reservation System (APRS) standard. Following a mystery shopping exercise in 2008, Passenger Focus circulated a set of guidelines to the rail industry outlining passenger needs when booking travel assistance.

Following on from this research, Passenger Focus managers Mike Greedy and Jocelyn Pearson recently met the 'First Info Assisted Travel Team', which has been set up in Plymouth to handle all contacts

and work associated with assisted travel on behalf of First Group companies.

The team provides a pool of experienced staff, drawn from various areas of the business to create a centre of knowledge and expertise. The team members themselves have a combined total of 36 years' experience working in the contact centre industry. Clients, customers and members of First Info staff now have a single point of contact and reference for all assisted travel issues.

Centre manager Patricia Russell was proud of what had been achieved since the unit was set up in December 2008. She confirmed that a number of Passenger Focus guideline recommendations had been incorporated into their processes. These included 100% feedback calls to passengers who had booked assistance, a single point of contact from request to delivery and through any complaint that results, and more importantly accurate and



A common APRS system is needed

timely monitoring of performance delivery.

The setting up of this dedicated unit is welcomed and is seen as a major step forward in delivering a more consistent service to passengers requiring assistance across the First Group rail operators.

## Exploratory bus research

As part of its work to help define its new role, Passenger Focus is carrying out bus passenger satisfaction work in the Bristol and Dorset areas. In collaboration with a research agency, Passenger Focus has been looking at how research will be scoped, how information will be gathered in the field, how results will be used and presented, and what can be determined from the data that will help achieve improvements for



passengers. The research should be completed by the end of May.

Research has also been carried out in Bath to look into the operation and impact of

the concessionary fares scheme on both passengers, local authorities and operators. The scheme allows those over 60 to travel free on buses outside peak hours.

## Passenger Focus at Accessibility Conference

Passenger Focus was a guest speaker at the South West Trains disability conference in March and presented the research undertaken aimed at improving the way the services are delivered to assist passengers with disabilities. South West Trains explained how it has used the research to improve its services.



# FGW scores better in national survey

The Autumn 2008 National Passenger Survey (NPS) results reflected the performance improvements that have been made by First Great Western (FGW) during 2008, with overall satisfaction rising by seven points to 80%

**T**hough this is a very creditable improvement, a lot of work still needs to be done to achieve the 90% target that the company has set.

Passengers regularly question why the results for FGW are listed under the London & South East section of the survey report; this is due to commuters in the Thames Valley area providing the larger volume of patronage and therefore survey input.

By examining the performance of the previous First Great Western Link, Wessex and Great Western areas, a

more detailed picture emerges, with very high levels of satisfaction being recorded in the Thames Valley area. Overall satisfaction has risen by 10 points and satisfaction with punctuality and reliability by 13 points when compared with the previous year.

The results in the previous Wessex area of the franchise indicate that there are higher levels of dissatisfaction with station facilities, availability of station staff, ticket-buying facilities and provision of information. These results have not been influenced by the regular running



of shorter trains, particularly in the Greater Bristol area, which has caused frustration to passengers, and it is these areas of work that will be the prime focus of attention for Mike Greedy, Passenger Focus manager, over the next 12 months.

## SWT improving information

Passenger Focus's recent fares research shows that in assessing value for money, information during disruption is very important to passengers. South West Trains (SWT) has identified a range of actions to help improve this aspect of its service. Its plans have been shared with Passenger Focus, and we welcome the initiative that will shortly move some

customer-service staff right next to the operations team at Waterloo. This will allow the service recovery team reorganising trains to pass over accurate and timely information to the people responsible for making sure passengers are kept up to date. This is only one part of an extensive and ongoing programme of improvements, and



Passenger Focus manager Jocelyn Pearson will be monitoring to see how passengers benefit from these gradual improvements.

## Potential for disruption into Paddington 2010-2017

The potential for disruption to passengers travelling between Reading and London between 2010 and 2017 is high due to major projects planned during this period. These include moving the main line signal-box from Reading to a new facility at Didcot, infrastructure and station remodelling at Reading, and building of the Crossrail network between Maidenhead and London Paddington and beyond. The last will also involve major changes to the Paddington station environment which will entail extensive excavation and changes to facilities in and around the station.

It is essential that the needs of passengers are at the forefront of all decisions about the work, and to this end Passenger Focus has started to build formal relationships with all the project companies involved to make sure it is that it is consulted at every stage of the process if disruption to services is envisaged.

Recent research with passengers affected by the Thameslink Programme has provided feedback about the needs and expectations of passengers who are likely to be affected by major projects, and this information will be used to inform future discussions with project leaders to ensure that those needs are met.

## Ticket office hours watched

Passenger Focus has welcomed the Department for Transport's (DfT) decision not to allow South West Trains (SWT) to reduce ticket office hours, unless fewer than 12 tickets an hour were being sold. However, other train operating companies are now making similar applications and there is nothing to stop SWT making further applications at a later date. Furthermore, there is no control over the number of ticket windows open; any reduction is likely to lengthen queues at busy stations. The immediate need is for SWT to provide staff for the advertised office hours. The DfT has assured Passenger Focus that ticket office opening hours are being very carefully monitored.