

Passenger Voice South West

Independent national passenger watchdog



Back-door price rises

Passenger Focus has opposed First Great Western's (FGW) move to charge passengers more to upgrade to first-class carriages, with concerns it will make standard carriages increasingly crowded

FGW passengers were previously able to pay a supplement to upgrade to first-class for only £5 in the Thames Valley area and £10 further afield on weekends and bank holidays. However, FGW has introduced a zonal charging structure with the cost of the upgrade now depending on how far the passenger is travelling, ranging from £5 to £25.

Under the new rules, passengers can no longer purchase a through first-class upgrade incorporating travel on connecting trains run by other rail companies. This will increase the price of the upgrade for the whole journey.

Mike Greedy, Passenger Focus manager, said: "On weekends fewer passengers are

using first-class carriages and it makes sense to incentivise passengers to upgrade their ticket at an affordable price. Standard carriages are going to become increasingly crowded and this is yet another example of a train company slipping through one more back-door fare rise."

FGW has also increased the price of some unregulated fares outside the Thames Valley area by around 2.5%. Regulated fares in the Thames Valley area have gone up by around 2% for standard-class. Off-peak fares from London and the South East to Devon and Cornwall have generally risen by around 3%, and some long-distance weekly season tickets have also increased.

Early input to rail plans

Passenger Focus is working to provide rail user groups with an early opportunity to help shape the scope of a 'second generation' Route Utilisation Strategy for London and the South East. An initial consultation meeting in July asked passengers to consider key issues and potential solutions to be fed in to the steering group. Further input will be invited during the next stages of work.

Bus work progresses in South West



Passenger Focus is testing how it will take on the role of bus passenger

representation by establishing pilots at three locations. Passenger Focus manager Mike Greedy and passenger executive Joe Lynch are leading the pilot in the South West and are meeting passengers to discuss their views, building on passenger research and identifying priorities to take to funders, operators and stakeholders. Issues raised locally include punctuality, timetables, information provision and fares.



Passenger Focus is exploring bus and coach passenger issues

Passengers report satisfaction with journey

More than 25,000 passengers have given their view of the country's railway in Passenger Focus's Spring 2009 National Passenger Survey.

The survey found the majority of passengers (81%) across Great Britain say they are satisfied with their rail experience.

The national passenger watchdog is now working with Great Britain's train companies to improve those areas passengers have identified as being problematic.

Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief executive, said: "Despite the credit crunch and train companies cutting staff, reducing cleaning and other services in some locations, passenger satisfaction has held up since last spring. This must be partly due to continued overall improvements in trains arriving on time – the key factor that underpins rail passenger satisfaction."

The National Passenger Survey is now classified as Official Statistics and is named in the Official Statistics Order 2009.

South West			
Train Operating Company (TOC)	Overall % satisfied	Passengers' satisfaction up	Passengers' satisfaction down
Arriva Trains Wales	87	Cleanliness of the outside of the train	–
CrossCountry	85	Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	–
First Great Western	81	Punctuality/reliability	–
South West Trains	84	Connections with other train services	Train toilet facilities

Waterloo Travel Centre

Passenger Focus welcomes the fact that South West Trains (SWT) has chosen to consult with passengers before implementing proposals to close Waterloo Travel Centre and relocate the specialised staff to the ticket office. If SWT decides to go ahead with the plan, there will need to be a formal request to the Department for Transport, but it's important that SWT considers passenger views.

Jocelyn Pearson, Passenger Focus manager, said she was concerned that the plan to close the busy centre will force passengers into long ticket office queues, regardless of whether they require tickets to travel immediately or need detailed travel advice.



Ms Pearson said: "If this goes ahead SWT should guarantee that they will meet the industry standard and ensure that passengers will not have to queue for more than five minutes at peak times and three minutes at other times. Passengers also need to know that staff will be available on the ground to answer questions and facilities will be provided for older passengers and disabled passengers who may struggle to stand in queues."

FGW's work to improve pays off

First Great Western's (FGW) efforts to improve services to passengers have received industry recognition with it taking the most improved company accolade at the Innovation Awards 2009.

Judges said FGW had the most improved punctuality record for 2008 and the company jumped from 18th place to 7th in the League of Train Operators. Passenger Focus welcomed FGW's efforts to improve punctuality and services generally.

Mike Greedy, Passenger Focus manager, said: "Punctual trains are passengers' top priority and FGW has done well to turn around its performance over the past 12 months".

News roundup

• Tackling vandalism

South West Trains (SWT) is exploring ways to reduce incidents of vandalism on ticket vending machines (TVMs). Following an attack, TVMs can be out of use for some time because of the need for repairs, making it difficult for many passengers when the booking office is unstaffed. Passenger Focus is concerned at the vulnerability of a ticketing system that relies on TVMs at unstaffed stations.

• Car parks under scrutiny

Passenger Focus and South West Trains (SWT) are working together to try to understand why National Passenger Survey scores for satisfaction with car parks are low, despite investment in extensions and security measures. Passenger Focus has written research questions for the SWT website and will be receiving and analysing passenger responses. Anecdotal feedback suggests that higher charges at some car parks may have coloured users' perceptions of total journey cost.

• Party Conferences 2009

Passenger Focus is planning to run events at GB political party conferences being held in Bournemouth, Brighton and Manchester later this year. If you would like to attend email matt.ayson@passengerfocus.org.uk

West Country issues

The intensive five-day tour of the British rail network by Lord Andrew Adonis gave the Minister the opportunity to meet a wide range of people involved with the transport industry, including Passenger Focus managers.

Provision of refreshments at Southampton by Jocelyn Pearson, Passenger Focus manager in the South West, grabbed the headlines, when Lord Adonis discovered the

lack of catering facilities for passengers after 8pm. They also discussed the absence of waiting and toilet facilities, the limitations of ticket machines for more complicated transactions, and accessibility issues.

During his stop at Exeter St David's station, Lord Adonis met Passenger Focus manager Mike Greedy. Among the issues raised were the shortage and quality of

rolling stock, the gaps in services that can arise from poorly renegotiated franchises, and capacity issues in the Greater Bristol area and on the Cardiff-Portsmouth route.

At the time of the tour, Lord Adonis was serving as Transport Minister but has since been promoted to Secretary of State for Transport. Meanwhile, Passenger Focus has published summaries of research undertaken on the Gloucester and Reading routes. These identify what passengers want from future services.

Welcome co-operation

Passenger Focus has applauded First Great Western's (FGW) agreement to accept South West Trains' (SWT) tickets on trains between Paddington and Windsor & Eton Central during Royal Ascot.

To increase capacity and cope with the 30,000 anticipated passengers between

London and Ascot alone, eight Waterloo-Windsor services were diverted to Ascot after the racing. Two buses for each diverted train called at the stations losing a rail service between Staines and Windsor. During the afternoon SWT tickets were valid on FGW services between Paddington and Windsor.

West of Exeter services safeguarded

The withdrawal of South West Trains' services beyond Exeter from the December 2009 timetable change would mean unacceptable gaps in services. Passenger Focus manager Mike Greedy has been pressing for the necessary funding from the Department of Transport to allow First Great Western to operate substitute services. This has now been agreed, and attention will now turn to the detail of the new timetable.