

Passenger Voice Rail

GREAT BRITAIN

Independent national passenger watchdog



83% of Great Britain's passengers satisfied

But passengers want train companies to improve on handling of delays

The majority of passengers (83%) across Great Britain are satisfied with the overall service they receive on the railway, the Autumn 2009 National Passenger Survey (NPS) has revealed.

Passenger Focus has welcomed improvements to London Midland (87%), First TransPennine Express (89%) and Virgin Trains (89%) overall satisfaction scores.

Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief executive, said: "The investment in faster and more frequent Virgin Trains services and London Midland's new trains have resulted in much better scores from passengers. The message from passengers is clear – investment does pay off."

While passengers said they were happy with rail services overall, work is needed to improve the areas passengers have identified as their top priorities. Scores for value for money slipped a point (45% passengers satisfied) and only 36% of passengers said they were satisfied with how well their train company handled delays.

The NPS results show that when the train company is able to run its services on time, passengers are more likely to report their satisfaction with services overall. What continues to annoy passengers is the way delays are dealt with by the industry and a poor performance in this area often results in passengers reporting greater dissatisfaction with the train company.

Mr Smith commented that the Autumn 2009 survey took place before the winter

disruption which saw many passengers left out in the cold. He said: "The recent snow and industrial action, as well as the NPS results, tell us the industry has a long way to go when it comes to managing disruption. First Capital Connect, for example, has a lot to do to restore passengers' faith – boosting the compensation package for recent poor performance would be a good start."

Passenger Focus welcomed improved passenger satisfaction scores with punctuality, up two points to 83% and long distance operators' improved punctuality



Passengers need information

results – specifically on the former National Express East Coast (90%), Virgin Trains (90%), First TransPennine Express (88%), CrossCountry (85%) and East Midlands Trains (85%). But the watchdog believes the industry should now put greater emphasis on running trains 'right time'. On-time should mean just that, not within the five or 10 minutes leeway currently accepted."

Working with NXEA to improve punctuality

Passenger Focus is calling for the rail industry to tell passengers how many of its trains are actually arriving at the station on time. Currently, the industry measures trains as being punctual if they arrive at the final station within five or 10 minutes (depending on journey length).

The National Passenger Survey Autumn 2009 results show that nationally, passenger satisfaction with punctuality/reliability is at a record high of 83%. However, Passenger Focus, with

the help of National Express East Anglia (NXEA), has undertaken research looking at the relationship between passenger satisfaction and train lateness. Passenger Focus welcomed NXEA's cooperation in the research as an important contribution to understanding how passenger satisfaction can be improved in East Anglia and across the wider rail network.

Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief executive, said: "Passengers tell us they are increasingly satisfied with punctuality on the railway. Passenger

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From the Chair

Information revolution needed!

In an age when there is more information available to us than ever before it is a paradox that organisations can struggle to meet their customers' demands for information. When that information is about problems, things can get really difficult.

The railway industry has improved much of its performance with 83% of passengers telling us that they are satisfied overall. Although if you are one of its passengers suffering from cancellations or an overcrowded service you probably think the industry has a long way to go. Passengers tell us now that more trains are arriving on time – something they want to see continue – it is also important to them how well their train company handles delays. We all

understand things will sometimes go wrong. Leaving aside the recent Eurostar problems, we understand exceptional weather can cause all sorts of problems for trains and for train company staff. By and large we passengers are a patient lot, and in the bout of heavy snow over the early New Year period there is little doubt that many staff worked very hard to get the network running. However, it looks as if passengers were less well served when it came to information about what was and was not happening. This is part of a long-standing problem about how the industry informs its passengers in periods of stress.

We are working with the industry to try to improve things and the industry recognises it has to do better. Passenger

Focus has 1000 passengers acting as reporters when there is disruption, and they tell us just how much or little they are told and how useful and accurate information is. Their stories make interesting reading and we use what they tell us to support our other research. We expect to publish a report soon, setting out just what passengers would like to be told when things go wrong.

In the meantime, we think that since everyone in the rail industry agrees it needs to do better to explain what is happening when things go wrong, it should pledge to learn the lessons of this year's snow so as to do better next time.

Colin Foxall, Chairman

Responding to the hard winter

The cold weather and heavy snowfalls of December and January badly affected some train services, most prominently Eurostar.

On the release of findings from the independent inquiry looking specifically at the Eurostar disruption, Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief

executive, said: "This report confirms just how badly passengers were let down. Physical discomfort, emergency evacuations and, above all, poor, if any, information – not the way any passenger should be treated. Staff seemed to be left in the dark along with passengers. The lack of contingency plans will

surely be an important lesson. How to help and police a large number of passengers, many with luggage in the confines of a railway station, needs attention. While no transport system will ever be totally immune to disruption, passengers will hope these lessons are acted on."



Rail services around Great Britain hit by snow this winter

Photo: Courtesy of Keeping Track

East Coast shake up

Big changes to the East Coast Main Line train timetable, which runs trains from London to Peterborough, Doncaster, Leeds, York, Newcastle and Edinburgh, are planned for May 2011. Passenger Focus encourages passengers to feed in their views about the new timetables by visiting www.eastcoast.co.uk/Eureka

Passenger Focus manager Guy Dangerfield said: "This will be the biggest change to the East Coast timetable for many years and, as with

most timetable changes, there are winners and losers. As well as East Coast's trains to and from London, times for some CrossCountry, East Midlands Trains, First Capital Connect, First TransPennine Express, Grand Central, Hull Trains, Northern and ScotRail services may also change. If you use trains on the East Coast Main Line, whichever company you travel with, don't miss the opportunity to have your say at www.eastcoast.co.uk/Eureka"

As well as responding to the train company, please let Passenger Focus know what you are thinking at www.passengerfocus.org.uk/contact-us/

Give peace a chance

Passengers worried about their safety want abusive and rowdy passengers stopped from catching the train

The majority of passengers is generally satisfied with their personal security at the station (64%) and on the train (73%), but of those passengers not satisfied, the anti-social behaviour of others was their primary worry.

Passenger Focus has asked passengers what they are most annoyed by when it comes to anti-social behaviour at the station and on the train. Those who play loud music, don't pay for their fare or vandalise the railway were judged as being the most irritating passengers.

When it comes to being concerned about their safety, passengers are most worried about abusive or threatening behaviour (60.5%).

Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief executive, said: "Passengers generally feel safe on the railway but having staff available definitely makes a difference – 40% of

passengers called for more staff on the train and 36% said they wanted more visible police on board".

The research found that the most common form of anti-social behaviours witnessed at the station were passengers playing loud music (24.3%); feet on seats (21.4%) or passengers being drunk or on drugs (17.3%). On the train, passengers reported that the most common form of anti-social behaviour observed were feet on seats (36.8%), loud music (30.6%) and use of phones in 'quiet' carriages (27.9%).

Mr Smith said: "While passengers feel safer when they're on board, conductors, guards and police may also help cut out those annoying behaviours like loud music and phone conversations in 'quiet' carriages".



Passengers highlight future rail needs

Passengers have been given their chance to highlight their priorities for services being run under the Intercity East Coast, Essex Thameside and Greater Anglia franchises.

Passenger Focus has spoken to passengers across the three networks to gauge their views and priorities for rail services and, based on their feedback, has made recommendations to government, which is working on the new franchise contracts. The independent passenger watchdog will also present the research to potential bidders in coming months to highlight passenger requirements from the new operators.

From the individual passenger's perspective, they don't much care who runs their train company. Passengers say that what they're worried about is their ticket offering value for money, sufficient services at times they wish to catch the train and trains that run on time. Therefore, what is crucial in any franchise arrangement is that an operator is appointed which recognises and acts on passenger priorities.

Passenger Focus's research can be viewed at www.passengerfocus.org.uk

Passenger Focus disruption panel

The recent weather has highlighted the importance of the information provided during disruption to train services. The latest National Passenger Survey results confirm that the way train companies handle

unplanned disruption remains one of the lowest areas of satisfaction, and an area where the watchdog continues to receive examples of poor service to passengers.

Passenger Focus has therefore launched

a national 'disruption panel' to collate feedback from passengers whose journeys have been affected by unplanned disruption. It is encouraging passengers to join the panel via its website www.passengerfocus.org.uk/disruption

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Focus welcomes National Express's work with us to understand how passenger satisfaction can be further improved."

The National Passenger Survey (NPS) shows that train punctuality is the leading factor in whether passengers will be satisfied overall with the rail service they receive. This latest research found commuters judge lateness from the first minute the train arrives at the destination after the scheduled time. For every minute that a train is late, passenger satisfaction drops by two percentage points.

The independent passenger watchdog welcomed the fact that across the rail network more trains were arriving at the final destination within five or 10 minutes of the scheduled timetable.

Mr Smith said: "Passengers want their trains actually on time, not up to five or 10 minutes late. To drive passenger satisfaction higher, train companies and Network Rail should focus on running trains to the timetable – not just at the final destination, but at intermediate stations too. We found that less than half of passengers in this study got to their home station on time – even though many of the trains they caught will have counted as on time at the final destination.

"Longer term, we are calling on the industry to move towards a system which reports to passengers whether trains are arriving on time rather than within five or 10 minutes."

Passenger Focus will be calling on the Department for Transport to consider these findings as it looks at setting future targets for the industry.

Working with Network Rail

Passenger Focus has appointed Mark Leving to work with Network Rail, train operating companies and wider industry to ensure passenger needs are prioritised during infrastructure and engineering works.

An update on this work will be included in the next edition of Passenger Voice.

New research into queuing times

Following Passenger Focus's 2007 report into queuing times at major rail stations, work is underway to assess queuing times at medium-sized stations across the rail

network. The results of queue monitoring at 13 stations will help the watchdog to understand where queues are exceeding the published standards of five minutes in

peak hours and three minutes off-peak. Train operators will be encouraged to make improvements if they fail to meet these standards.

The results of the research will be highlighted in the next edition of *Passenger Voice*.

Passenger point of view



Passengers on Virgin reap the reward of investment

Due to massive investment along the West Coast, passengers have faced a lot of disruption, but are now benefiting from a more regular service and passenger satisfaction scores are on the rise

The reconstruction of the West Coast Main Line is largely consigned to history, but the difficulty of operating a railway while it is being rebuilt has overshadowed most of Virgin's franchise, which began in March 1997.

While the railway was a building site, it was a struggle to operate a robust timetable. Introduction of the Pendolino trains produced a boost for passengers, but the project was in such a mess that the Strategic Rail Authority had to produce a rescue plan. At the end of 2008, Network Rail said the upgrade was complete, but even when the new Very High Frequency (VHF) timetable was introduced on 16 February 2009, there were still reliability problems with infrastructure. In the Autumn 2008 National Passenger Survey (NPS) the satisfaction score for punctuality/reliability was 82% and overall satisfaction 84%.

The picture one year on is very different. Virgin has emerged as one of the best-performing train operating companies, Network Rail is working to improve reliability

and maintenance issues on infrastructure which were not part of the original upgrades, but the £9 billion investment project is at last paying off for passengers. Since the introduction of VHF, rising passenger satisfaction is being matched by passenger volume growth – as much as 49% on the London–Chester route and 32% for London–Manchester. A dependable seven-day railway has greatly increased weekend travel over the past 12 months.

In the Autumn 2009 NPS, overall satisfaction had reached 89% and punctuality 90%, ahead of the long-distance operator sector averages – both at 87%.

From the latest feedback from passengers, it appears that Virgin and the industry has ironed out some of the problems passengers were facing when using this company's services. Passenger Focus will now be consulting passengers during 2010 to gain their views on what should be part of the specification for the new Intercity West Coast franchise, which will run from 1 April 2012.

"The picture one year on is very different. Virgin has emerged as one of the best-performing train operating companies."

Better service for disabled passengers?

In September 2008 Passenger Focus carried out a 'mystery shop' survey of the Assisted Passenger Reservation Service (APRS), which allows disabled people to book assistance when travelling by train. Since the report and publication of the 'Best Practice' guidelines, Passenger Focus has been working with operators to improve the experience for disabled passengers. In June 2010,

Passenger Focus will be repeating the research to assess the progress made by the industry.

Jocelyn Pearson, passenger manager, said: "APRS is a vital service for many disabled passengers and we are pleased that the industry has worked with us to improve the service. This research will help us to understand where there is further room for improvement."

