

Passenger Voice Rail

NORTH EAST

Independent national passenger watchdog



Expectations for new franchise

Passenger Focus has asked over 6000 passengers for their views and priorities for services running on the East Coast

On 21 January Transport Secretary Andrew Adonis launched the consultation phase of the InterCity East Coast franchise. The watchdog has now made recommendations to government based on passenger feedback. The research will also be shared with potential bidders to highlight passenger requirements from the new operator.

Guy Dangerfield, Passenger Focus manager, said: "Passengers tell us that their top priority on this franchise is more punctual and reliable trains. Let's see more challenging targets set in the new deal, including a focus on 'right time' – not the 10-minute leeway which is currently in place. This is also a prime opportunity for government to solve passengers' top issue



Passengers give their view

with the railway – concerns about fares and getting a good deal for their money."



Ticket barriers at Newcastle

Passenger Focus is aware that the introduction of gates at Newcastle has had a mixed reception. Problems are reported with season

tickets and some Nexus integrated tickets do not seem to open the gates. This can pose real difficulties for passengers. Some difficulty

has also been reported by those with accessibility issues. Passenger Focus will continue to ensure passengers' views on this issue are heard.

Meanwhile, train company East Coast has dropped plans for barriers at York.

Good NPS results

First TransPennine Express's (TPE) passenger satisfaction scores moved in the right direction in Passenger Focus's Autumn 2009 National Passenger Survey (NPS). Overall satisfaction rose six points to a high 89%, two points ahead of the long-

distance operator sector average. There were substantial increases in many train facility scores: availability of staff (nine points to 68%); punctuality/reliability (seven points to 88%) and connections with other train services (six points to 81%). Given the state of the economy, the most remarkable rise was the value for money for the ticket price, which jumped 10 points to 63%.

Grand Central train scores

As this is the first time the open access operator Grand Central has participated in Passenger Focus's National Passenger Survey (NPS), the Autumn 2009 figures have no previous data for comparison. However, the NPS shows that Grand Central's difficult first few months are history, with a raft of very good scores. Overall satisfaction is at 95% while many of its train figures are in the nineties: punctuality/reliability (96%); journey time (95%); sufficient room for passengers to sit/stand (95%); comfort of seating area (94%); personal security and availability of staff (both 92%); interior cleanliness (91%); upkeep and repair of train and ease of getting on/off (both 90%).

North East			
Train Operating Company (TOC)	Overall % satisfied	Passengers' satisfaction up	Passengers' satisfaction down
CrossCountry	85	Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	Facilities for car parking
First TransPennine Express	89	Value for money	-
National Express East Coast	89	Upkeep and repair of the train	-
Northern Rail	82	Provision of information about train times/platforms	-
Grand Central	95	-	-

East Coast shake up



Timetable consultation

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/

News roundup

- **Small improvements at Northern**
Overall passenger satisfaction with Northern Rail remains unchanged at 82% in Passenger Focus's Autumn 2009 National Passenger Survey. Punctuality/reliability also sits at 81% but satisfaction with the provision of information at stations increased by five points.

Given that most of Northern stations are unstaffed, information is particularly important, and Ashwin Kumar, Passenger Focus director, would like to see live running information rolled out to all stations: "New screens can be installed very cheaply and will make a real difference to passengers".

Autumn NPS

The additional capacity provided by more seats and use of high speed trains on CrossCountry routes have raised passenger satisfaction, according to Passenger Focus's Autumn 2009 National Passenger Survey (NPS). The figure for sufficient room to sit/stand rose by 11 points and reflects the provision of 35% more seats on trains by the end of 2009, though the measure has still not eliminated overcrowding on some weekend trains.

We need more trains

Overcrowding is one of the key challenges facing the rail industry and sustained investment is needed to tackle the problem. However, passengers in the north of England demand something be done now, says Passenger Focus manager Sue Tibbett.

The north of England has seen unprecedented growth in rail travel in recent years and the trend looks set to continue.

With Passenger Focus regularly receiving complaints about the lack of seats on busy services, the independent watchdog has been working hard to ensure that TransPennine Express (TPE) and Northern deploy their train fleets efficiently.

The challenge is a general shortage of stock which means that operators cannot access the extra trains required to meet peak-time demand. TPE and Northern had hoped to have new diesel trains and carriages in passenger service in 2012 as part of the government's High Level Output Specification. However,

with plans now underway to electrify certain routes in the North West, electric trains will now be required instead. While it frees up more diesel trains to strengthen services on other parts of the network, electric trains will not be available until 2014.

Sue recently spent a day at Bolton, Manchester Piccadilly and Leeds stations with fellow Passenger Focus manager Kerry Williamson talking to passengers and rail

user group representatives about their experiences. Business passengers complained about their staff unable to board crowded trains and arriving late for work, and families spoke about having to travel separately due to a lack of seats. Disabled passengers would not consider rail travel during peak hours.

A video with more information on this problem will be available on the Passenger Focus website soon.

