

Passenger Voice Rail

NORTH WEST

Independent national passenger watchdog



Good NPS results for First TransPennine Express

First TransPennine Express's (TPE) passenger satisfaction scores moved in the right direction in Passenger Focus's Autumn 2009 National Passenger Survey (NPS)

Overall passenger satisfaction rose six points to a high score of 89%, two points ahead of the long-distance sector average. There were substantial increases in many train facility passenger satisfaction scores: availability of staff (nine points to 68%); punctuality/reliability (seven points to 88%) and connections with other train services (six points to 81%). But given the state of the economy, the most remarkable rise was value for money, which jumped 10 points to 63%.

Station scores too registered significant increases: the upkeep and repair of stations rose seven points to 80%. The current £12 million station improvement programme should translate into further rises in passenger satisfaction.



Merseyrail performs

Passenger Focus's Autumn 2009 National Passenger Survey (NPS) shows passengers continue to rate Merseyrail well with overall satisfaction at a high 91%. Passenger Focus has been working with Merseyrail on the attitudes and helpfulness of staff, and this has registered a 10-point improvement to 85%, 10 points above the regional-operator sector average. Merseyrail's work on stations has also borne fruit with a 10 point rise in the score for upkeep/repair of stations. Satisfaction with the provision of information at stations also increased to 86%.

Perhaps the most puzzling figure is a 10-point fall in the perception of value for money, when overall satisfaction is so high and the scores for train frequency (94%), punctuality/reliability (92%) and journey time (94%) are exceptionally high. It may simply reflect economic circumstances.

North West

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
East Midlands Trains	84	Punctuality/reliability	-
First TransPennine Express	89	Value for money	-
London Midland	87	Train toilet facilities	-
Merseyrail	91	The attitudes and helpfulness of the staff at the station	Value for money
Northern Rail	82	Provision of information about train times/platforms	-
Virgin Trains	89	Facilities for car parking	-

Passengers note Virgin improvements

Virgin Trains' overall passenger satisfaction score rose five points to 89% in Passenger Focus's Autumn 2009 National Passenger Survey. The major investment in additional car-parking facilities was rewarded with a 13-point improvement to 56%. But the most dramatic increases

observed were passenger satisfaction with train facilities. Improvements in satisfaction follow the introduction of the Very High Frequency timetable in February 2009, substantially increasing capacity and providing a 20-minute daytime service frequency between the capital and Birmingham/ Manchester.

The largest rises were for journey time (11 points to 93%), connections with other train services (nine points to 84%), sufficient room to sit/stand (nine points to 77%), value for money (eight points to 64%), toilet facilities (eight points to 58%) and punctuality reliability (eight points to 90%).

Passengers say “We need more trains and we need them now”

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 as efficiently as possible.

The challenge is a general shortage of stock which means that operators cannot access the extra trains required to meet peak-

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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.



£530million investment

Passenger Focus has welcomed plans for a £530m investment package to transform rail travel in the north of England through better stations and quicker, more frequent services.

Network Rail’s “Northern Hub” study identifies what needs to be done to respond to the significant growth seen in the region and to help drive economic

prosperity. The plans include:

- A 40% increase in trains per day across the region
- Capacity for a further 3.5 million passengers per year
- Quicker, more frequent services for Newcastle, Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield.

Julie Warburton, Passenger Focus manager, said: “Passengers will welcome

this as a step towards alleviating overcrowding and speeding up journeys in the north of England. The railway is getting busier and passengers are telling us that many services into Manchester and Leeds are seriously overcrowded.

Passengers also express frustration with slow journey times. These proposals, if funded and delivered, should help to alleviate these problems.”

News roundup

- **Merseyrail customer service**
Passenger Focus managers Julie Warburton and Sue Tibbett have met with Merseyrail to talk about their new ‘Fast Track’ project, which is aiming to change staff attitudes to customer service. Merseyrail was concerned about previous low scores in the National Passenger Survey for train and station staff. The company has subsequently developed staff training aids to improve passenger satisfaction.

Small improvements at Northern

Overall 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 Rail’s 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”.