

# Passenger Voice Rail

## SOUTH EAST

Independent national passenger watchdog



## Unhappy over disruption

Less than a third of First Capital Connect's (FCC) passengers is happy with the way the company handles delays, according to Passenger

Focus's Autumn 2009 National Passenger Survey (NPS).

This result of just 32% satisfaction was before the impact of this winter's

snow, short-formation trains and criticism of the company for what was considered an inadequate offer of compensation. Guy Dangerfield, Passenger Focus manager, commented that "the recent snow and industrial action, as well as the NPS results, tell us that FCC has a lot to do to restore its passengers' faith".

### South East

Train Operating Company (TOC)	Overall % satisfied	Passengers' satisfaction up	Passengers' satisfaction down
Chiltern Railways	91	Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	-
First Capital Connect	75	The ease of being able to get on and off the train	-
First Great Western	82	Availability of staff on the train	-
Heathrow Connect	90	The attitudes and helpfulness of the staff at the station	-
Heathrow Express	93	Facilities for car parking	Station facilities and services
London Midland	87	Train toilet facilities	-
Southeastern	80	-	Upkeep and repair of the train
Southern	82	Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	-
South West Trains	86	Availability of staff on the train	Cleanliness of the inside of the train

## New Oxford - London Services

In January Chiltern Railways announced a bold initiative costing £250 million to cut Marylebone - Birmingham journey times by 20% to 100 minutes and to rebuild the railway between Oxford and Bicester to allow a new service to London.

Julie Warburton, Passenger Focus manager, said: "This is good news for passengers who use Chiltern services and the railway generally, as it will give them more choice. We will work with both Chiltern and Network Rail to ensure that passenger needs during the development of the line are to the fore, with measures in place to minimise disruption to passengers while work happens."

## Sussex Rail study welcomed

Passenger Focus manager Sharon Hedges has welcomed the final version of Network Rail's Rail Utilisation Strategy (RUS) for Sussex, which sets out a 30-year vision for the county, eastern parts of Surrey and services running through south London. The fundamental challenge is a strategy to provide additional capacity, since routes into Victoria and London Bridge are expected to be at full capacity by 2020, even with the Thameslink and Brighton

line improvement schemes. Passenger Focus interviewed 3000 passengers to feed their views and needs into the RUS. In response to the finding that overcrowding on peak services stopping at Clapham Junction is a serious issue, the RUS recommends stops at Clapham Junction for two to four Gatwick Express services which currently pass through during the morning and evening peaks, helping to reduce congestion for passengers.



More room needed

## News roundup

- **A review of Kent services**

Southeastern's major timetable change in December focused on the introduction of the high-speed services between St Pancras and Kent. However, concern is growing that the changes have reduced parallel service frequencies and made some journeys, such as the East Kent Coast, much slower. This, and other passenger concerns, will be the subject of a review by Southeastern, and Passenger Focus will be pressing for improvements wherever it identifies significant passenger hardship.

- **Winter weather hits Southeastern**

Southeastern services appeared to be among the most badly affected by the severe winter weather with its punctuality record dropping from 91.7% to 70%. Tunde Olatunji, Passenger Focus manager, said: "It is essential that the industry minimises disruption for passengers, and keep them informed during these instances with accurate and timely information. Long-term, the industry must learn lessons from its experience and ensure that passengers receive a better service during similar cases of bad weather in the future."

- **Station Travel Plans for Southern**

Passenger Focus has made a submission highlighting issues for consideration in the development of Station Travel Plans at 30 Southern stations. Site audits are analysing the individual requirements at a mix of rural and urban stations.

## Jury out on Kent rail study

Rail passenger numbers are forecast to grow, putting even more pressure on today's overcrowded trains during long-term peak hours.

Despite the long term nature of the Kent Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS), which looks at the long-term needs of the region's railway, the jury is still out as to whether it will deliver enough capacity to meet future growth.

In order to put passengers' priorities at

the heart of this long-term planning, Passenger Focus carried out research on four different routes. Feedback from over 3400 passengers was received. The top five main priorities identified included –

- 1 Punctuality and reliability
- 2 Value for money for the price of the ticket
- 3 Frequency of trains on the route
- 4 Being able to get a seat
- 5 The length of time the train the journey was scheduled to take (speed).

## Improvements at Southern

Passenger Focus's Autumn 2009 National Passenger Survey (NPS) shows passenger satisfaction is either stable or improving, following the decision to renew Southern's franchise

from September 2009. Overall satisfaction stands at 82%, the sector average, and improved train scores are likely to be the result of reduced peak-time demand during the recession. A

franchise commitment to increase train capacity from 2011 should assist the operator to respond to the return of higher passenger demand.

Sharon Hedges, Passenger Focus manager, commented that "we look forward to seeing the effects of promised franchise improvements".

## FCC needs to improve service

First Capital Connect (FCC) has assured passengers that it is recruiting drivers, improving train reliability and upgrading information systems after three months of dreadful service on the Thameslink route.

Passenger Focus has raised passengers' concerns about poor service with Government and FCC management and has asked the operator to explain when issues will be resolved.

Passengers travelling on the FCC

Thameslink route have faced disruption since early November due to industrial action and severe weather conditions.

FCC has assured passengers that trains affected by snow damage are now repaired; modifications are currently being made to trains to ensure future disruption as a consequence of snow is minimised; and more drivers are being recruited.

Passenger Focus will be monitoring how FCC performs in coming months.

## Work on draft rail plan

Passenger Focus is working to ensure that passengers' needs will be addressed in the long-term planning for rail services in and around London and the South East.

Passenger Focus is contributing to detailed work being undertaken on capacity and future demand for services into Central London and a further study looking specifically at the needs in South Hampshire, which were not covered in the earlier South West study.

## NPS reveals major problem over delays at Southeastern

Only one in four of Southeastern's passengers is satisfied with the way the company handles delays (25%) which is far below the unimpressive London & South East operator sector average of 33%, according to Passenger Focus's Autumn 2009 National Passenger Survey.

The figure reflects the unreliability of Southeastern's customer information system: it has proved unstable and regularly fails.

Overall satisfaction is unchanged at 80%, two points below the sector average; punctuality/reliability is 81%

against a sector average of 82%. The train company also recorded further falls in passenger satisfaction for upkeep and repair of the train. Now that the high-speed services are running, passengers will expect Southeastern to start addressing these areas of poor customer satisfaction.