

Passenger Voice Rail

SOUTH WEST

Independent national passenger watchdog



What passengers want

Passenger Focus interviewed 1500 passengers between Bristol and Gloucester, London and Reading and at Exeter to feed their priorities into the Great Western Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS)

As the industry considers the long-term future of rail services in the area, passengers have said they want to see better punctuality, less overcrowding, later-evening trains, better connections and journey-time improvements.

Passenger Focus also consulted rail user groups and analysed National Passenger Survey feedback to inform

the submission to the RUS covering 2014-19. Mike Greedy said: "Based on what passengers have told us, we want Network Rail and the wider industry to look at improving stations, access and car parking. It is also vital for the industry to plan for increasing numbers of passengers on what are already busy routes."



Great Western study

Successful engineering works

Passenger Focus manager Jocelyn Pearson praised the way the Christmas and New Year closure of Southampton Tunnel was handled. Network Rail could not afford a repeat of the fiasco in Portsmouth when the resignalling took much longer than planned.

Both Network Rail and South West Trains had consulted

Passenger Focus on the closure and their plans for minimising disruption to passengers during the works. Jocelyn Pearson commented: "Passengers never like the prospect of bus-replacement services but it is reassuring to see the careful planning and communication which took place".

West of Exeter services supported

It took Passenger Focus manager Mike Greedy many months of negotiation to secure funding for additional services west of Exeter from December 2009, when South West Trains (SWT) began the hourly Waterloo-Exeter service and withdrew its services west of Exeter. The Department for Transport is funding First Great Western to provide services to replace the loss of the SWT trains and this has been achieved with the exception of one late Sunday Plymouth - Penzance service.

FGW still on way up

82% of First Great Western's (FGW) passengers have reported that they are happy with the company's performance. The National Passenger Survey (NPS) shows an 82% overall satisfaction score, a dramatic improvement on the position in 2007 when almost every passenger score was falling. The NPS also shows a steady improvement in the punctuality/reliability of FGW services, with a four point rise to 80%. Mike Greedy, Passenger Focus manager, said train staff deserve commendation with the NPS results showing a six-point rise in staff availability (47%), well ahead of the poor 34% London and South East train operator sector average.

South West			
Train Operating Company (TOC)	Overall % satisfied	Passengers' satisfaction up	Passengers' satisfaction down
Arriva Trains Wales	86	Ticket buying facilities	-
CrossCountry	85	Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	Facilities for car parking
First Great Western	82	Availability of staff on the train	-
South West Trains	86	Availability of staff on the train	Cleanliness of the inside of the train



Ticket office changes proposed

South West Trains has announced proposals to reduce opening hours of ticket offices at 13 stations outside London. Passenger Focus has urged all passengers to have their say and will be responding formally to South West Trains.

Jocelyn Pearson, Passenger Focus manager, said: "Our research shows that almost a fifth of passengers don't want to use ticket machines and passengers travelling in groups, particularly families with children, need advice on how to buy the cheapest tickets available".

News roundup

• Overcrowded trains

The short-formation of First Great Western (FGW) trains in late 2009 meant services were so overcrowded that schoolchildren travelling east were left behind on Totnes station platform. A meeting between Passenger Focus manager Mike Greedy and FGW managing director Mark Hopwood produced a reassurance that afternoon-peak trains would only be shortened as a last resort.

• First Great Western effort

Passenger Focus manager Mike Greedy said he heard plenty of evidence that many First Great Western staff went the extra mile to keep services running during the adverse winter weather, some walking miles to get to work.

• Improve train cleaning

Reduced cleaning regimes on South West Trains (SWT) are reflected in Passenger Focus's Autumn 2009 National Passenger Survey (NPS) results. Figures for both interior and exterior cleanliness fell by four points. Untidy or dirty trains do not encourage repeat business.

• Work completed

The rail upgrade work carried out in the Severn Tunnel area over the Christmas and New Year period has been completed. Passenger Focus representatives, who visited stations during the line closure to see how well bus-replacement services were running, found passengers' experience to be generally positive.

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 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.

Following feedback from industry and passenger groups Network Rail is considering potential options before the groups meet again. A substantial amount of work remains to be done before a draft strategy is prepared for consultation.



Board in Focus Barbara Saunders

Members of the Passenger Focus Board have been chosen for their specialised knowledge and skills, and Welsh-born Barbara Saunders, OBE has an exceptional background in consumer representation.

After university Barbara worked for 10 years with the National Federation for Women's Institutes at a time when there were 10,000 branches across the UK. Lobbying for women and their families at the newly-created European Community was excellent preparation for becoming an independent consumer consultant.

Her non-executive positions have included Chair of the Financial Services Consumer Panel, fighting for the rights of bank customers, and the Insurance

Ombudsman Bureau. Nearly all her work has entailed bringing the concerns and rights of customers to the fore in policy decisions, based on her belief in the importance of speaking up for those who don't have a voice. Vital to success with this is sound research, so that you have absolute confidence in what is being said, and Barbara pays tribute to the quality of Passenger Focus's research and evidence base.

She is particularly involved with Passenger Focus's frontline advice

services in Manchester, working with staff on audits of the train companies' complaints handling procedures as well as improving the processes of its Passenger Advice Team. Her use of First Capital Connect, London Midland, Virgin Trains and First Great Western services equips her for a role in

contributing to the relevant route utilisation strategies and the specification for the forthcoming franchise renewal on the West Coast Main Line.

Barbara is looking forward

to Passenger Focus's new bus role and has enjoyed developing her knowledge of the regional bus operators and the challenges facing customers. Although Passenger Focus will not be responsible for complaint appeals, Barbara hopes that the organisation will be able to share the watchdog's experience of good practice from the rail industry with bus operators so passengers with a problem get a timely and helpful response and services can be improved as a result.

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