

Passenger Voice Rail

WEST MIDLANDS

Independent national passenger watchdog



Good performance from Virgin Trains

Virgin Trains' overall passenger satisfaction score rose five points to 89% against a long distance operator sector average of 87% 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%, three ahead of the sector average. 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 2009, substantially increasing capacity and providing a 20-minute daytime service 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%).



Chiltern maintains its NPS performance

Since the start of its franchise in 1996, Chiltern has been one of the best-performing train operating companies (TOCs) in Passenger Focus's National Passenger Survey (NPS). In the Autumn 2009 survey 91% of its passengers said they were happy overall with the service they receive and 92% satisfied with punctuality/reliability. Chiltern is one of the few franchises with specific targets for satisfaction with train toilets, its score of 51% comparing well against a sector average of 34%.

NPS shows LM passengers benefiting

Passenger Focus's Autumn 2009 National Passenger Survey (NPS) reveal significant increases in passenger satisfaction with most aspects of London Midland's (LM) train services and facilities. Six categories recorded double-digit increases: 15 points for toilet facilities; 11 points for upkeep and repair of the train, sufficient room to stand/sit, helpfulness and attitude of staff on the train, and cleanliness of the outside; and 10 points for internal cleanliness. These improvements are the result of LM's new fleet of Desiro trains.

The only fly in the ointment, which does not appear to be reflected in the overall satisfaction rise of seven points to 87%, is the cancellation of Sunday services; on one day in September 80% were cancelled because of non-availability of drivers. Because LM's franchise includes a separate Sunday service target, the company has been served a remedial notice to address the issue. It is probable that low numbers of passengers travelling on Sunday services is the reason for this level of cancellations not having a significant impact on the NPS scores.

West Midlands

Train Operating Company (TOC)	Overall % satisfied	Passengers' satisfaction up	Passengers' satisfaction down
Arriva Trains Wales	86	Ticket buying facilities	-
Chiltern Railways	91	Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	-
CrossCountry	85	Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	Facilities for car parking
London Midland	87	Train toilet facilities	-
Virgin Trains	89	Facilities for car parking	-
Wrexham & Shropshire	98	-	-

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.

Following feedback from industry and passenger representatives, 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 later in the year.



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 she 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.

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

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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.

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 its experience of good practice from the rail industry with bus operators so passengers with a problem get a timely and helpful response.

News roundup

• Cleaner toilets on Chiltern

Passenger Focus has been working with Chiltern Railways to improve passenger satisfaction with the toilets on their trains. Chiltern previously developed plans to replace every toilet every two years, repaint the toilets on the Class 165 trains, apply an anti-graffiti coating and adjusting cleaning regimes. Passenger Focus is undertaking research with Chiltern to understand why passengers rate their satisfaction with the facilities so low to see if there is anything more the company could do to improve further this facility for passengers.

• Impressive debut

The first appearance of open-access operator Wrexham & Shropshire (W&S) in Passenger Focus's National Passenger Survey (NPS) reflects overwhelming passenger delight with its services, with 98% satisfied. The Autumn 2009 figures have no previous data for comparison, and W&S relies on franchise companies for its station facilities, so the focus for its figures is on the trains. Satisfaction with punctuality/ reliability and the helpfulness/attitude of staff are both at an impressive 98%.

• Give us your feedback

Want to have your say about something you've read in Passenger Voice? Contact: krista.hamblin@passengerfocus.org.uk



New Oxford-London services planned

In January Chiltern Railways announced a bold initiative to cut Marylebone – Birmingham journey times by 20% to 100 minutes and to rebuild the railway between Oxford and Bicester allowing a new service to London. Improvements to West Midlands journey times will begin in 2011, and the new line to Oxford is expected to open in 2013 subject to Transport & Works Act approval. The plan is expected to cost £250 million.

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. Passengers consistently tell us that they are happy with most aspects of Chiltern's service, and this is a good example of a train company continuing to invest in improving services for its passengers. 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."

For further information or to contact us go to www.passengerfocus.org.uk



Transport Secretary Andrew Adonis at the unveiling of Chiltern's investment plans