

Passenger Voice

Independent national passenger watchdog



Passengers satisfied with rail journey

National Passenger Survey (NPS) finds the majority of passengers are happy with the railway

Passenger Focus has welcomed improvements to overall satisfaction on c2c (91%), First Great Western (81%), TransPennine Express (87%) and London Overground (75%). All of these companies have upped their game and passengers have told the national passenger watchdog they have noticed significant improvements to the overall service received.

Heathrow Express (92%), MerseyRail (91%), Chiltern Railways (90%) and Heathrow Connect (90%), along with c2c, all continue to be strong performers.

However, punctuality and reliability continue to cause concerns for some passengers. For example, following the problems on the West

“Network Rail and these train companies must stay focused on restoring their passengers’ trust in the timetable.”

Coast Main Line, satisfaction with punctuality and reliability has fallen by six points to 79% on Virgin Trains and eight points to 70% on London Midland. Network Rail and the train operators must continue to focus on problematic routes to restore passenger faith.

Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief



executive, said: “Across Great Britain passengers continue to be broadly satisfied with their train services. Despite the credit crunch and train companies cutting staff, reducing cleaning and other services in some locations, passenger satisfaction has held up since last spring. This must be partly due to continued overall improvements in trains arriving on time – the key factor that underpins rail passenger satisfaction.

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Bus and coach work steps up a notch

Passenger Focus continues to explore how it can assist bus and coach passengers across England get a better deal.

To help it understand the needs and expectations of passengers, regional and national stakeholders and the views of operators, Passenger Focus has been meeting with

individuals and organisations across the industry. Its research has been in preparation for the watchdog to take on the role officially in April 2010.

David Sidebottom, bus passenger project manager, said: “We have developed a good understanding of local bus and coach services across the country.

“We are now exploring the

factors that drive bus passenger satisfaction and dissatisfaction. We also want to understand the areas that passengers want to see improved as a priority.”

Passenger Focus has teams now working in the South East, South West and West Midlands, working on issues passengers face in these areas and meeting

stakeholders. The watchdog is also undertaking research looking at passenger needs and priorities generally. Research focusing on passenger views on concessionary fares will be published this summer. It is also discussing results of bus research projects in Southampton, Bristol, Dorset, Lincolnshire, Tyne Wear and the West Midlands.

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From the chair

Boosting the passenger voice

The devil is in the detail about any franchise agreement. The rosy announcement can lose its tarnish as some of the detail dribbles out into the public domain and when the version of the contract we passengers are allowed to see finally finds its way into the House of Commons library. However, the new South Central franchise, just awarded to the current operators Southern, looks good at first glance.

Why does it look good? After the rash of franchise awards in 2007, Passenger Focus became increasingly concerned that, while the taxpayer and shareholder voice were well heard, the passenger voice was not being heard clearly enough in the process. We went to the then Secretary

of State for Transport Ruth Kelly and talked this through. Ms Kelly asked Passenger Focus to become more involved in helping the Department set the specification for the franchise rather than simply being one of the formal consultees.

Building on evidence from other research, Passenger Focus then spoke to over 6000 Southern passengers asking their priorities for improvement. The results were broken down by inner and outer London, main line and Sussex coast passengers. The feedback was clear. Passengers want more seats, more trains on time, more weekend and evening trains, visible staff and, as ever, more information.

We talked the results through in detail

with the Department and bidders, making 70 recommendations for the new franchise, all backed up with evidence and arguments for their inclusion. The Department and bidders listened and many of these aspirations have found their way into the franchise. We got a lot of what we wanted but not everything.

So have we reached Nirvana – are passengers and taxpayers going to be happy? Time will tell, but in upping the specification the Department has effectively bought more on behalf of passengers and taxpayers. The Department wants to replicate this approach in future franchise arrangements and Passenger Focus is happy to help.

Colin Foxall, Chairman

Service disruption

The National Passenger Survey shows that only 35% of passengers are satisfied with the way delays are handled, with 29% dissatisfied. Passenger Focus is working to secure improvements in this area, particularly in relation to the information passengers receive when things go wrong.

Passenger manager Guy Dangerfield said: "We will be researching passengers' experiences during delays and disruptions to understand what works well and what doesn't. As well as generating examples of best practice, this will lay bare where there are problems and give us the evidence to campaign for a step-change in this area".

Passenger Focus is also in discussion with government, Network Rail and train companies about ways to reduce the impact of engineering work on passengers.

Watchdog responds to government air plan

Passenger Focus has welcomed suggestions it might take on representation of air passengers, alongside the work it does in the rail, bus and coach sector.

The independent passenger watchdog has responded to the Department for Transport's consultation on 'Reforming the framework for the economic regulation of airports'. It is in this consultation document that the Government suggests that Passenger Focus could be given responsibility for air passenger representation.

Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief executive, said: "It's a logical step to extend our remit to cover air along with trains, buses and coaches. We're



Image courtesy of Elaine Faith

Passenger Focus would welcome air role

already meeting with industry and passenger groups, looking at how we could best work in partnership with them to get a better deal for air passengers.

"Our initial analysis has revealed some similarities between the needs of long-distance rail passengers and domestic air passengers

– primarily punctual services, good delay handling and available staff to help passengers. We're convinced that using our research-based approach we'll be able to make a difference."

Passenger Focus's submission is available at www.passengerfocus.org.uk

Information important during King's Cross works

Passengers expect to be informed of any disruption to services during the King's Cross re-development

Passenger Focus research shows that passengers welcome the industry's intention to carry out the King's Cross work without causing major disruption to train services. However, passengers reported that they were concerned that fares would rise to pay for the major investment.

Passengers said they don't believe relocating toilets and shops is a big issue while works happen but they do need signs and service information to be clear and up-to-date.

Additionally, the industry should ensure a high standard of security and provide information on how passengers can contact police during emergencies.

The research looking at passenger needs during the station's redevelopment found that passengers expected to benefit from the planned work; they anticipated more services, relief from overcrowding, a more pleasant environment and better facilities for all passengers, including those with disabilities.

The research was

commissioned by Passenger Focus, working in partnership with station owner and operator Network Rail, train operating companies which use the facility including First Capital Connect, National Express East Coast, Grand Central Railway and Hull Trains, as well as the British Transport Police.

Passenger Focus is now calling for the industry to deliver on promises that work will have a minimum impact

on services. It has also stressed the importance of keeping passengers informed of any disruption or alterations in journeys to, from and through the station and that the industry

coordinates information given to passengers while improvement works are happening. Passenger Focus and London TravelWatch will monitor passenger satisfaction while works are being undertaken.



Passenger Focus lobbies for fare change

Following publication of Passenger Focus's Fares and Ticketing Study, the watchdog has continued to champion its conclusions and recommendations with government, individual train companies and owning groups. Passenger Focus is specifically calling on the industry to:

- Offer a 12 instalment Direct Debit facility for annual season ticket purchase
- Sell 'books' of 10 single tickets which are valid anytime and offer the passenger a discount.
- That every station should display the cheapest walk-up through-ticket return price

to three key destinations

- That passengers holding an Advance ticket who wish to travel on a train for which their ticket is not valid, should be able to pay the difference between what they have already paid and the price of a new single ticket valid at that time, subject to an administration fee
- That the industry sells Advance Purchase tickets for the following day until 23:59
- Regulated fare prices should be held where train performance is poor.

Accepting one of Passenger Focus's recommendations, the Government has announced that from January 2010 RPI+1% will mean just that for regulated fares, removing train companies' ability to raise some fares by a further 5%.



Public transport under review at passenger conference

Videos taken from Passenger Focus's fully-booked 2009 Annual Conference are now available to view online at www.passengerfocus.org.uk

Guest speakers included Geoff Hoon MP; Ian Coucher, Network Rail chief executive; Richard Bowker, then National Express chief executive; and Sir Moir Lockhead, First Group chief executive.

Passenger Focus is now planning events at the main GB political party conferences being held in Bournemouth, Brighton and Manchester later this year. Further information will be posted on the Passenger Focus website nearer to the dates. If you would like to attend email matt.ayson@passengerfocus.org.uk



Passenger Focus conference delegates

News roundup

- **Watchdog reports on its work**
Passenger Focus has published its Annual Report and Accounts 2008-2009, Business Plan 2009-2010 and Corporate Plan 2009 – 2012.

The reports can be downloaded from www.passengerfocus.org.uk or are available on request by calling 0300 123 0860.

- **Comment on Welsh Scheme**
Passenger Focus has published a draft Welsh language scheme setting out how it will provide services to the public through the medium of Welsh.

That scheme is now out for public consultation and may be viewed at www.passengerfocus.org.uk

- **European railway focus**
Stations, regulation of the railway and railway noise were issues discussed at the European Passengers' Federation Council meeting held in Brussels recently.

Passenger Focus is a member of the Council, helping to ensure Great Britain's passenger views are represented at the European decision-making level.

- **Board looks to Kent**
The Passenger Focus Board continued its exploration of passenger issues, this time in Kent.

The Board held its July meeting in public at Folkestone with issues discussed including Passenger Focus's bus and coach work. Phil Medlicott, Stagecoach East Kent regional managing director, and Simon Posner, Confederation of Public Transport chief executive, discussed bus passenger issues with the Passenger Focus Board.

Rail issues were discussed with representatives from Southeastern.

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"However, Virgin Trains and London Midland passengers are fed up with not being able to rely on the timekeeping of their services, the key thing we passengers want. Network Rail and these train companies must stay focused on restoring their passengers' trust in the timetable."

Views on new trains

Passenger Focus has revealed the findings of research looking at passenger satisfaction with a range of intercity train interiors. The study is intended to help with the design of the new Super Express Train. Passenger Focus is now calling on the industry to build mock-ups of the new trains to run on the East Coast Main Line and Great Western Main Line, giving passengers the opportunity to provide feedback on design.

Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief executive, said: "Passengers will be buying

tickets to travel on these trains for the next 30 or 40 years, so it is only right that they're given a say on how trains for the 21st century should be designed."

The national passenger watchdog's research looked at passengers' views on the design of trains currently running across the British rail network. The findings show that while passengers want improved luggage space, this should not impact on the comfort of their journey. They also expect seating and legroom to be of a standard which at least meets current best practice.

The design should include improvements to grab rails, seat reservation systems and better designed toilet facilities.

The report, 'Designing for the future: Passengers' preferences for new national intercity rolling stock from 2012' is available to download from www.passengerfocus.org.uk



National Express rail future reviewed

The future of a National Express-run franchise is under review following the company predicting that without a renegotiation of franchise arrangements it would have to hand back its East Coast business.

The Government has established a publicly owned company to take over the franchise if National Express defaults on its deal at the end of the year. Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief executive, said: "This potentially brings an end to a period of uncertainty as passengers became increasingly squeezed between government and the train operating company in an unrealistic deal. Passengers will welcome the assurances from government that the level and

quality of service will not suffer in the meantime. Passenger Focus will monitor this very closely.

"Now we must begin the task of building a new passenger-focused franchise that puts passenger needs first."

Andrew Adonis, Secretary of State for Transport, said: "I can assure the travelling public that services will continue without disruption and all tickets will be honoured". Lord Adonis said he was now considering whether National Express will be able to keep its c2c and East Anglia franchises.

Passenger Focus has reported its concerns over recent months about increases in parking costs, seat reservation charges and staff cuts.

Station travel plans

Passenger Focus has welcomed the launch of the Station Travel Plan initiative, involving 31 stations across the country.

Participating stations have developed plans to encourage passengers to use more sustainable forms of transport when travelling to and from the station. This includes improving access to public transport, and providing facilities to encourage walking and cycling.

The initiative has been developed with the Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC) and supported by Passenger Focus, RSSB, and the Department for Transport (DfT).

