

Passenger Voice Wales

Independent national rail passenger watchdog



Still room to improve on trains in Wales

Although most passengers in Wales are satisfied with their train journey, calls have been made to improve ticket buying facilities, the availability of staff at stations and train frequency

Passenger Focus has launched the results of its Autumn 2008 National Passenger Survey (NPS) in the Winter 2009 Passenger Voice bulletin.

Passengers told the national rail watchdog there has been little change in the quality of service they receive on the train and at the station, with 86% of Arriva Trains Wales passengers saying they're satisfied with their overall journey. A higher percentage of passengers reported they were

satisfied with car-parking facilities, up 10 points to 58% compared with Autumn 2007 results. However, its percentage of passengers satisfied with ticket buying facilities dropped nine points (61%), the availability of staff at the station dropped 11 points to 46% and satisfaction with train frequency decreased from 82% to 76%.

Simon Pickering, Passenger Focus manager for Wales, will continue to work with Arriva Trains

Wales

Train Operating Company (TOC)	Overall % satisfied	Passengers' satisfaction up	Passengers' satisfaction down
Arriva Trains Wales	86	Car-parking facilities	Availability of staff at the station
CrossCountry	84	Car-parking facilities	Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand
First Great Western	80	How well the company dealt with delays	No decline in satisfaction scores
Virgin Trains	84	How a request to station staff was handled	Punctuality/reliability

Wales to drive further improvements for passengers. Simon will also work closely with other Passenger

Focus managers to improve the experience passengers receive on cross-border services.

Express Holyhead to Cardiff service begins

Passenger Focus research has helped inform the development of the new 'Express' service from Holyhead to Cardiff.

Passenger Focus found that passengers believe a saving of at least 30 minutes over existing North-South Wales journey times was necessary to make a significant difference to their views of the service. The research, which has been shared with Arriva Trains Wales and other stakeholders, also found that first-class accommodation

and improved catering, both elements of the new 'Gerallt Gymro' service, were considered important. Passengers were also very keen to see access to power points and wireless internet on-board the train, both of which are planned to be added to the new service in the coming months.

Like other stakeholders, Passenger Focus is disappointed that the service is currently unable to call at Wrexham, but we welcome various plans to make

this possible in the future.

The weekdays-only train leaves Holyhead at 5.32 am for an arrival in the Welsh capital at 9.58 am and calls at Bangor, Llandudno Junction, Rhyl, Flint, Chester, Crewe, Shrewsbury and Newport. Breakfast is served to first-class passengers and dinner is provided on the return journey. This leaves Cardiff at 4.17pm, arriving at Holyhead at 8.49pm, calling additionally at Cwmbran and Abergavenny.

More Virgin ticket restrictions

Passengers travelling between mid-Wales and London are the latest to feel the impact of ticketing restrictions introduced by Virgin Trains.

Until the last fares round, there was no restriction on the use of off-peak tickets for travel between mid-Wales and the

English capital. While passengers can arrive in London using an off-peak ticket at 10.14 am, the return journey is even more restricted with off-peak tickets invalid before a 3.26 pm arrival in Aberystwyth.

Passenger Focus believes the new restrictions are particularly

unfair for mid-Wales passengers as they only have access to a two-hourly service for part of their journey.

"Passengers who have to make long journeys from mid-Wales are being penalised by these new ticket restrictions," Simon Pickering, Wales manager



for Passenger Focus, said. "Passengers tell us in our National Passenger Survey that their fares represent poor value for money and this is another example of train companies introducing back-door price rises."



Stella Mair Thomas

The National Assembly for Wales' representative on the Passenger Focus Board brings extensive experience at a senior level in the fields of tourism, marketing, communications, corporate affairs and television regulation

Throughout her working life in Wales, Stella Mair Thomas has been a regular rail user. "Early in my career, at the Wales Tourist Board, I became very familiar with the railway network in Wales and my marketing role involved actively promoting the benefits of using our scenic lines, such as the Heart of Wales and Cambrian lines.

"Transport links to and within Wales are vital to our whole economy. We must have efficient modes of transport which are sensibly integrated to enable communities across Wales to get to and from work, and to access other amenities such as shops and leisure facilities.

"It is with enormous pleasure that I am now in a position to represent rail passengers in Wales, to fight for improvements which rail passengers tell us they want: more trains, improved stations with more parking spaces, punctual and reliable services and better connections. And passengers

want fares to be affordable.

The success of keeping fares at the right level has been demonstrated by the huge success of the reopened Ebbw Vale line, which has given greater access for passengers along the line to jobs and social activities.

"The Welsh Assembly Government's Transport Minister has recently announced major plans for improving transport links across Wales which includes a 'rail forward programme' of developments. These include the launch of the Holyhead to Cardiff Express, a commitment to link Ebbw Vale to Newport, extra carriages and services for the Valleys lines, improvements to the rail infrastructure between Wrexham and Chester and between Gowerton and Loughor. These are two of the worst pinch points in the Wales rail network so these projects should unlock better and more frequent services."

Tackling capacity problems between Cardiff and Bristol

Train capacity between Cardiff and Bristol is still an issue for passengers despite services on the route being increased to a three-car operation in May 2008. Rolling stock shortages in other parts of the First Great Western

franchise have resulted in the running of two-car instead of three-car trains on occasions, and this has led to severe overcrowding, particularly from Severn Tunnel Junction. The local action group, Severn Tunnel Action Group (STAG), has

provided monthly data to help identify problems along this route.

There is a growing push to see four-car operations on the route to cater for existing and future growth. Passenger Focus supports the call for enhanced capacity along this route and will use every opportunity to highlight the issue with the Welsh Assembly Government and the Department for Transport.

News roundup

- **Focus on concessionary fares**
Passenger Focus has organised focus groups in Barmouth, Llanrwst and Llanwrtyd Wells to help with the evaluation of the Welsh Assembly's concessionary fares scheme. This is currently operating on a number of rural lines. More details of our findings in the next edition.

- **Evidence to Welsh Affairs committee**
Passenger Focus recently appeared before the Welsh Affairs Select Committee examining the provision of cross-border services. We emphasised the importance of safeguarding the frequency and quality of direct services between Wales and key cities in England in future franchise agreements.

- **Helping disabled passengers**
Following the recent release of a research report into the Assisted Passenger Reservation Service (APRS), Passenger Focus is sharing ideas on best practice in this area with Arriva Trains Wales. The APRS enables passengers with disabilities to book assistance to help them access rail services.



- **Understanding Chester-Shrewsbury passengers**
A survey to find out more about rail users along a key section of the North-South Wales rail route has been undertaken by the Chester to Shrewsbury Rail Partnership, with help from Passenger Focus. We helped with the research design and data analysis, as well as providing a prize to encourage participation.

- **New Wrexham service**
The introduction of the new timetable from 14 December saw the start of a new Virgin Trains service from Wrexham to Chester and London.



Look at Wales on Passenger Focus website

In February Passenger Focus will launch a new section on our website to show the work we are doing on behalf of passengers around the country. The new area of the site will show our work by region and nation, train operating

company, route and issues such as getting a seat or fares and ticketing. It will also feature Google Maps™ technology which will allow website users to view any Passenger Focus work with a specific geographic location.