

London Midland offers passengers apology

Passenger Focus manager Julie Warburton has welcomed London Midland's public apology to passengers and its plans outlining how it intends to restore standards

London Midland's services have received poor passenger satisfaction scores in recent surveys, caused by West Coast Main Line disruptions through bad weather, engineering work, lineside equipment failure and industrial action.

London Midland has developed an eight-point action plan that ranges from quick wins to longer-term benefits and includes:

- More seats through new services
- Adjustments to timetables in response to customer feedback and discussions with Passenger Focus
- New trains: 37 four-car trains are being added; 19 have already been delivered
- Better punctuality with more information about performance at stations and on London Midland's website
- Better information at stations through renewal of electronic information and public address systems, beginning with Watford and Milton Keynes. Other stations will be updated before the end of the year
- Shorter queues, thanks to more staff at ticket windows at peak-times and a new website with easier on-line purchasing procedures
- Station improvements through an £11 million investment, plus a further £9.5 million partnership funding to improve 40 smaller stations.
- Listening, through creation of a 1000 – member passenger panel. 'Meet the Manager' sessions will be held every two weeks.

Passenger Focus will monitor services and how passengers respond to the improvements.

More trains on time

Britain's rail passengers enjoyed the best train punctuality figures ever recorded with 90.8% of train services arriving on time in the 12 months up to May 2009. This follows year-on-year improvements from a low of 78.6% in 2002.

Punctual trains are a top priority for passengers and the industry has done well to improve the number of trains which run on time. However, nearly one in 10 trains run with delays which means there is still room for improvement. When delays do happen, the industry must get better at providing passengers with information and must tell them about the compensation they are owed.

Julie Warburton, passenger manager, has met with Network Rail to discuss what it intends to do to improve performance on the WCML. "Passengers don't want to play a game of chance when they get on a train but have to be able to rely on the timetable."

Passengers report satisfaction with journey

More than 25,000 passengers have given their view of the country's railway in Passenger Focus's Spring 2009 National Passenger Survey.

The survey found the majority of passengers (81%) across Great Britain say they are satisfied with their rail experience.

The national passenger watchdog is now working with Great Britain's train companies to improve those areas passengers have identified as being problematic.

Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief executive, said: "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."

The National Passenger Survey is now classified as Official Statistics and is named in the Official Statistics Order 2009. Full National Passenger Survey results can be found at www.passengerfocus.org.uk

West Midlands

Train Operating Company (TOC)	Overall % satisfied	Passengers' satisfaction up	Passengers' satisfaction down
Arriva Trains Wales	87	Cleanliness of the outside of the train	–
Chiltern	90	The helpfulness and attitude of staff on the train	The space for luggage
CrossCountry	85	Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	–
London Midland	78	Train toilet facilities	How well the train company dealt with delays
Virgin Trains	86	Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	Punctuality/reliability

West Coast Route Utilisation Strategy underway

Passenger Focus is exploring passenger priorities for West Coast rail services as part of the biggest Rail Utilisation Strategy (RUS) Network Rail has undertaken to date

These strategies look at the future needs and potential development of the route and members of the Network Rail stakeholder management group (SMG) will analyse the current West Coast Main Line, looking at capacity, capability, infrastructure and performance. It will examine the gap between the current situation and aspirations for the route. It will run in tandem with the West Midlands RUS.

Informal consultation will be

undertaken throughout the rail industry and with the wider community to ensure passenger views and ideas are considered and where appropriate included in the strategy. Passenger Focus has already facilitated meetings in Crewe, Carlisle and Northampton between Network Rail and 39 rail user groups/community rail partnerships.



Passenger issues are under review

After a presentation about the timetable and scope of the RUS, attendees split into workshops to consider the issues for passengers in their area, the possible solutions and their top three priorities for inclusion in the RUS.

A follow-up event will be held later in the year when the SMG has considered the gaps and identified a range of possible solutions.

In the autumn, Passenger Focus will undertake route-specific passenger research for a report to the SMG before the end of the year. It will underpin Passenger Focus's response to the draft consultation, due for circulation in January 2010 with completion by June 2010.

Virgin to improve disruption information

Train companies' failure to keep passengers informed about disruption is one of passengers' major gripes with the railway.

At Passenger Focus's suggestion, this problem and possible solutions will be discussed in depth at a Virgin Passenger Panel meeting. Virgin will create a scenario of a major route blockage, and the panel will split

into three groups to discuss what information they would expect/require at home preparing to travel, at the station and on the train. The outcomes will assist Virgin in planning how to improve this very important passenger requirement and to ensure passengers are satisfied that they are being kept up to date with timely, accurate and accessible information.



Information important

Bus work progresses



Passenger Focus is testing how it will take on the role of bus passenger representation

by establishing pilots at three locations. Paul Fullwood is leading the pilot in the West Midlands and has begun to meet passengers and get their views, building on passenger research and identifying priorities to take to funders, providers and stakeholders. Issues raised locally include punctuality, timetables, information provision and fares.



Passenger Focus is meeting with bus passengers in the West Midlands

Early input to future rail plans

Passenger Focus is working to provide rail user groups with an early opportunity to help shape the scope of a 'second generation' Route Utilisation Strategy for London and the South East. An initial consultation meeting in July asked passengers to consider key issues and potential solutions to be fed into the steering group. Further input will be invited during the next stages of work.

Improving stations a priority

The Department for Transport is funding work to improve stations in partnership with local authorities and other stakeholders.

The National Station Improvements Programme Local Delivery Groups meet to prioritise basic improvements and the much-needed 'extras' that should go into the submitted plans.

Passenger Focus manager Robert Samson is involved with the project to give the passengers' perspective. The project should bring about real and visible differences to passengers. To help assess the impact of the National Station Improvement Programme, Passenger Focus has surveyed 2200 passengers at the first 25 stations to benefit from improvement works. Now that the improvement works are underway, Passenger Focus is working with Network Rail to identify when it can go back to see if the views of the passengers have changed.