

## Virgin high-frequency timetable begins



Passenger Focus has criticised new year problems on the West Coast Main Line (WCML).

Anthony Smith, chief executive for the national rail watchdog Passenger Focus, said: "The upheaval caused by a horrific air accident and overhead line failures within days of each other are a double whammy for WCML passengers. This is not the best start to the new year for passengers and we hope that a normal service will resume as soon as possible – especially since passengers are now paying more to use the train. Furthermore, with the major investment the

WCML has undergone, passengers would expect to see a greater resilience and a reduction of infrastructure problems."

Passenger Focus will continue to monitor performance on the WCML, and in particular the launch of the Virgin high-frequency service.

All the work on the WCML has been geared towards the new timetable that came into operation on 14 December, which sees three trains an hour each way between Manchester and London, Birmingham and London, and hourly services between Liverpool, Preston and Euston. The six-year

upgrade will result in 30 per cent more Virgin train services on the route every day.

However, there is still concern about continuing weekend engineering works to improve line speed and capacity on the northern part of the route between Oxenholme Lake District and Lockerbie on Saturday and Sunday from 31 January to 22 March. Passenger Focus will be keeping a close eye on the new timetable, together with how well Network Rail and Virgin handle alternative services during the line closures.

## One year on

London Midland (LM) has marked its first anniversary. Passenger Focus research shows that punctuality and reliability remain at the top of passenger concerns for LM users. Punctuality has reached a high of over 91 per cent, but in the Autumn 2008 National Passenger Survey passenger satisfaction with punctuality slipped back to the mid-70s, due in no small part to the continuing issues arising from the upgrade of the West Coast Main Line. Passengers will expect that the works completed over Christmas and New Year will allow LM to improve its performance and passenger satisfaction significantly. Reliability will also be helped by the introduction of the new Class 350 Desiros and passengers will welcome the extra seats on the new services introduced in December 2008.

## Working for better train services

Passenger Focus has found record numbers of people across Great Britain are satisfied with their train journey.

Launching the Autumn National Passenger Survey 2008 in the Winter 2009 Passenger Voice bulletin, the rail watchdog has reported that 83% of passengers are satisfied with their rail journey.

Although passengers rate their overall

experience quite high, Passenger Focus has identified several areas where improvements must be made. Passenger Focus managers Paul Fullwood and Julie Warburton will be working with train operators in the West Midlands to make certain passengers' concerns are addressed in 2009.

Full results can be found at [www.passengerfocus.org.uk](http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk)

### West Midlands

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
Chiltern	90	No improvements in satisfaction scores	Space for luggage on the train
CrossCountry	84	Car-parking facilities	Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand
London Midland	80	Cleanliness of the inside of the train	Car-parking facilities
Virgin Trains	84	How a request to station staff was handled	Punctuality/reliability

# New timetable changes

There are winners and losers in the timetable changes that came into effect recently

CrossCountry timetable changes aim to create a simplified service, making better use of limited capacity at Birmingham New Street station and providing consistent journey patterns across the day. Clock-face timetables will also be easier to understand and hopefully encourage more people to use trains. Punctuality should be improved as there will be fewer train conflicts at

Birmingham New Street, and crowding is being addressed by the introduction of eight-car trains on the busiest route, Edinburgh–Plymouth. Extra seating will also be available on refurbished Voyagers across the CrossCountry network.

However, changes to CrossCountry services mean that some passengers will find they need to change trains to complete their journeys. As well as Birmingham New Street, there will be alternative interchange options. Passenger Focus encouraged the Department for Transport to insist bidders for the new franchise had an interchange



strategy as Birmingham New Street is extremely busy and due to undergo major redevelopment throughout the life of the CrossCountry franchise. CrossCountry has produced leaflets and posters explaining the interchange options and has begun briefing staff so they can better assist passengers who require help.

## West Coast RUS work starts

The Stakeholder Management Group for the Network Rail (NR) West Coast Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS) has met for the first time. This is the final RUS for the network and the process will last for around 20 months. It will look at a variety of issues on the West Coast Main Line, including evaluating how the December 2008 timetables are working in practice. Passenger Focus plans to undertake research in late Summer 2009 with passengers at various points along the route. In addition, we plan to hold meetings between NR and Rail User Groups to find out what local groups believe the priorities for action should be.

## Progress on station car-parks

Virgin Trains' car-park expansions are well underway, with developers on site at Birmingham International, Rugby and Stafford, creating additional parking spaces either at ground level by extending the existing car-parks or by building multi-storey car-parks. Birmingham International will have 835, Rugby 269 and Runcorn 198. Coventry and

Wolverhampton are next in line for work to commence.

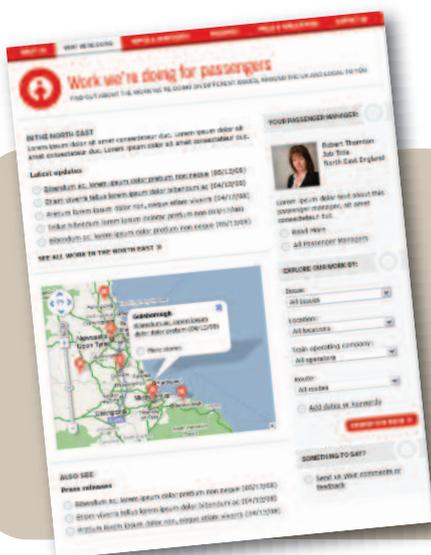
Passenger Focus has asked Virgin Trains to include details of local bus services and alternative car-parks on its leaflets, as well as posters about car-park improvements to help passengers to get to and from their local station as easily as possible during building work.

## London Midland growth

The numbers of passengers using London Midland (LM) services on the southern part of the West Coast Main Line has exceeded the expectations of the company when it set its plans, and it has had to respond. Passenger Focus supported the decision not to replace all the existing train fleet on this route when

new Desiro trains are delivered, but to retain some of them to supplement the new rolling stock. The direct Birmingham–Northampton–London Euston services introduced from December 2008 should allow all LM Euston peak arrivals between 7.40 and 8.45 am to be 12-car, with more 12-cars in the afternoon peak. Measures to ease future

overcrowding may include extra new trains, revising the timetable further, and acceleration of the Northampton service by deploying higher speed trains on the fast lines. Whatever mix of solutions is chosen, LM must accommodate growth if passenger satisfaction with the ability to get a seat is to be improved.



## New 'regional' area 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.