

Passenger Voice

Yorkshire and The Humber

Independent national passenger watchdog



More trains needed for TPE passengers

The independent passenger watchdog has taken up passengers' concerns about fares, ticketing, overcrowding and plans for more carriages with TransPennine Express (TPE)

Sue Tibbett, Passenger Focus manager, has been looking at the region's services and checking where passengers are struggling to get a seat, and possible solutions; how TPE plans to accommodate growth on its routes; how trains promised by government will help solve problems; and what can be done to improve information given to passengers during delays.

Because of the routes TPE runs, there are often large numbers of leisure travellers on the train at times when other companies' trains are less busy. Trains are particularly

busy at weekends and around events like the York races, the Edinburgh Festival, football and other sporting fixtures. Despite investment to increase capacity, TPE faces a real and growing challenge to meet demand.

TPE has responded by pricing tickets in a way that encourages passengers to avoid travelling on services that are predicted to be busy. TPE is also looking at its fares and retailing strategy to address overcrowding.

The most pressing need, however, is for more trains on TPE routes to cope with



New trains are needed

increasing demand. Passenger Focus is calling on the Department for Transport to deliver new trains urgently to allow TPE to provide a punctual, reliable and fast service between the key northern cities.

Catering on CrossCountry

CrossCountry has analysed passengers' preferences for catering on its services, comparing the at-seat service with the 'shop' facility which was provided

on Voyager trains.

Passenger Focus research shows that getting a seat is the number one priority for CrossCountry passengers and having to get up to buy

refreshments can mean passengers run the risk of losing their seat. Many passengers also favour the at-seat service because they are reluctant to leave luggage unattended. As Passenger Focus manager Sue Tibbett comments:

"The important thing for passengers is that CrossCountry provides access to affordable, good quality refreshments on its long-distance services. We will be reviewing how this new at-seat service is received by passengers."

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

Yorkshire and The Humber

Train Operating Company (TOC)	Overall % satisfied	Passengers' satisfaction up	Passengers' satisfaction down
CrossCountry	85	Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	-
East Midlands Trains	80	Connections with other forms of public transport	-
First TransPennine Express	87	Punctuality/reliability	How well the train company dealt with delays
National Express East Coast	87	Facilities for car parking	Connections with other forms of public transport
Northern	80	-	Train toilet facilities

Seniors' Railcard problems on TPE services solved

Passenger Focus has worked with TransPennine Express (TPE) to overcome ticketing issues some passengers with Senior Railcards have experienced when trying to buy a ticket for their full journey at the discounted price



Senior Railcard issue resolved

Sue Tibbett, Passenger Focus manager, learned that holders of Senior Railcards who boarded the train at Slaithwaite or Marsden, between Manchester and Huddersfield, were being penalised by TPE staff when they joined a connecting service at Huddersfield. The passengers were being told they could not pay the reduced fare because they had not bought a ticket before they boarded

the train – even though there is no facility to buy tickets at these stations.

On Passenger Focus's appeal, TPE accepted that it is unreasonable to insist that any passenger, especially older passengers risk missing their onward connection at Huddersfield by buying a ticket at the connecting station. TPE has briefed staff to use their discretion in these instances.

Franchise review

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".



News roundup

• York gates

Passenger Focus continues discussions with National Express East Coast about the gating of York station. Key issues are whether sufficient gates are proposed to ensure the smooth flow of passengers on and off the platforms and arrangements for Grand Central passengers to buy tickets on board the train. Passenger Focus has also opposed automatic ticket gates at Sheffield station because it restricts access to a key stop on the city's tram network.

• Rail tour

Passenger Focus spoke with Lord Andrew Adonis, now Secretary of State for Transport, about passenger issues and concerns during his five-day railway tour of Great Britain.

• Northern consultation

Northern has begun consultation with Passenger Focus on timetable changes for December 2010, and will be holding a stakeholder forum during the summer. Only very minor changes are expected this winter.

Board in Focus Christine Knights

Christine Knights sits on the Passenger Focus board, coming to the position from the then Rail Passengers Committee for North East England, which she chaired

Christine has had a long interest in consumer organisations, having worked for Consumers International in the emerging markets of Eastern Europe. Her portfolio on the board includes personal security on trains and at stations, and she brings to it her experience as a member of the British Transport Police Authority (BTP), the Community Safety Steering Group and involvement in the Rail Safety and Standards Board Personal Security Group.

For Christine improving station security is a priority. National Passenger Survey scores indicate a higher level of satisfaction with on-train security, thanks to a generally better staff presence and the CCTV cameras that are fitted to many new trains. She believes a key improvement to station security would be for local authorities to see railway stations as part of the community space, helped by moves

to use stations and surrounding buildings for complementary activities. Christine also believes that better co-ordination is needed between train operating companies, BTP and other stakeholders in making plans to cope with major events.

Better information to smooth the door-to-door journey using car, bus or bike is another of Christine's aspirations, as well as tackling overcrowding on commuter services in regional centres. Christine points out that huge improvements have been made in recent years' citing Network Rail's transformation of Hull Paragon station and the fulfilment of wide-ranging promises for a better passenger experience made by TransPennine's Managing Director, Vernon Barker, at the beginning of the franchise. However, Christine argues there is still more to be achieved to improve the railway for passengers.