

Passenger Voice Wales

Independent national rail passenger watchdog

Passengerfocus
putting rail passengers first

Wales study welcome, but more needed

Passenger Focus has welcomed many positive proposals in the draft Wales Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS), but believes further options need to be taken forward if the rail network is to meet its full potential

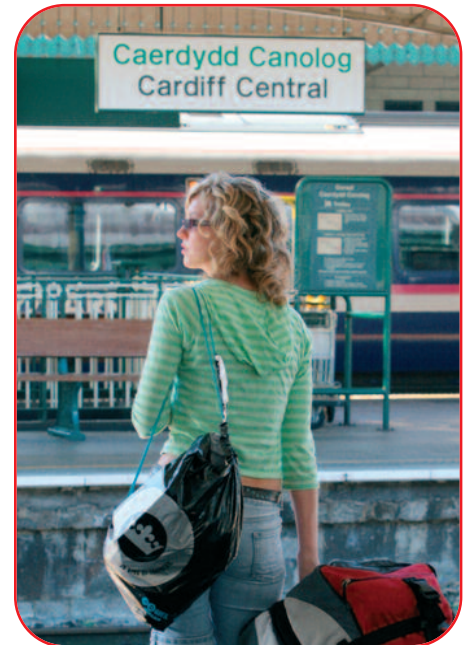
Passenger Focus responded to the recent consultation on the draft RUS, which is a key document in rail industry planning. Passenger Focus examined the options from the passengers' perspective, based on interviews with 4085 passengers.

Though Passenger Focus found much in the document to support, we believe there are some important options to meet passengers' needs that the RUS is not proposing to take forward. The actions that Passenger Focus would like to see progressed would increase train frequencies, reliability and connectivity, improve punctuality and make stations more user-friendly. If the Welsh rail network is to meet its full potential, firm commitments to fund the projects will also be needed.

Passenger Focus is calling for:

- a real step-change in passenger services for Wales – for example, faster journeys between North and South Wales
- meeting specific passenger aspirations, such as improved frequency for the Cambrian line and to South West Wales
- improvements that complement other social and economic objectives – linking Ebbw Vale with Newport and extra services on the Heart of Wales line, for example
- improvements to stations and an increase in car-park capacity.

Our response commends the train operating companies in Wales for recent improvements in their services as reflected in passenger satisfaction surveys. However, it also echoes a nationwide concern over the substitution of buses for trains during engineering work and



the full fares paid for such disrupted services. Over half the passengers travelling on such days were unaware of the substitution before arriving at the station, and 56% of passengers said they needed to know that their journey would be significantly longer.

Station improvements a priority

Passenger Focus would like to see improvements to stations become one of the priorities for rail investment in Wales.

The National Passenger Survey carried out by Passenger Focus indicates that stations in Wales fall well below the average for Britain: stations operated by Arriva Trains Wales came bottom in four out of 12 station attributes, and second lowest in another two. Further surveys with passengers find that their priorities for improvement include: accurate information on train arrivals/departures; toilets; and waiting shelters.

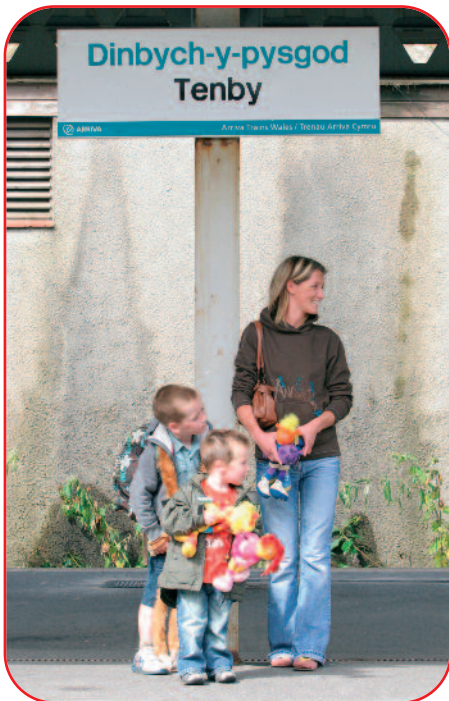


Time for new trains

Passenger Focus believes trains operated by Arriva Trains Wales on many of its services are in need of replacement. The Pacers and Class 150s are well below passengers' expectations, while the Class 158s are also showing their age. Passenger Focus has outlined the need for new trains in its Wales Rail Utilisation Strategy response. An ideal solution would be a standard unit with a variable interior configuration to allow for different needs for seating layout, luggage space, bicycle racks and catering facilities.

Improving rail in the South West

Passenger Focus research is helping shape plans for improved rail services west of Swansea that are currently being developed by the South West Wales Integrated Transport Consortium (SWWITCH)



During the study we interviewed 610 passengers travelling between Swansea and Whitland.

Passengers were asked: why they chose to use the train; if there were any factors limiting their use of the service; and what improvements they would most like to see at stations.

The majority said that they chose train because it was the most direct route (37%), although a significant number (23%) said that they used the train because they had no access to a car. For 37% of respondents there was no factor limiting their use of the train, while 17% said that the cost was the main factor in this regard.

Passenger Focus has shared the results of the survey with SWWITCH to help inform the West of Swansea Rail Services project.

Accessibility issues in Wales

Passenger Focus manager Simon Pickering (pictured left) has been involved in helping Arriva Trains Wales (ATW) set up a disabled passenger group, which had its inaugural meeting recently in Cardiff. Among the issues discussed was ATW's recently updated guide for passengers with reduced mobility, and



Passenger Focus's research into the Assisted Passenger Reservation Service (APRS).

Simon also sits on a group newly appointed by the Welsh Assembly Government to look at public transport for those with sensory impairment. The 'task and finish' group will make recommendations to address factors that inhibit the greater use of public transport by such passengers.

News roundup

• Rail's role in social inclusion

The vital importance of train services in meeting government goals for social inclusion in Wales is borne out by recent Passenger Focus surveys. The results found that 16% of passengers had no alternative means of transport, but on some routes it was considerably higher: 23% both on the Cambrian line and in South West Wales. Among those older than 65 years using the Cambrian line, 21% had no access to a car.

• Welsh users embrace new ticket technology

A very high proportion of rail users in Wales are willing to have tickets sent to their computers or mobile telephones, Passenger Focus research has found. Users of the Valley Lines were the most keen to have them sent to their mobiles, at an astonishing 53%. Most of the regional surveys found around 45% willing to receive bar-coded tickets on their mobiles, while 57-63% of users were happy to receive them through their computer.

• Love those trolleys!

Given the length of many journeys in Wales, it is not surprising that passengers are anxious to obtain refreshments. On the Cambrian line 69% of users in a recent Passenger Focus survey said they bought refreshments, while on the Marches line between North and South Wales, 72% ranged from usual to occasional patrons of the trolley; 42% said they would buy from a hot buffet service.

• Passenger Focus on conference platform

Passenger Focus manager Simon Pickering and Board Member for Wales Stella Mair Thomas will be attending the 4th annual Transport Solutions Cymru Conference, to be held on 20 November at the University of Aberystwyth. Simon will speak on 'Passengers' needs for North-South rail services in Wales'.

• Meeting with bus and rail passengers

Passenger Focus's Simon Pickering will be attending the Bus User Surgery in Swansea to give passengers the chance to provide feedback on their train journey as well as voice concerns about buses.

The Bus Users UK event is run to give passengers the opportunity to talk to operators in their local area and raise concerns about the public transport provided.

Input to Regional Transport Plans

With the first Regional Transport Plans (RTP) currently being prepared by Wales' four transport consortia, Passenger Focus is ensuring that the interests of rail passengers are being well

represented. We have attended a series of consultation events with each of the consortia, and are also preparing responses to all of the formal consultation exercises. Although major

rail projects will continue to be delivered by the Welsh Assembly Government, several schemes such as station and interchange improvements will be delivered by the consortia. The RTPs follow the Wales Transport Strategy, which was launched earlier this year, while the National Transport Plan is also due to be launched soon.