

West Coast Main Line upgrade

The West Coast Main Line (WCML) upgrade will deliver passengers extra services to Manchester, Birmingham and other places, will mean more trains at the weekend and a substantial cut to journey times along the route

The additional trains and shorter journey times should go some way to addressing passenger priorities for extra services and more trains running on time.

The industry acknowledges the engineering work needed to bring these

massive improvements has caused years of weekend pain and disruption to passengers on an ongoing and frequent basis. Therefore, it is now essential that engineering works do not overrun into 2009 and cause further delay and disruptions to passengers.

Passenger Focus has raised its concerns to the industry that many

passengers have had to pay full-price fares for disrupted and longer journeys, often on bus replacement services. This has sometimes been because of train timetables being loaded on to the website too late to offer lower advance purchase fares.

There is now also concern about how the upgraded line will cope with the increase in services from December 2008. However, Passenger Focus will be monitoring this situation very closely. And, Network Rail assures us that its plans are running to time and from January 2009 the inconvenience and distress caused to passengers will fade into a distant memory.



Engineers work to upgrade the line

Passengers to have extra Pendolino trains

Passenger Focus has welcomed the announcement that commercial negotiations have been concluded for 106 extra Pendolino carriages to expand capacity on Virgin's services on the West Coast Main Line (WCML). There will be four new 11-car trains, and the other 62 cars will lengthen 31 of the 52 nine-car trains to 11 vehicles. Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief executive, said: "The extra seats and more trains will be very welcome news for hard-pressed passengers using the WCML. Our research shows that reducing overcrowding is a key priority for passengers."

However, the long delay in gaining agreement for the much-needed coaches means that it will be 2012 before they are in service.

Passenger Focus takes bus to party conference

Passenger Focus arrived at the Conservative Party conference in Birmingham on a double-decker bus to highlight its up and coming role as bus and coach passenger watchdog for England in 2009.

The move was to encourage passengers, politicians and stakeholders to visit Passenger Focus at the conference and put across their views on the state of public transport.

Pictured below are: Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief executive, Colin Foxall, Passenger Focus chairman and Stephen Hammond MP. Passenger Focus also attended the Labour and Liberal Democrat Party Conferences in the bus.



News roundup

• New Street to be rebuilt

Birmingham New Street station is to be rebuilt as part of a £600m Gateway Project. The concourse will be three and a half times the size of the current one, which should help to transform the passenger experience. Passenger Focus will work with the industry to ensure disruption to passengers is minimised.

• Improvement programme

In last year's White Paper the Government highlighted the value passengers place on improved station facilities and noted the work Passenger Focus had done in identifying passenger needs at stations. As a result, £150m was made available for match funding improvements at the top 500 stations by passenger numbers. Local Delivery Groups (LDG) have been set up for each train operating company, and the London Midland LDG, on which Passenger Focus manager Paul Fullwood sits, has been actively pursuing schemes and funding partners to bring benefits to passengers.

An innovative approach has been to treat the stations on the Chase Line in the West Midlands and Staffordshire as one station. With potential funding from Centro as well as other local authorities, the planned improvements to lighting, CCTV, customer information systems and shelters will bring benefits to match the investment going in to upgrade the line and signalling will result in a 'showcase' line for passengers.

National Passenger Survey online

An online database version of Passenger Focus's twice-yearly National Passenger Survey (NPS) is now available. Besides providing all the information in the report, the Reportal database allows registered users to review previous years' surveys and devise their own comparisons based on specific interests.

The NPS is the largest study of rail users in Europe with over

53,000 passengers completing questionnaires about their rail journeys each year. In addition to Reportal, Passenger Focus has created an on-line facility which will allow the user to access comments made about services provided on the train and at the station, giving a clear idea of passenger feedback. For further information, go to www.npsreportal.org.uk

Virgin Passenger Panel

The members of its new Passenger Panel met at Virgin's Talent Academy in Crewe along with Passenger Focus

Julie Warburton from Passenger Focus facilitated the first part of the meeting with the panel to find out what they wanted to achieve, what type of information they needed from Virgin, how they could communicate between meetings and how regularly meetings should be held. A lively debate took place and panel members were clear that they wanted to:

- represent the views of Virgin passengers
- influence Virgin's plans
- help Virgin achieve a better travel experience for passengers
- be able to make a difference.

Virgin and the panel initially talked about stations and discussed issues such as

station signage, car-parking and cleanliness. Virgin staff answered queries and noted concerns. Discussion turned to fares and tickets, including the cost of weekend fares, booking tickets over the internet, using the fast ticket machines and seat bookings.

Passenger Focus sees passenger panels as a useful way for train companies to talk directly to their customers. Virgin's Passenger Panel members are from all walks of life and different areas of the country. They are the eyes and ears of the wider Virgin community of passengers and are there to represent all passengers' views.

Safer travel team

While the risk of incidents is very low, fear of crime and anti-social behaviour is a real barrier for some passengers to using rail services

We identified these concerns as part of our submission on the London Midland (LM) franchise specification. LM has made a commitment to raise passengers' perceptions of personal safety and security when

using trains and stations in the West Midlands by 10% within the first three years of its franchise. The latest National Passenger Survey results show the satisfaction rate amongst passengers is currently around 50%.

Some of the measures that LM will implement relate to infrastructure; secure station accreditation will be achieved at 73 stations and a similar scheme for car parks (Park Mark) and at 10 station car-parks; and LM intends to remove graffiti within 24 hours. In addition, LM is deploying its Safer Travel Team, a specialist multi-disciplinary task force of private security guards working alongside revenue protection inspectors and the British Transport Police to provide



reassurance and support. Passenger Focus has provided evidence of what passengers concerns are, and, using the Cross City Line – the busiest in the West Midlands – where concerns exist. We look forward to seeing initiatives bear fruit.