

Improving Punctuality for Passengers

Independent national passenger watchdog

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Passengerfocus
putting passengers first

Punctuality is of key importance for rail passengers and the main influence on overall journey satisfaction¹ and one of the top three priority areas for further improvement². Given the significance of performance, Passenger Focus has investigated how customer satisfaction with punctuality is affected by the actual level of delay they experience.

The current measure of railway punctuality is the Public Performance Measure (PPM). This records the performance of individual trains against their planned timetable. A train is defined as on time if it arrives within five minutes of the planned destination arrival time for shorter-distance operators; or within ten minutes for long-distance operators. Punctuality is measured at the train's final destination. The Department for Transport (DfT) uses PPM as one of the measures in the High Level Output Statement (HLOS) with the aim being to secure a reduction in delays experienced by passengers.

Passenger Focus has previously undertaken a small-scale piece of work, in conjunction with the DfT, comparing passengers' experience of punctuality with that recorded by PPM. Analysing responses to questions regarding delays from the National Passenger Survey (NPS), we found that passengers recorded a worse level of punctuality than that given by the corresponding PPM figures. The DfT subsequently gave an undertaking in the 2007 White Paper 'Delivering a Sustainable Railway' to ensure that the industry's understanding of the passenger experience of delay is as comprehensive as possible.

Latest research

Our latest research has examined in greater depth passengers' experience of delay and how it corresponds with PPM figures. The work examined in detail the correlation between



passenger satisfaction with punctuality as measured by the National Passenger Survey (NPS) for a three to four year period and actual train performance recorded by the train company over the same period.

An initial study was conducted on London commuter services with National Express East Anglia, with two further studies carried out on Northern Rail regional commuter services (into and from Manchester) and on longer distance journeys with CrossCountry. Passenger Focus is grateful to these three companies for their active participation in this work including the provision of train performance records.

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¹ National Passenger Survey-Divers of Passenger Satisfaction, Passenger Focus.

² Passengers' Priorities for Improvements in Rail Services, March 2010, Passenger Focus.

continued overleaf



“Passengers who are commuting are the least tolerant passengers of late trains, just as they are the least satisfied with their journeys overall.”

Key findings

- Average lateness experienced by passengers is worse than that recorded for train services. This is because of the effect of cancellations and because many trains that are on time at their destination are late at intermediate stations;
- On average, passenger satisfaction with punctuality reduces by between two and three percentage points with every minute of delay;
- Passengers who are commuting are the least tolerant of late trains, just as they are the least satisfied with their journeys overall. The experiences of commuters during the previous three months appears to affect their satisfaction with “today’s” journey;
- Commuters (except those travelling long distances) notice lateness after one minute of delay, not just after the five or ten minutes allowed by PPM. Their satisfaction with punctuality falls by an average of five percentage points per minute during the initial period of delay;
- Business and leisure users and long distance commuters tend to change their level of satisfaction with punctuality after a delay of four to six minutes;
- The level of crowding does not affect passengers’ satisfaction with punctuality and neither does the change between trains.

Next steps

- Should the number of ‘right time’ train arrivals be a key performance measure?
- Should punctuality be measured at key intermediate stations?
- Do the recent improvements in punctuality mean that the current PPM time bands that allow for a train to be recorded as ‘on time’ ought to be tightened?
- What information can rail companies provide to enable individual passengers to gain a better understanding of the performance data for their specific routes?

Passenger Focus will continue to explore with the rail industry and Government how these questions can be best addressed.



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