



Passengerfocus

putting rail passengers first

Executive summary of our response to Network Rail's Scotland Route Utilisation Strategy Draft for Consultation



November 2006

Foreword

Passengers will want to know what the RUS offers to those who use the railway – and who will pay for it. Do the options provide benefits, do they offer solutions to difficulties or shortcomings in the present service? Will they:

- reduce crowding?
- increase reliability?
- improve punctuality?
- increase frequencies?
- improve stations?
- increase connectivity?

Executive summary

The numbers of people travelling by rail are increasing. Performance on the railways is steadily improving and passenger satisfaction is rising. Passenger Focus expect the programme of Route Utilisation Strategies (RUSs) across the rail network to build on this; to allow for continued passenger growth, to further improve performance and to improve passenger satisfaction.

The RUS objective is defined as *“the effective and efficient use and development of the capacity available, consistent with funding that is, or is reasonably likely to become, available during the period of the RUS and with the licence holder’s performance of the duty¹.”*

Passenger Focus has a wealth of research material regarding what passengers want, and adds to this as the RUS programme rolls out across the network. This evidence informs our input to specific RUS consultations at route level. Drivers of passenger satisfaction change over time, but punctuality and reliability have been the main drivers of passenger satisfaction since the National Passenger Survey (NPS) began in 1999. Issues such as facilities for car parking, frequency of train services and connections with other train services have also been clear factors in overall satisfaction ratings. Passenger Focus expects RUSs to address the link between passenger satisfaction and development of capacity.

Our submission is based on comprehensive research with over 2,600 passengers on five routes, looking at the passenger viewpoint on the options proposed for inclusion in the final RUS, as well as generic issues regarding the passenger viewpoint on fares, satisfaction and wider rail issues.

It is clear that Scotland’s railways are performing with a considerable degree of success. The steady growth in passenger numbers, the good overall satisfaction ratings and improved performance demonstrate that the RUS should build on those solid foundations.

The RUS proposes many sensible options to make *“efficient use and development of the capacity available”* which we support. However, our new research demonstrates some options which Network Rail propose to be considered further as part of the final RUS are not supported by

¹ Extract from Office of Rail Regulation Guidelines on RUSs (June 2005)

passengers, and alternatives should be considered, ensuring the passenger viewpoint is at the heart of the decision-making process.

This would ensure that train services meet passenger expectations and avoids the scenario that the RUS provides an operational solution to improve capacity and performance but in doing so delivers changes in service patterns that do not meet the needs of passengers.

Priority Issues

- **Car Parking** – most passengers who park at the station are unwilling to pay more to guarantee a car parking in the peak period. Almost two thirds of passengers who park at the station are fairly or very unlikely to travel by train if car parking charges are more than they consider to be a fair price
- **Edinburgh CrossRail** – most passengers would prefer a direct service without changing trains at Edinburgh Waverley. If there was no direct service almost half of passengers would be less likely to travel by train
- **Edinburgh to Aberdeen Services** – nearly two thirds of passengers would prefer a faster service with fewer stops. More than half of passengers would prefer at least a 15 minute saving in journey time
- **Fife Circle Services** – passengers confirm the need for earlier commuting services into Edinburgh
- **Stranraer Services** – the vast majority of passengers do not want to change trains at Kilmarnock for a connection to Glasgow, preferring a direct service that serves Ayr, Paisley and Glasgow
- **Glasgow to Edinburgh Services via Shotts** – passengers clearly opposed a reduction in service frequency but clearly expressed a desire for an improved frequency based on a new semi-fast service with the retention of the hourly stopping service

Other Issues

- **Geographical Scope of RUS** – concern that routes within Scotland on the West Coast Main Line (WCML), East Coast Main Line (ECML) and Highland routes are excluded from this process
- **Stations** – there is no commitment to improve facilities at a number of interchange locations where proposed capacity improvements to the route will lead to further increases in passenger numbers
- **Linkages with Other Studies** – options proposed for inclusion in the final RUS must take full cognisance of other ongoing work e.g. ‘Haymarket Interchange Study and Masterplan’, ‘Tay Estuary Rail Study’ and ‘Aberdeen to Inverness Transport Corridor Study’.

Recommendations

Our key recommendations for further consideration for inclusion in the final RUS are:

- to undertake a programme of car park extensions and apply mechanisms that ensure car parking provision is utilised by rail passengers. That any review of car parking charging policy must not stifle demand for rail services

- Edinburgh CrossRail services should not be split and that an infrastructure solution is preferred which maintains CrossRail services
- provision of faster Aberdeen to Edinburgh services should provide for at least a 15 minute journey time improvement and take cognisance of other aspirations e.g. 'Tay Estuary Rail Study'
- earlier commuting services from Fife into Edinburgh
- direct services are maintained from Stranraer to Paisley and Glasgow
- the introduction of a two-tier semi-fast and all stations service pattern to allow faster journey times on the Edinburgh – Glasgow Central route via Shotts
- improvement to interchange locations where proposed capacity improvements to the route will lead to an increase in passenger numbers
- to consider the concept of incentive schemes that encourage passengers to travel outwith the high morning peak (08.00 to 09.00).

Additional Option For Consideration

An option worthy of further consideration is to encourage edge of morning peak travel. Recent Passenger Focus research² carried out with passengers at Waterloo station explored:

- what would motivate passengers to change travel patterns to arrive before 08.00 or after 09.00
- what are the key barriers to changing travel patterns.

The research found that early bird ticketing went hand-in-hand with smart-card ticketing. The findings clearly point to the need for any system to be flexible. Existing Early Bird schemes have tended to specify an arrival time (e.g. you must arrive before 07.30) with season ticket-holders travelling outside this time penalised with an excess fare. The research indicates that commuters do not want to be tied down – they want to be rewarded for those days they travel outside the peak.

The research indicates that there is support for the concept of 'early/late bird' incentive schemes as a short-term means of reducing congestion/crowding. Passenger Focus believes that the RUS should explore the potential for an incentive scheme, especially before considering more punitive measures to restrict demand through measures such as increasing peak fares as demonstrated by First ScotRail's recent fares restructuring.



Copies of our full response to Network Rail's Scotland RUS Draft for Consultation (and this executive summary version) are available from the Passenger Focus web site at:

<http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk>

² Encouraging Edge of Morning Peak Travel Research Finding and Policy Implications (August 2006)