

Independent national passenger watchdog

Passenger Voice Rail



Autumn/Winter 2010

South West

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Check before you travel this Christmas

Passenger Focus has been advising the industry on how to keep passengers informed while engineering works happen over Christmas in the Reading area. Bus and train timetables will be available to passengers by the middle of October.

Passengers face major disruption to their train services between 24th and 30th December this year as the industry uses the festive period to progress its station re-modelling project, signalling

and line infrastructure works. All routes will be open on the 31st December but further localised works will take place in the area between the 1st and 3rd January with the railway re-opening for business for the return to work on 4th January 2011.

Mike Greedy, Passenger Focus manager in the South West, has been working with the industry to ensure passengers are considered during planning. He commented: "These works are

absolutely essential to enable the signalling systems in the Thames Valley area to be re-located to the new control centre at Didcot and to make changes to bridges and road layouts to support the future Reading station re-development project. Any passengers intending to travel through or from Reading over the Christmas/New Year period would be well advised to see how they will be affected by either checking with National Rail Enquiries or the First Great Western website."

South West Trains' disruption handling

News that South West Trains (SWT) is planning to start trialing new procedures to ensure more services can run during severe weather conditions and minimise disruption to passengers has been welcomed by Passenger Focus. It follows regular meetings with SWT to track progress on how the train company is improving information to passengers. Meanwhile, First Great Western's procedure for handling disruption is improving, according to Passenger Focus. Passengers report that, despite a few months of severe disruption over the summer, most of the comments received by the disruption panel has praised the train operating company's handling of delays and cancellations.

Passenger Focus invites passengers on its disruption panel, which comprises of about 1000 rail users nationwide, to report back on their experiences of disrupted journeys. The feedback is used to campaign at a national and local level for improvements in the way train operating companies handle disruption.

Clapham Junction Station under review



Passenger Focus, with London TravelWatch, has been exploring how passengers feel about Clapham Junction station with a view to look at how the facility might better serve the needs of passengers. The research looked specifically at station access, information, station amenities, safety and security as well as retail outlets.

Passengers using South West Trains, Southern or London Overground services to/from the station told the watchdogs their priorities for improvement were reducing congestion in the subway, better real-time information and, toilet facilities, having canopies over the platforms and better information on platforms.

Passenger Focus and London TravelWatch are now working with the industry to see how the passenger research can feed into plans for station improvements. In the current economic climate, it is imperative that any improvements works taking place at stations, reflect and address passenger priorities. While the funding previously identified for Clapham Junction has been withdrawn, Passenger Focus is pleased that South West Trains and Network Rail plan to fund £6m of improvements to the station which will commence during 2011/12. These works, which include improvements to the real-time information, new toilet and waiting facilities and extended canopies on the station will address passengers' key priorities for improvement at the station.



Passengers spared many ticket-office opening hour cuts

Passenger Focus has declared the Government's decision to keep South West Trains' (SWT) ticket offices open a win for many passengers. However, it acknowledged cuts were going to happen across the SWT ticket office network which many passengers would find inconvenient and worrying.

The independent passenger watchdog objected to changes to SWT ticket office opening hours at Barnes, Berylands, Christchurch, Farncombe, Strawberry Hill and Virginia Water as more than 12 tickets are sold an hour. The Secretary of State for Transport has now rejected many of SWT proposals, forcing the company to open offices longer and maintain some Sunday trading.

Analysis shows that the Government has significantly reduced the number of hours that SWT is permitted to close its outlets. On the other hand, Passenger Focus said it was disappointed for those passengers

that will be affected by reduced opening hours, with ticket offices at some stations closing for the entire weekend and early in the afternoon during weekdays. The train company is able to make these changes because fewer than 12 tickets are sold an hour.

Jocelyn Pearson, Passenger Focus manager, said: "Passengers tell us staff at the station is crucial. While many passengers like using ticket machines, our research found many passengers prefer to queue to speak to staff to ensure they're buying the right ticket for their journey. Ticket-vending machines are important, but while they don't offer all ticket types, nor clearly display ticket restrictions or provide passengers with advice to ensure they are buying the cheapest fares, there will be a need for ticket office staff. We welcome the Government's careful consideration of passengers' concerns and needs when making this very important decision."

Station pride

Passenger Focus congratulated those staff successful in South West Trains' 2010 Station Pride Awards.

Passenger Focus joined the judging panel for the awards in an effort to recognise those staff delivering excellent service to passengers.

Jocelyn Pearson, Passenger Focus manager, was part of the panel and said: "Stations and station staff are a crucial part of the passengers' rail journey. We are pleased to be part of the process which recognises excellent service."



Photo courtesy of South West Trains

News roundup

Industry rates Oxford Station

Oxford Station, managed by First Great Western, has been highly commended at this year's National Rail Awards in the Medium Station of the Year category. Passenger Focus is involved in nominating and judging of the awards. Judges consider a whole range of categories when making their assessment, including ticket-buying facilities, facilities and services, information and staff.

CrossCountry passengers not online

Passenger Focus is disappointed that CrossCountry has not met its deadline to provide passengers with Wi-Fi on its trains. Passenger Focus's research shows that over a third (37%) of business passengers identified one of the benefits of using the train is having the ability to continue their work while travelling. They also said it is a less stressful form of transport (33%), 28% said speed of journey is a benefit and 21% appreciated the fact it eliminated parking problems. Mike Greedy, Passenger Focus manager, said: "Having Wi-Fi onboard is important to passengers, particularly to those on long-distance journeys who wish to use it to work. Delivering Wi-Fi was a specific commitment in their franchise, so we urge CrossCountry to deliver this service as soon as possible."

Confusion over scooters

Passenger Focus manager Mike Greedy has called on First Great Western to review its policy on the carrying of unfolded motorised scooters on their services by mobility-impaired passengers.

Confusion is being caused by some train managers allowing them to be loaded while others tell passengers that the scooters are not allowed on trains because of their size and weight.

Passenger Focus has approached First Great Western about this. Other train companies running the same type of trains allow unfolded scooters on board.

Cycling to the station

Passenger Focus is pleased to see continued progress by the industry on improving cycle facilities at Britain's stations.

Passenger Focus is part of the Cycle and Rail Task Force, which was set up to improve bike and rail integration. It includes representatives from the Association of Train Operating Companies, Cycling England, government and Network Rail and the group is responsible for helping the delivery of a £14 million improvement package of cycle facilities at stations.

Currently, Merseyrail, Northern, South West Trains and Virgin are working on improving their cycle facilities as part of a flagship 'Bike 'n' Ride' scheme. Southern has also outlined its plans to upgrade cycling facilities as part of its station travel plans.

Passenger Focus feels that cycling to the station helps reduce road congestion, improves health and is a totally self-reliant form of transport. However, to convince people to cycle, sufficient and secure storage facilities must be provided at the station. This is especially important while trains are overcrowded and passengers cannot take their bike on the train.

