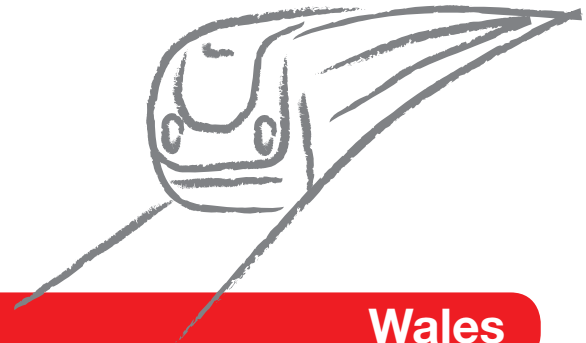


Independent national passenger watchdog

Passenger Voice Rail



Autumn/Winter 2010

Wales

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Increasing rail's role in rural tourism

Increased service frequency, a reduction in rail-replacement bus services, and additional summer train capacity are required to encourage more tourists to use the train to visit rural attractions, according to Passenger Focus in its written response to a National Assembly for Wales inquiry on rural tourism in Wales. While recognising the funding

challenges these improvements would require, Passenger Focus highlighted that a simpler fare structure and improved station facilities would also be more likely to entice tourists to use the railway.

Visitor attractions in Wales are often located on lightly-used parts of the network where rail services are typically infrequent, particularly on

Sundays. In addition, engineering works usually take place at weekends, and overcrowding is a problem during the summer months. Simon Pickering, Passenger Focus Wales manager, said: "It's important to recognise the role of transport in enabling visitors to access attractions in Wales. Our scenic routes can also be an attraction in their own right."



Passenger concerns

Passengers in Wales are consistently less satisfied with small unstaffed stations compared with larger staffed stations, according to new research carried out by Passenger Focus.

The research on passengers' experiences of unstaffed rail stations highlighted several key concerns, including problems with purchasing tickets, lack of real-time information, inadequate station shelters, lack of access and worries over personal security. The report made the following recommendations:

- Replace older-style shelters with modern enclosed designs
- Improve ticket-buying facilities
- Investigate lower-cost alternatives to full-scale real-time information, including web-based systems
- Address access issues caused by platform heights and large gaps between the train and the platform edge
- Ensure a secure environment for passengers and their vehicles in station car parks
- Continue to promote station adoption schemes and engage community groups to be actively involved in maintaining and enhancing the station environment.

Stella Mair Thomas, Passenger Focus board member for Wales, said: "Stations are the gateways to the rail network and are an essential element in passengers' overall journey experience. It's pleasing to see that funding is coming on stream to help address these issues. Our report and recommendations will help develop new station improvement projects that reflect the interests of passengers and the facilities they want to see."

Station funding

Passenger Focus' has welcomed an EU-funding boost to improve stations across west Wales and the Valleys.

The money, which comes from the Convergence European Regional Development Fund, will support previously-announced investment from the Welsh Assembly Government, Network Rail, Arriva Trains Wales and the Department for Transport under the Wales Enhanced Station Improvement plans.

Dozens of stations could benefit from improvements ranging from new waiting facilities, park and ride schemes and better access, security and customer information systems.

Passenger Focus continues to be actively involved in campaigning for better facilities at stations. It has, for example, been fighting for every station in Wales to have customer information systems.

The station improvement work is due for completion by 2014 and builds on the current National Station Improvement Programme (NSIP) programme.

Progress on key areas

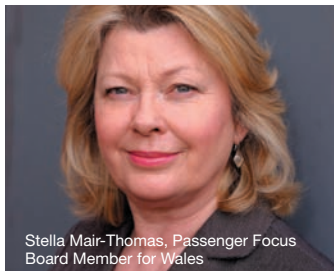
The Passenger Focus Board recently reviewed progress in a number of key areas where it is currently focusing its efforts to improve the rail experience for passengers in Wales. Included in the review was work to improve accessibility of the railway in Wales, integrated transport and details of Passenger Focus's launch of its Welsh Language Scheme following approval from the Welsh Language Board. For further information about the Passenger Focus Board and details of its reports and next meeting, see www.passengerfocus.org.uk

Check before you travel

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 31st December but further localised works will take place in the area between 1st and the 3rd January with the railway reopening for business for the return to work on the 4th January 2011.

Mike Greedy, Passenger Focus manager 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 periods would be well advised to see how they will be affected by either checking with National Rail Enquiries or the First Great Western website."



Stella Mair-Thomas, Passenger Focus Board Member for Wales



Rail passenger priorities

While Passenger Focus's National Passenger Survey shows that passengers are broadly happy with rail services in Wales (88%), the research also reveals that value for money, punctuality and service frequency continue to be the main areas identified by passengers for improvements.

Over 3000 rail passengers were asked to rank their priorities for improvement. The results were broken down for Wales, Scotland and all the English regions, and for commuters, leisure and

business passengers, too. The findings will help the rail industry and governments target and plan future railway spending.

Simon Pickering, Passenger Focus Wales manager, said: "Value for money remains the key priority for improvement for passengers. We know that commuter fares in Britain are the most expensive in Europe and long distance fares are complex and confusing. Passengers find it hard to know whether they've got the cheapest fare for their journey."

News roundup

Promoting transport research

Passenger Focus has joined a partnership looking to improve, increase and coordinate transport research in Wales. The Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods (WISERD) is a collaborative venture between the universities of Aberystwyth, Bangor, Cardiff, Glamorgan and Swansea together with industry partners.

Community Rail Partnership celebrates 25 Years

One of the Great Britain's first Community Rail Partnerships (CRP), the Heart of Wales Line Forum, celebrated its 25th anniversary this year. The forum brings together a diverse range of organisations with an interest in promoting and developing the line from Swansea to Shrewsbury, including Passenger Focus.

Disruption disappointment

Passenger Focus has expressed disappointment at the late-notice cancellation of Arriva Trains Wales services on several occasions in recent months. A shortage of train crew has caused the disruption with passengers informed only days before services were withdrawn.

Simon Pickering, Passenger Focus Wales manager, said: "Passengers are being stretched in this tug of war between the train operating company and its staff. Our train service should not be reliant on staff working overtime.

"It is passengers who suffer in the event of disruption and we urge all parties to get round the table to keep talking and find a solution."

£7.5 million upgrade

Passenger Focus has welcomed the news that trains operating on the main line service in Wales are to be upgraded thanks to £7.5 million funding from the Welsh Assembly Government.

The improvement programme will see a complete upgrade of Arriva Trains Wales' (ATW) Class 158 Sprinter fleet. Passengers will benefit from new seats, state-of-the-art information systems, improved luggage storage, additional wheelchair space and better toilets. The ATW eight single-carriage Class 153 Sprinter trains, used on rural branch lines, will also

be refreshed, including the raising of seating in relations to windows, with the first unit already completed.

The refurbishment will be one of the most extensive of its kind the industry has seen to date with work on the Class 158s scheduled to begin in December and the first 24 units expected to be completed by summer 2012. The refurbished trains will begin operating from January 2011.

Work is already underway on refurbishing ATW Class 175 trains, which run from north and south Wales to Manchester.

NPS finds new role

Passengers' experiences as measured in Passenger Focus's National Passenger Survey (NPS) are being used to help to monitor the success of the National Transport Plan in Wales, a five-year programme of projects and initiatives, including new train stations and services.

The twice-yearly NPS asks passengers how satisfied they are with 30 aspects of trains and stations. Ratings that will

be used to assess progress on the National Transport Plan will include overall satisfaction with Arriva Trains Wales and passenger perceptions of safety and security on the train and at the station.

Simon Pickering, Passenger Focus Wales manager, said: "It is pleasing to see that the passenger experience is being used to directly assess the progress of government plans and strategies."