

Independent national passenger watchdog

# Passenger Voice Rail



Autumn/Winter 2010

West Midlands

**In this issue:** • Long term look at West Midlands rail • Cycling to the station • High-speed a step closer

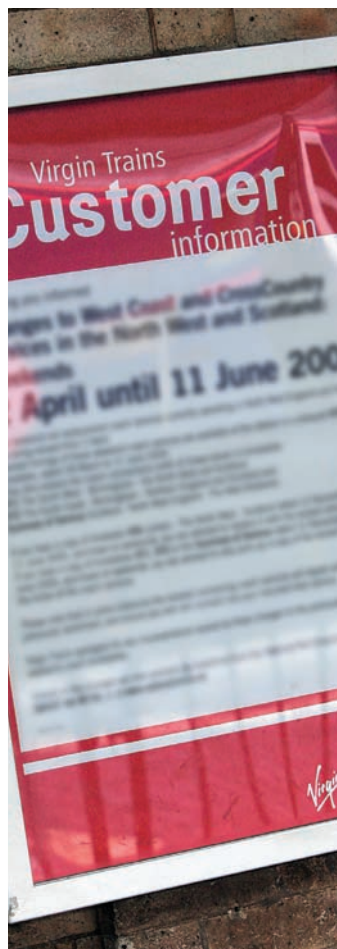
## Working to improve passenger views of Chiltern's loos

Passenger Focus has been working with Chiltern Railways to explore where the company could improve passenger satisfaction with its train toilets.

The National Passenger Survey shows that there is a lower satisfaction score with train toilets compared with other train facilities, with only 48% of passengers satisfied with the

onboard WCs. Questionnaires were given out to passengers and 345 responses were received. Passengers told the watchdog their priorities for improvement were first cleanliness of toilets, followed by availability. Passengers' priorities together with suggestions for improvement received from the survey, led Passenger Focus to make recommendations to Chiltern,

including introducing a more visible cleaning regime, making small design changes such as adding shelves, improving ventilation, better signs onboard and, longer term, more toilets being provided on new trains. For this research and more information about Passenger Focus's work in the West Midlands see [www.passengerfocus.org.uk](http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk)



## Disruption handling in the West Midlands

Passenger Focus has welcomed London Midland's plans to replace its outdated customer information screens at the stations that it manages. The train operating company has also started work to rectify some of the anomalies on the on-board information screens, particularly on Desiro 350 trains when they split along the route to serve two different destinations.

Passenger Focus has also welcomed Chiltern Railways' long-term commitment to introduce newer, advanced customer information screens at stations across its network. The pledge follows feedback from the watchdog that passengers want up-to-date and clear information especially when there is disruption on the line.

Looking at the long-distance operators, Passenger Focus is working with Virgin Trains to improve communications at its stations, including participating in staff training days to highlight the importance of making accurate and timely information available to passengers. It's good news on CrossCountry with passengers reporting they are generally satisfied with the way CrossCountry is handling 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 national and local level for improvements in the way train operating companies handle disruption.

### Passengers not yet online

Passenger Focus is disappointed that CrossCountry has not met its deadline yet 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."



## Long-term look at West Midlands rail

Passenger Focus has been asking passengers in the region what they want long term from their rail network as the industry puts its plans out for consultation.

The watchdog will use its research of passenger issues and priorities to feed into its response to the industry's West Midlands and Chiltern Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS). RUSs consider the future needs of the rail network and identify gaps which need to be addressed by Network Rail in its future planning. Industry consultation started in November and final plans will be published in Spring 2011.

Passenger Focus's research is looking specifically at three routes, including Birmingham New Street to Northampton; Birmingham Moor Street to Leamington Spa and Stratford-upon-Avon; and Birmingham Snow Hill to Stourbridge, Worcester Shrub Hill and Foregate Street.

Passenger Focus will also be meeting with local rail user groups in the region to ensure their feedback is included in the industry's planning.

Passenger Focus will publish the research report with its consultation later this winter.

## 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.

## News roundup

### Virgin passengers share their views

Passenger Focus co-chairs Virgin Trains' quarterly Passenger Panel meetings, which are a chance for rail users to tell the train operator what they think about its services, stations and trains. At the most recent session, held in October, passengers discussed what they wanted from future franchises. The feedback will be included in Passenger Focus's response to the Department for Transport's consultation on reforming rail franchising.

### Station development plans at Aylesbury and Princes Risborough

Passenger Focus has been working with Chiltern Railways and feeding into its plans on works to improve Aylesbury and Princes Risborough stations.

Developments at Aylesbury include an enlarged waiting room, extra gates, refurbished toilets, cycle racks and additional security. At Princes Risborough, passengers will benefit from an improved waiting area, relocated toilets, extra cycle racks and additional CCTV.

Chiltern has consulted with Passenger Focus on plans and invited the watchdog to visit the stations concerned to understand the impact on passengers during the work and the benefits, particularly with regard to accessibility and mobility.

### Avoiding website errors

When Virgin redesigned its website in 2009, it did not clearly show restrictions on tickets. Because peak and off-peak services start and end at different times across Virgin services, it was all too easy for passengers to make a mistake when booking a ticket.

Passenger Focus reviewed the website with Virgin and asked them to make such restrictions clear when the mouse cursor hovers over a ticket option. By installing these warnings, Virgin has minimised the risk of passengers finding they have bought the wrong ticket for their journey.

### More trains on time

Passenger Focus was pleased to see 97.3% of all Chiltern's trains ran on time during September.

On London Midland, 92.5% of services were on time and Virgin Trains had a 91.3% score.

Passenger Focus's research shows that in the West Midlands punctuality is passengers' number one priority for improvement.

## High-speed a step closer

The Government has announced that it will consult early next year on building a 'Y'-shaped high-speed rail network with separate legs from London to the West Midlands then to Manchester and Leeds. A 'Y'-shaped route would allow the East Midlands and South Yorkshire to be served by the high-speed rail network, as well as Leeds, Manchester and the North West.

Ashwin Kumar, Passenger Focus rail director, said: "Passengers who have campaigned for a high-speed connection to east-coast destinations will welcome this latest development.

"All forecasts show that Britain's railways are only going to get busier. Government and industry must continue progress on this important project as new high-speed lines are critical to relieving overcrowding in the future. Putting longer-distance journeys onto these new lines will allow more trains to serve commuters and middle-distance passengers on the current network.

"Wherever, this new line is built, there will be winners and losers. It is important that the Government and industry discuss the implications of this decision with affected communities and addresses concerns."