



What do we know about stations?

November 2009

What passengers tell us about stations?

Introduction

The National Passenger Survey reveals that satisfaction with individual station service attributes vary greatly. Passengers are most satisfied with the way station staff deal with requests (82%) whilst they are least satisfied with facilities that are provided for car parking (44%)¹.

This is also reflected in a report by the National Audit Office (NAO) which reported that the 95 largest rail stations enjoyed the highest levels of passenger satisfaction². These were fully staffed, had a range of facilities and served more than half of all rail passengers. However, passengers were consistently less satisfied with the 2000 plus medium- to small-sized stations; which were largely unstaffed, or only staffed for part of the day, and had few facilities.

In more recent times the varying quality of stations was also highlighted by Lord Adonis, Secretary of State for Transport, who as part of his six-day rail tour of Britain, commented that conditions at some stations were “downright poor”.

The rail industry has worked hard to improve stations. Likewise Government has made funds available – for instance, the 2007 White Paper, “Delivering a Sustainable Railway”, allocated funding for the National Stations Improvement Programme³, while the Access for All scheme⁴ aims to make stations more accessible.

But despite these – and other schemes - it is clear that there is still more to do. To help focus the debate even further the Secretary of State for Transport announced a review of passengers’ requirements at stations across England and Wales. The review, by Sir Peter Hall and Chris Green⁵, was designed to look at how the basic needs of passengers can be met as well as the broader role of stations in the future. In November 2009 Network Rail began its own consultation exercise on the future of stations.⁶

Passenger Focus welcomes this renewed emphasis on stations. It is crucial, though, that the debate is based on, and reflects, what passengers actually want. This report draws together our existing research and seeks to highlight which aspects of stations passengers are most satisfied and dissatisfied with, and identifies what passengers want from the station. A separate report has already been published on passengers’ perception of personal security

¹ National Passenger Survey Spring 2009, Passenger Focus (June 2009)

² Maintaining and improving Britain’s railways, National Audit Office (2005)

³ The National Stations Improvement Programme (NSIP) is an initiative worth £150 million to modernise approximately 150 intermediate stations in England and Wales in 2009-14.

⁴ Access for All is a £370 million ring-fenced fund for station accessibility improvements under the Government’s 10 year Railways for All strategy. Station selection and prioritisation is made by the Department for Transport.

⁵ Sir Peter Hall is the Bartlett Professor of Planning and Regeneration at University College London and President of both the Town and Country Planning Association. Chris Green is a non-executive director of Network Rail and a former Chief Executive of Virgin Trains.

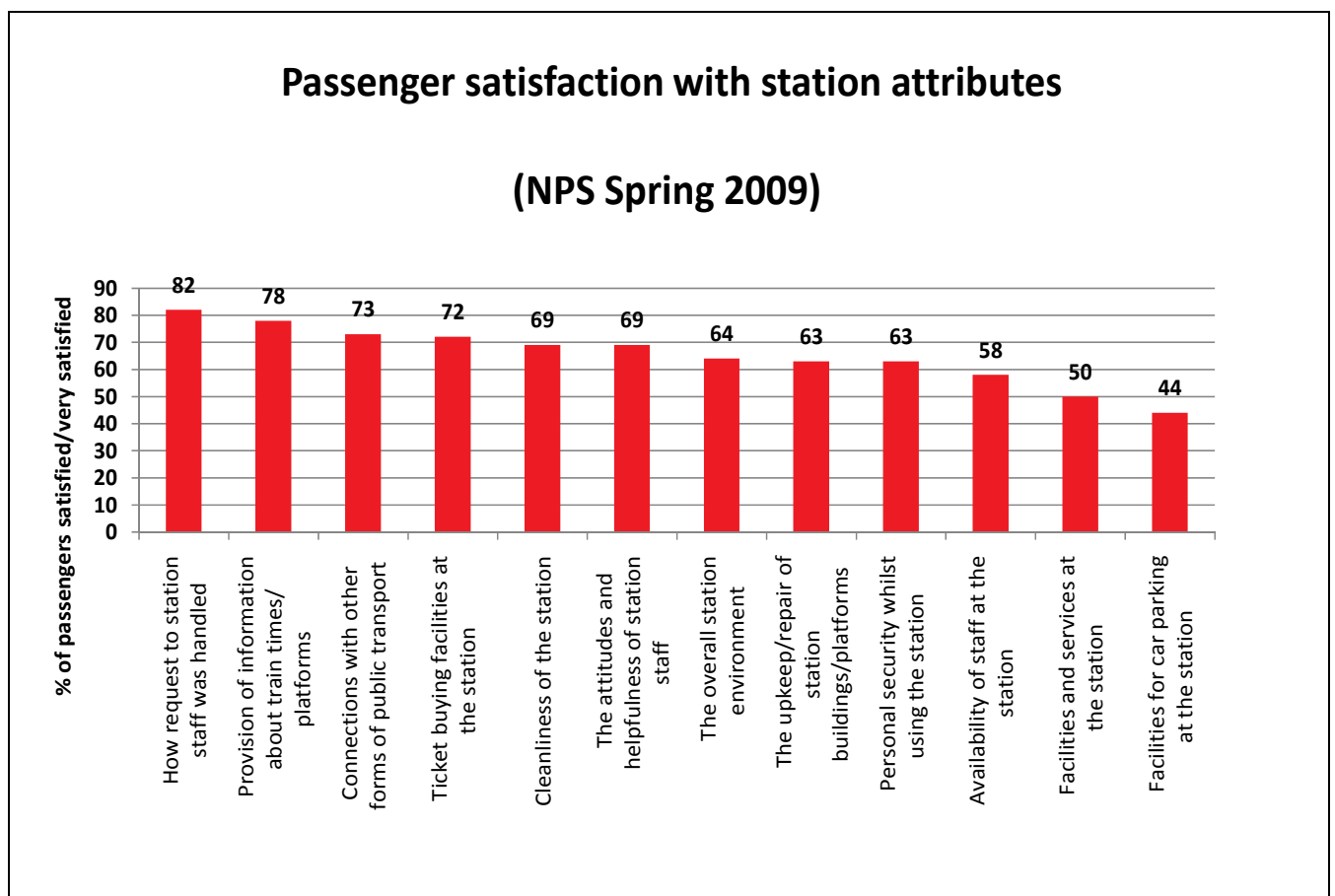
⁶ Action Stations, Network Rail. November 2009

on the railway⁷ and it is our intention to produce a further report on looking at the ways in which passengers access and depart from stations as part of their end-to-end journey. This report, therefore, focuses on the station fabric and environment.

Passenger satisfaction with stations

Overall satisfaction

When asked to rate their satisfaction with stations in the latest wave of the National Passenger Survey (Spring 2009) passengers told us that they were most satisfied with the way in which station staff had dealt with a request (82%) whilst (those that need it) were least satisfied with station facilities for car parking (44%).



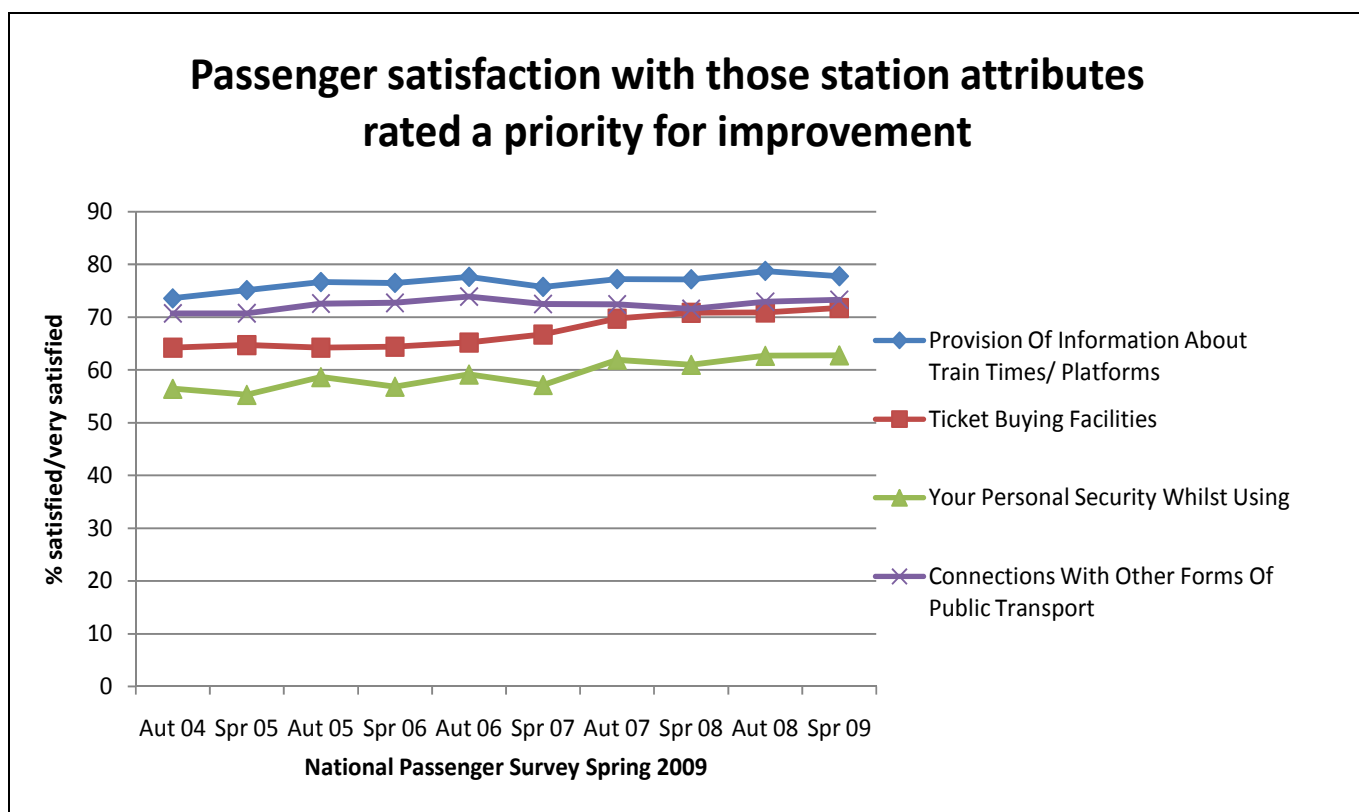
In July 2007 Passenger Focus asked passengers what they wanted to see improved on the railway. The research⁸ revealed, that out of 30 separate station and train based attributes, two station attributes featured in the top ten national priorities for improvement: queuing times for tickets, and information on train times/platforms. These were considered to be the sixth and seventh priorities for improvement respectively. Outside of the top 10, personal

⁷ Passenger perceptions of personal security on the railways. Passenger Focus (March 2009).

⁸ Passengers' priorities for improvements in rail services. Passenger Focus (2007).

security at stations and good connections with other forms of transport were placed eleventh and twelfth.

Passenger satisfaction for these top-four station attributes shows a slow but steady improvement across the board. That said, the satisfaction scores for both personal security on the station and ticket buying facilities remain relatively low.

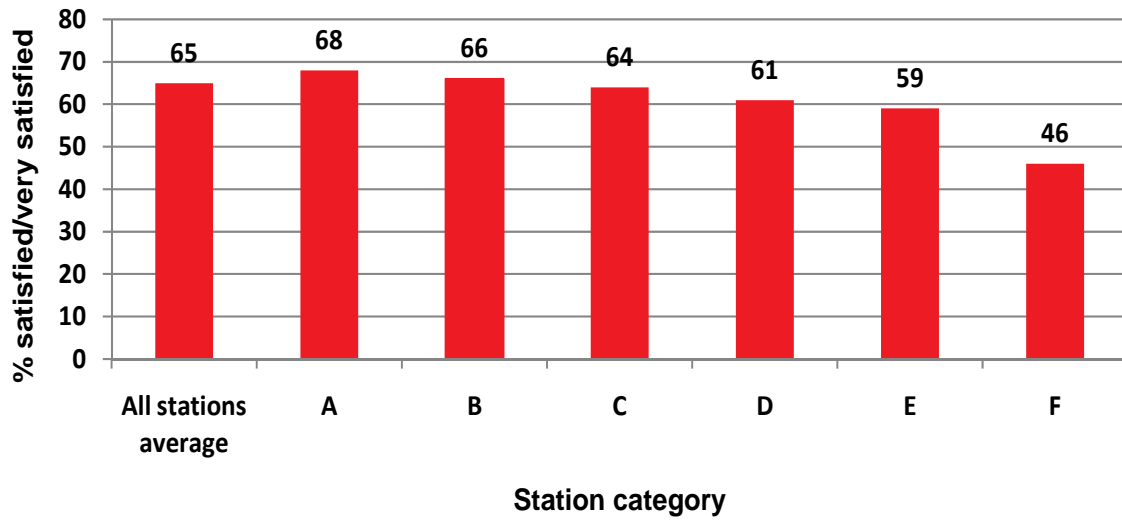


Satisfaction by station type

Within the rail industry there are six categories⁹ of station, which broadly correspond to their level of use. Major termini, for example, are found in band A, unstaffed halts are found in band F. A clear relationship exists between the size of the station and the level of satisfaction; with category A stations scoring the highest and Category F the lowest.

⁹ National Hub A Stations; Regional Hub B Stations; Large Feeder C Stations; Medium Staffed D Stations; Small Staffed E Stations; Unstaffed F Stations

Overall satisfaction for station attributes combined



NPS Spring 2009

The other station-based criteria in NPS also show a similar distinction according to size.

Satisfaction with station attributes by station category (NPS Spring 2009)							
	All stations average	A	B	C	D	E	F
		Ticket buying facilities	72	68	73	75	72
Provision of information about train times/platforms	78	81	77	79	74	73	62
The upkeep/repair of the station buildings/platforms	63	68	61	60	61	61	57
Cleanliness	69	74	65	67	67	67	58
Facilities and services	50	65	56	45	34	20	11
Connections with other forms of public transport	73	83	80	68	63	51	43
Facilities for car parking	44	28	40	48	48	48	44
The overall environment	64	72	64	61	58	57	51
Your personal security whilst using the station	63	69	65	61	56	54	42
The availability of staff at the station	58	60	63	60	52	52	21
How request to station staff was handled	82	82	81	83	85	87	74
Below average by more than 10% points							
Above average by more than 10% points							

Looking at the station attributes identified as priorities for improvement we see:

- Provision of information about train times and platforms**
 With the exception of category B stations the pattern of satisfaction generally mirrors that of overall satisfaction across the six different types of station. Category A stations score the highest (81%) whilst category F stations receive the lowest scores with only 62% of passengers rating the provision of information as good/very good.
- Connections with other forms of public transport**
 Passengers travelling from category A and B stations on the other hand consider this attribute to be better than average.
- Ticket buying facilities**
 Aside from category F stations, where over a third (40%) of passengers purchase their tickets on the train (due to a lack of booking offices/ticket machines on the

stations) category A stations received the lowest scores for ticket buying facilities from passengers (68%).

- **Personal security**

Again, levels of satisfaction drop from category A (69%) to F (42%).

Looking at the lowest rated station facilities in terms of satisfaction by station type we see:

- **Station facilities for car parking**

Satisfaction was lowest at category A (28%) and B (40%) stations. This is not surprising as most category A and B stations tend to be located in large towns and cities, where space for car parking is at a premium; most passengers would therefore access the station by other forms of public transport. This is supported by the fact that category A and B stations received the highest satisfaction scores for connections with other forms of public transport.

- **Station facilities and services**

Some of the lowest scores were, predictably, received at smaller stations (Bands D-F) where the stations are not of a size to accommodate a large number of services. In many instances the fact that there is limited or no staff presence at these stations will mean that even where there is space, facilities are not provided due to concerns over vandalism and crime.

- **Availability of staff**

Whilst the average level of satisfaction is relatively low in itself (58%) even lower scores are recorded for category D-F stations.

Satisfaction with station attributes by passenger group

By looking at the demographic data of those passengers that responded to the National Passenger Survey (Spring 2009) it is possible to identify which groups are the most dissatisfied with the different attributes of stations.

Age groups

When asked to rate their satisfaction with 11 station attributes, those aged over 65 appear to be the most satisfied of all rail passengers, whilst those aged between 26 and 34 tending to be the least satisfied.

Journey purpose

Commuters are less satisfied than either business or leisure users, for all station attributes. For all except two (connections with other forms of transport and the availability of staff at the station) of the station attributes they were asked about, leisure passengers gave satisfaction scores at least 10% points higher, than commuters - the biggest difference being for how station staff dealt with a request, then the upkeep and repair of station buildings.

Satisfaction with station attribute by journey purpose (NPS Spring 2009)				
	Total	Commuter	Business	Leisure
Ticket buying facilities	72	66	73	79
Provision of information about train times/platforms	78	73	80	83
The upkeep/repair of the station buildings/platforms	63	57	62	71
Cleanliness	69	63	67	75
Facilities and services	50	43	55	56
Connections with other forms of public transport	73	70	75	77
Facilities for car parking	44	38	42	52
The overall environment	64	58	63	71
Your personal security whilst using the station	63	58	63	68
The availability of staff at the station	58	55	58	62
How request to station staff was handled	82	72	85	87

Disabled passengers

Of the disabled passengers¹⁰ who responded to the National Passenger Survey passengers with a visual impairment were most dissatisfied with the following station attributes: facilities and services (48%), personal security whilst using the station (54%), the overall environment (61%), the upkeep and repair of station buildings (64%) the attitude and helpfulness of staff (66%) and the provision of information about train times and platforms (67%).¹¹

Ticket buying facilities and the availability of staff both received the lowest scores for satisfaction from those disabled passengers with a hearing impairment (66% and 55% respectively). Facilities for car parking were rated the lowest amongst those with mobility impairment (41%).¹²

The Disability Discrimination Act requires operators of stations to take reasonable steps to ensure that they do not discriminate against disabled people. The Disability Rights Commission (DRC) issued a Statutory Code of Practice on the provision and use of transport vehicles. This set out a number of factors which might be taken into account when considering what reasonable provision is.

In 2006 the Government committed £370 million to the Access for All scheme with the aim of providing full obstacle-free accessibility at priority stations in England and Wales in the period up to 2015. These are defined as the 500 busiest stations in terms of passenger arrivals and departures. Disabled access issues will clearly not all be solved by this scheme,

¹⁰ This does not including those with a speech impediment due to the small sample size

¹¹ National Passenger Survey, Passenger Focus, (Spring 2009)

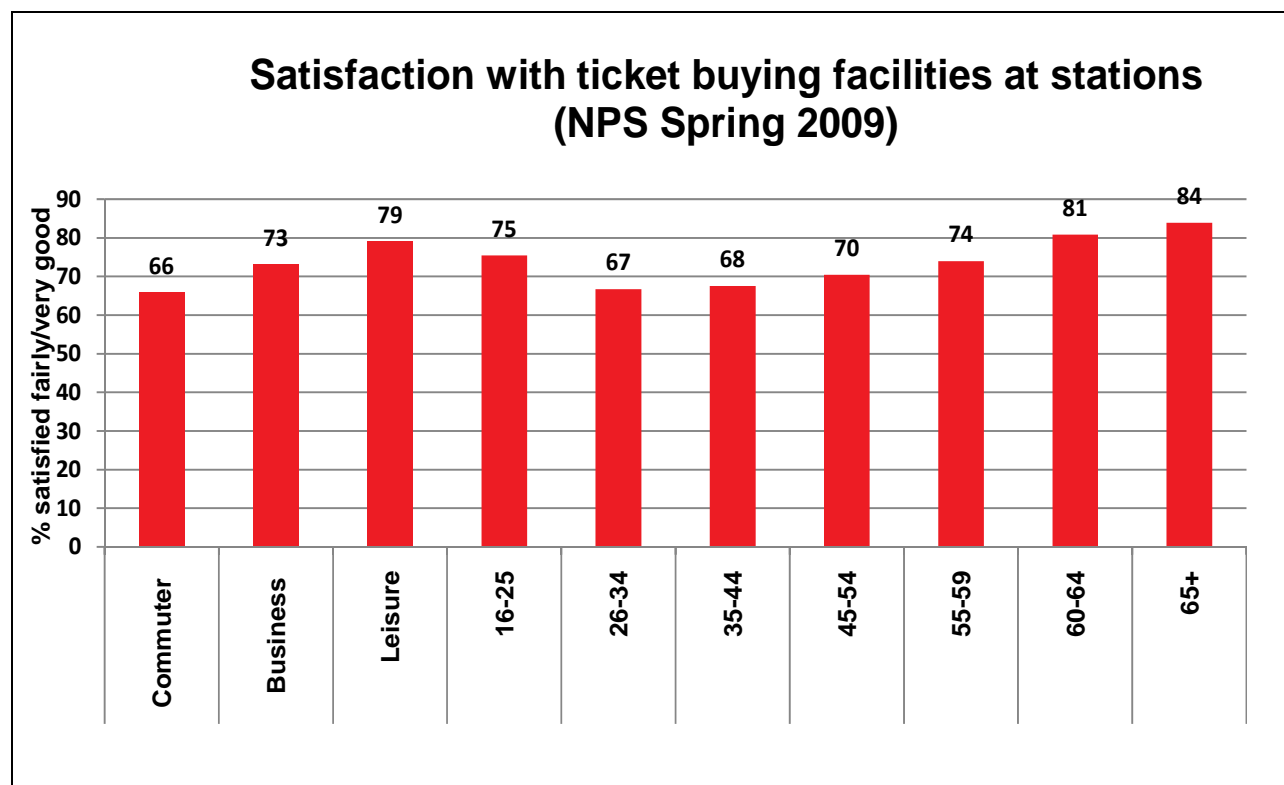
¹² National Passenger Survey, Passenger Focus, (Spring 2009)

and a great deal of effort will also need to be invested in improving the assistance provided to disabled passengers by staff. In its 2007 White Paper, “Delivering a Sustainable Railway” the Government confirmed its intention to review the benefits of the Access for All scheme and determine whether the travel patterns of disabled passengers had changed as a result. The intention is to then incorporate the results of the review in the next High Level Output Specification for rail in 2012¹³.

Station attributes in more detail

Purchasing a ticket at the station

When asked to rate the ticket buying facilities at the station they started their journey, passengers undertaking journeys as part of a regular commute and those aged between 26 and 34 were the least satisfied. Those passengers over the age of 65 and leisure passengers were the most satisfied.



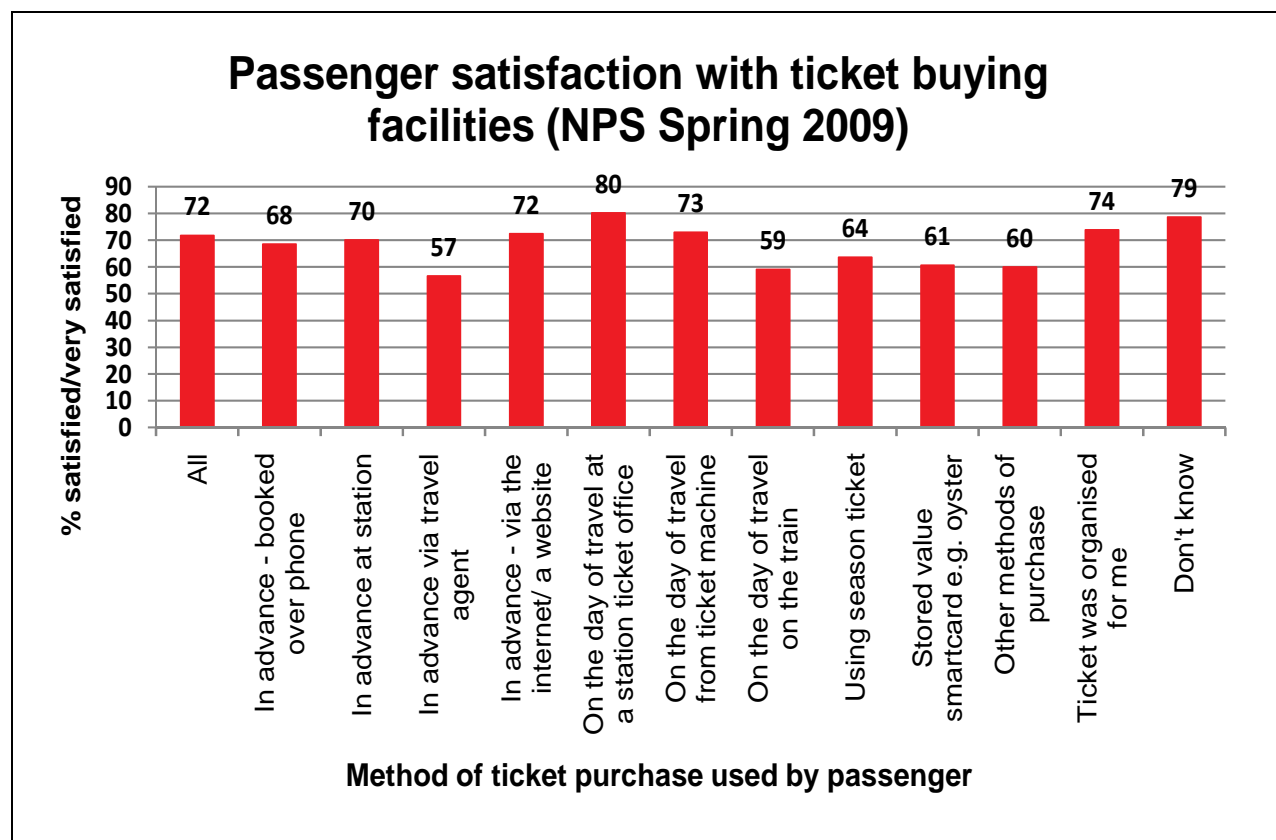
NPS shows that 21% of passengers surveyed were using a season ticket for the journey that they were asked to rate. Of these, 28% had chosen to purchase their ticket on the day of travel at a station ticket office; a further 12% had purchased it from the station before the day of travel; while 13% waited until the day of travel, but chose to buy their ticket from a ticket vending machine.

¹³ Delivering a sustainable railway, Department for Transport (July 2007)

Passengers aged 16 to 25 are most likely to use ticket machines when buying a ticket on the day of travel (21%), whilst those passengers over the age of 60 are more likely to purchase their ticket on the day of travel from the station booking office¹⁴.

When asked to rate their satisfaction with the ease of ticket purchase, those passengers that purchased their ticket on the day of travel from a station ticket office were most satisfied (88%). Whilst still a high rate of satisfaction, those passengers purchasing their tickets from ticket machines at stations gave a lower score of 83%.

Similarly when asked to rate their satisfaction with ticket buying facilities, those that purchased tickets from the booking office on the day of travel gave the highest scores.



Although satisfaction with ticketing buying facilities is relatively high, reducing the queuing time, for those purchasing a ticket on the day of travel, is one of the top 10 passenger priorities for improvement.¹⁵

In May 2008 ticket queuing time research revealed that at 12 major stations, queues at ticket vending machines (TVMs) were on average shorter than those at ticket offices during the peak and off peak (including weekends). It also showed that at 41% of all the observations undertaken at ticket machines there were no queues, compared to just 18% at ticket offices.

¹⁴ 34% of passengers aged between 60 and 64, 3% of passengers aged over 65, National Passenger Survey, Passenger Focus, (Spring 2009).

¹⁵ Passenger priorities for improvements in rail services, Passenger Focus (July 2007)

Seemingly, TVMs, despite train operating companies making a large investment in installing more of them, are not used as heavily as the ticket offices¹⁶.

Given the priority passengers attach to reducing ticket purchase queuing times, Passenger Focus, in conjunction with South West Trains, sought to try and understand why passengers choose ticket office windows over ticket machines. It did this by looking at:

- the proportion of passengers queuing at ticket offices who could have used a ticket vending machine (TVM)
- passenger's reluctance to use ticket machines
- other ways passengers could have purchased their tickets to avoid a long queue.

The results of this additional research revealed that although most passengers queuing at ticket offices could have bought their tickets from a machine, a large proportion choose not to do so. The non-usage cannot be attributed to a lack of awareness, as nine out of 10 passengers in the ticket office queues were aware of the TVMs at the station (78% had used them in the past). Instead the decision to buy a rail ticket at the ticket office was often a conscious one; largely driven by one or more of the following:

- the purchaser's lack of confidence in using the machine
- the purchaser's lack of confidence in their ability to select a ticket at the appropriate price with the necessary validity or relevant route (as specified on the ticket and reflected in the price)
- a preference for face-to-face transactions for reassurance.

That said, one in five passengers have no particular reason for not using a TVM – they simply just do not consider the idea¹⁷.

In 2007 the strength of passenger feeling on this subject was revealed when train operating company Southeastern launched a public consultation on proposals to change ticket office opening hours at some of its stations. In a small number of cases complete closures were proposed. In response to the consultation Southeastern received nearly 3000 objections to the proposals, which led to substantial revisions to the proposed reductions. Similarly, in July 2008, South West Trains launched a consultation in which it proposed a reduction in ticket office opening hours at 114 stations.

In the three week consultation period Passenger Focus received over 3100 postcards and 360 letters and e-mails objecting to the proposals. Such was the depth of feeling, that we received representations from county, district and parish councils, rail user groups, both houses of parliament, trade unions and individual passengers alike. Although the two consultations involved two different train operators, and two different sets of passengers, the underlying reasons for the objections can largely be attributed to:

¹⁶ Buying a ticket at the station, research on ticket machine use, Passenger Focus (October 2008)

¹⁷ Buying a ticket at the station, research on ticket machine use, Passenger Focus (October 2008)

- a perceived reduction in customer service – in the provision of advice, information and availability of staff
- safety concerns - the expectation that a reduced staff presence would result in increased vandalism and less supervision of youngsters and anti-social behaviour
- ticket Vending Machines – were not considered a suitable alternative to real staff as they could not give passengers advice, for instance, about disruption, the best value fares or journey options. Some concern was also expressed about the reliability of the TVMs and the fact that they could not retail the complete range of tickets.¹⁸

Passenger Focus recommends

Apart from certain safety regulations, the only general requirement to provide staff at a station comes from the Ticketing and Settlement Agreement (TSA), which governs ticket office opening hours. We have never taken the line that the opening hours should be 'set-in-stone' - the onus is, though, on the train company to justify the need for change and to show how it will benefit passengers overall.

Whilst Passenger Focus understands the wider context in which technology is bringing innovation to retail activities – for example: through such things as smartcard technology and tickets via mobile phones - we press for stations to be staffed wherever possible. This isn't just for ticket sales, staff also provide a reassuring presence for personal security, provide information and act as a deterrent to crime.

With train companies taking revenue protection much more seriously – both in terms of checking tickets and installing ticket gates - it is crucial that passengers are given every opportunity to purchase a ticket before they get on a train. This coupled with the ever growing number of people using rail, means that the ease of purchasing a ticket is increasingly becoming a concern for passengers. While part of the solution is to provide alternative points of sale (for example: internet or telesales) many people still rely on the station ticket office and, for those, the issue of queuing times is uppermost.

There are many valid reasons why passengers need or prefer to speak to staff. In some cases the rail products they need are simply not available. Even where the ticket is theoretically available, the complexity of the fares structure means that it can be extremely difficult to get the cheapest fare without advice. We do not want to see a situation where off-peak travellers find it increasingly difficult to purchase the right ticket and either find themselves spending more than they should, or choosing to travel by other means. In research passengers consistently say they want to see staff at stations – more ticket machines should not necessarily mean fewer staff.

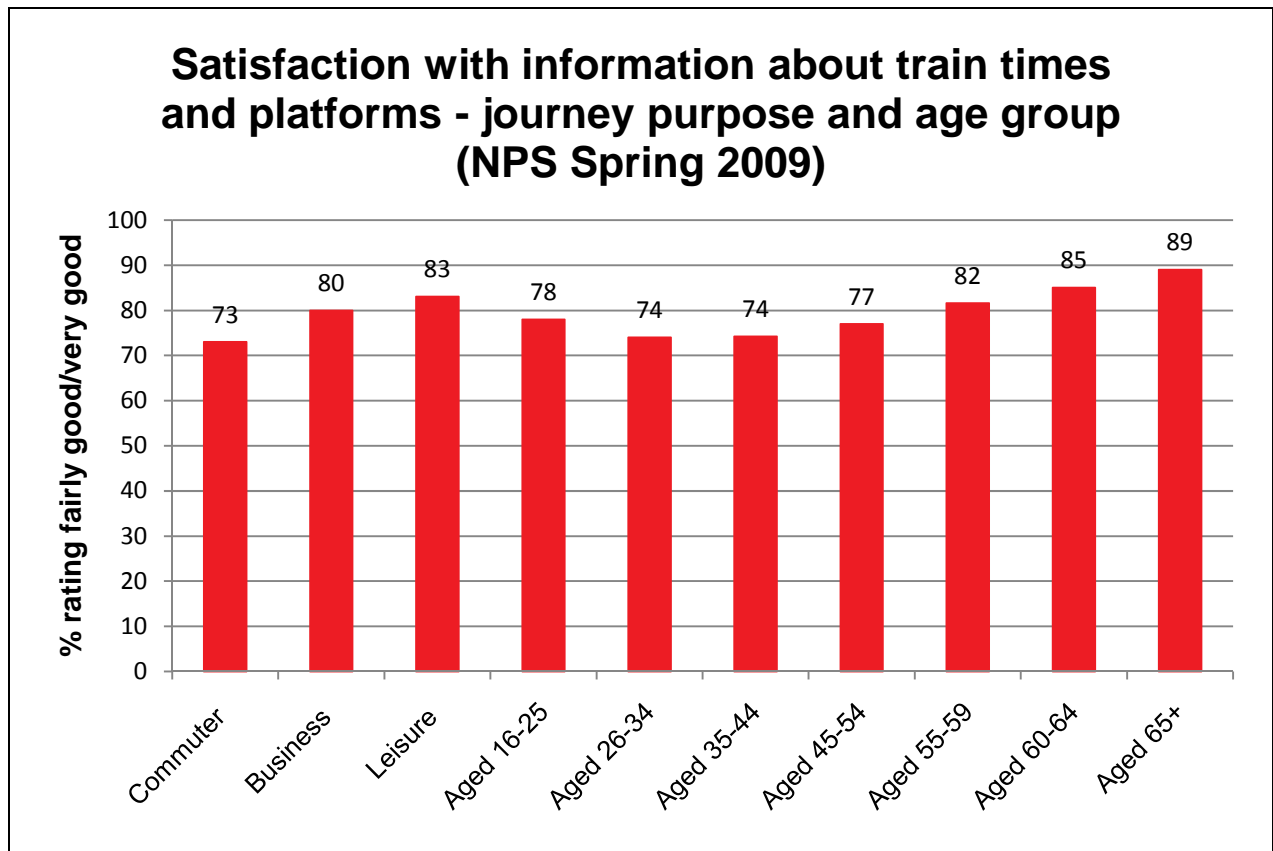
¹⁸ Formal response to Southeastern's consultation on major changes to ticket office opening hours, Passenger Focus (March 2007) & Response to South West Trains' proposals to reduce ticket office opening hours, Passenger Focus (August 2008)

Provision of information about train times and platforms

When asked to rate their satisfaction with 12 different station attributes, passengers placed the provision of information at stations on train times and platforms second (78% satisfaction).

Passenger satisfaction with this attribute was reasonably consistent amongst those using category A-C stations (ranging from 81% to 77%); it declined slightly for those using D-E stations (74% and 73%) and dropped sharply for those who used category F stations (62%).

Once again it was commuters that were most dissatisfied (73%), whilst those under the age of 25 were likely to rate the provision of information lower than other age groups.



Although passenger satisfaction with the provision of information about train times and platforms has been gradually increasing since Spring 2004 (an increase from 74% in 2004, to 78% in Spring 2009) this particular service attribute remains a relatively high passenger priority for improvement. National research by Passenger Focus in 2007 placed two elements of information ('passengers kept informed of delays' and 'information on train times/platforms accurate and available') in the top 10 priorities for improvement¹⁹. There is clearly room for the industry to improve.

The importance that passengers place on the provision of information was further confirmed by research that Passenger Focus undertook in December 2007 looking at what passengers

¹⁹ Passenger priorities for improvements in rail services, Passenger Focus (July 2007)

wanted for the future South Central rail franchise. Of the eight routes that Passenger Focus surveyed, passengers on four of them placed the provision of train and departure times as the top priority for improvement. A further two routes considered it to be the second highest priority. Moreover, when asked about importance of station facilities – information about train times and departures featured strongly. Visual Information was top, whilst announcements on train times and delays were placed fourth and fifth respectively²⁰.

Similarly when conducting research in Wales, to inform Passenger Focus' response to the Welsh Rail Utilisation Strategy passengers told us that accurate visual information on train arrival times was the most important, of 14, station attributes to have at the station they boarded²¹.

When at the station information is largely obtained through three media: visual screens and signs, audio announcements and by talking to staff. Passengers tend to use the visual screens or station timetable posters to obtain information in the first instance; and then make their own assessment of whether they need additional information, which might mean seeking advice from a member of station staff. There is less emphasis on audio announcements as a direct source of information, as passengers are often concerned that they are too brief, intermittent and not necessarily clear/comprehensible. The risk of missing an important announcement can create anxiety.²²

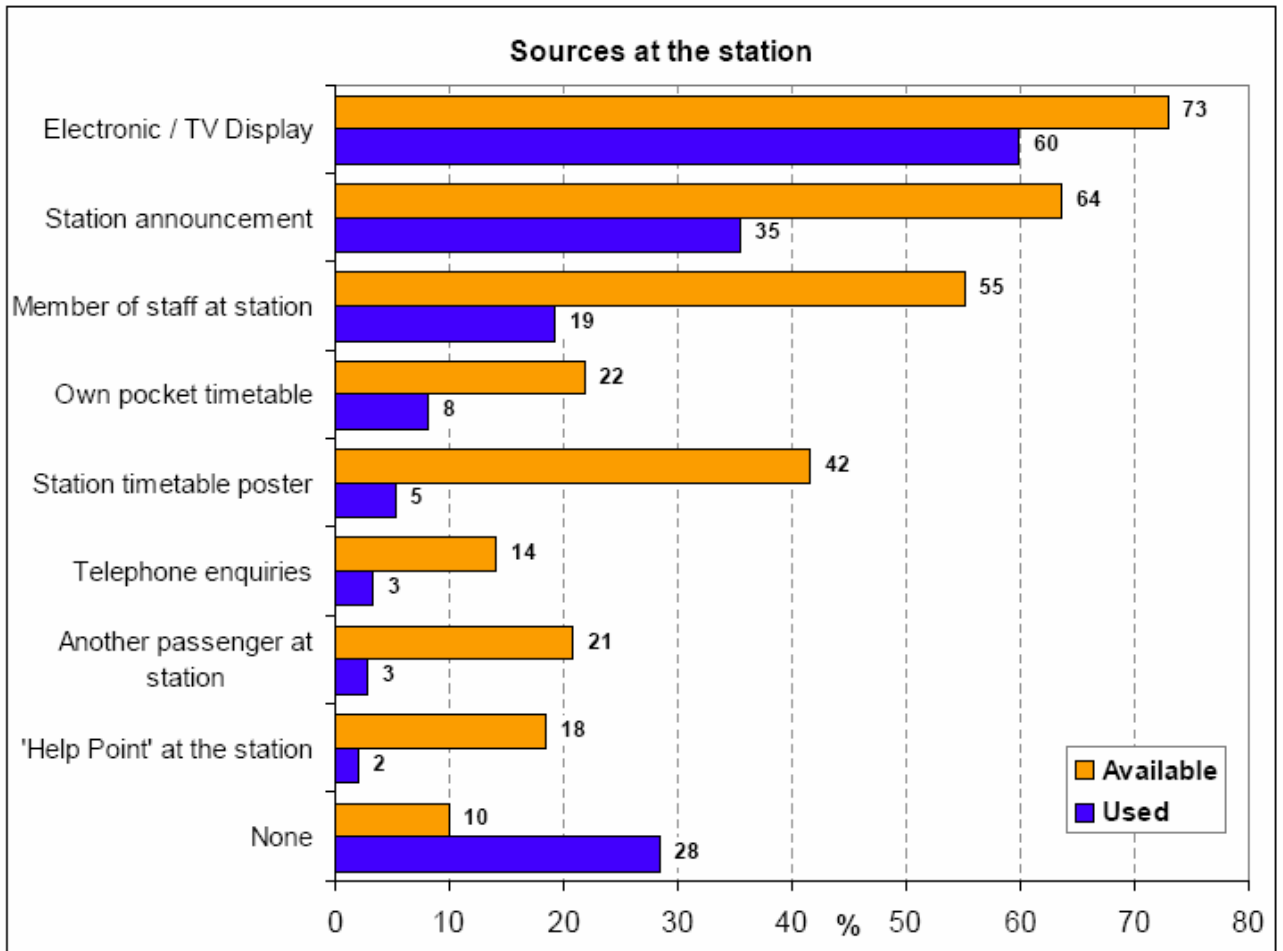
This reinforced research in 2004 which also showed the importance of visual information²³.

²⁰ Route based research – identifying what passengers want from South Central, Passenger Focus (April 2008)

²¹ Research report – Welsh Routes, Passenger Focus (May 2009)

²² Passenger information: a vision, Passenger Focus (July 2008)

²³ Passenger information: what, where, when, how? Passenger Focus (Sept 2004)



Passengers identify a range of information requirements as being essential, on the basis that if they are not provided it would be difficult to plan and undertake a journey. At stations passengers expect the following information to be clearly displayed:²⁴

- platform information for arriving and departing trains
- expected (as well as scheduled) time of arrival of trains
- details of train formation (including number of carriages, particularly if reduced)
- the location of specific carriages and the facilities on board the train
- any delays/cancellations, alternative routes/modes in the event of significant delay.

This information should be easily and quickly obtained, clear and easily understood, accurate and issued in a timely manner.

Passengers consider a staff presence on stations to be an extremely important medium for delivering information about their journey. The ability to communicate with staff face-to-face is, therefore, often considered essential; especially during times of service disruption, when staff can provide reassurance in confusing and fast changing situations. Passengers consider the traditional staff-centred information and more hi-tech channels to be complimentary.²⁵

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Ibid

However, passengers are concerned that station staff do not always appear to have access to up-to-date information. As such, improving staff access to real time information was considered to be a high priority for improvement by passengers.

As was:

- information at smaller stations when engineering work is disrupting services
- how passengers are told that engineering work will disrupt future journeys.²⁶

Focus group research in June 2005 revealed that at larger stations the level of information provision was perceived to be higher than that at medium and small stations (category D, E and F). Information at larger stations was also considered to be clearer in terms of directing passengers to trains and informing them of train times. This included real time information, departure and arrival trains and directions to different parts of the station to access services and facilities. Smaller stations were felt to offer inadequate information about which platforms serve particular destinations. Passengers feel this information should be displayed more clearly on departure boards rather than on maps.²⁷

Although real-time information, in the form of TV or dot matrix style screens was provided on the platforms at most larger stations, passengers at category E and F stations were often left without access to such information sources. Passengers therefore considered real-time information at smaller stations to be a high priority for improvement.²⁸ The primary benefits being that passengers could obtain information on delays; particularly at stations where there isn't a staff presence.

Passenger Focus recommends

In December 2007 the Association of Train Operating Companies produced a good practice guide on providing information to passengers, based on Passengers Focus' research report "Passenger information: what, when, where and how?" The guide contained guidance on four specific areas: information 'off-station', at the station, on the train and at times of planned engineering work. In order to address the recommendations in the research report and ensure that the good practice guides were adopted across the industry the Passenger Information Strategy Group (PISG) was established, composed of representatives from National Rail Enquiries, all Train Operating Companies, Network Rail and Passenger Focus.

By using the good practice guides it is hope that Train Operating Companies can deliver a better, more accessible, service to passengers and potential passengers.

Passenger Focus places great importance on the provision of accurate, impartial and timely information, especially in times of disruption, so we are pleased that the industry is taking the provision of information seriously. Information is clearly an important element of a successful journey by train, in some cases information is key to whether a journey is made by train at all. At times of unexpected disruption keeping people informed about what is happening can

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ What passengers want from stations, Passenger Focus, (June 2005)

²⁸ Ibid

be the difference between passengers in angry despair about “the railway” and resigned acceptance that from time to time things go wrong. We want the rail industry to implement the good practice guides on passenger information as quickly, and as thoroughly, as possible.

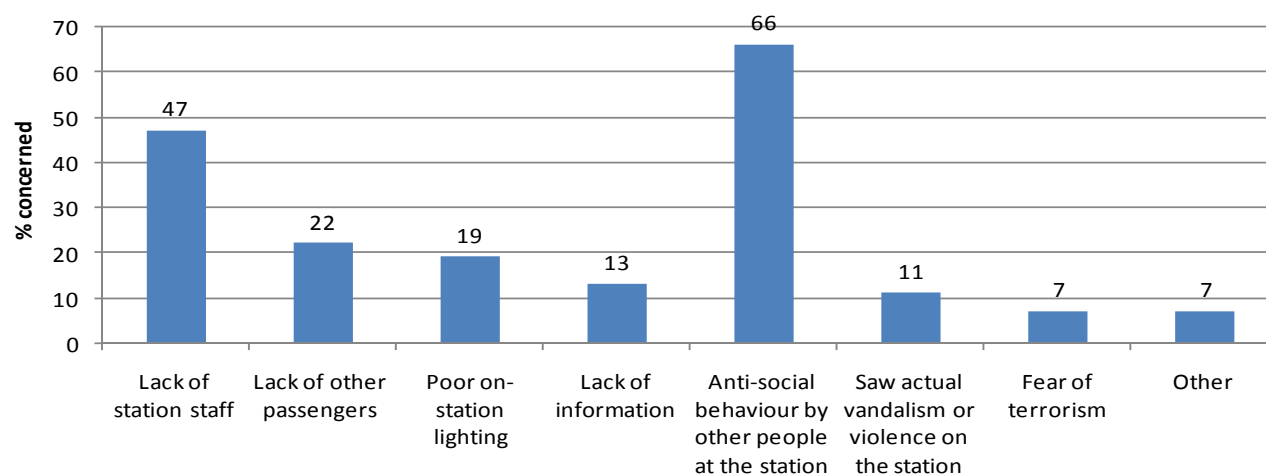
Another key area is to ensure that the various sources a valuable to passengers give the same advice and information – in effect that they are fed by a single, accurate source of information.

Your personal security whilst using the station

Passenger Focus’s work on national priorities for improvement highlighted issues such as value for money, punctuality and getting a seat but it also revealed the continuing importance of personal security. Out of 30 separate station, and train-based categories, security on trains and on stations were ranked tenth and eleventh highest priorities respectively²⁹.

Although the general trend in recent years has been one of steady improvement in passengers’ satisfaction with station security, the Spring 2009 results from the National Passenger Survey reveal that there is still considerable room for improvement (only 63% rated it as good/very good). Passengers have continued to express their concern at the anti-social behaviour of others and at the lack of visible staff across the rail network; particularly so when travelling after dark.

Cause for concern with personal security at the station (NPS Autumn 2008)



Passenger Focus research into passenger security found that when passengers compared journeys that they had made before and after 20:00, they were far less satisfied with personal security and the availability of staff when travelling after 20:00. Satisfaction with

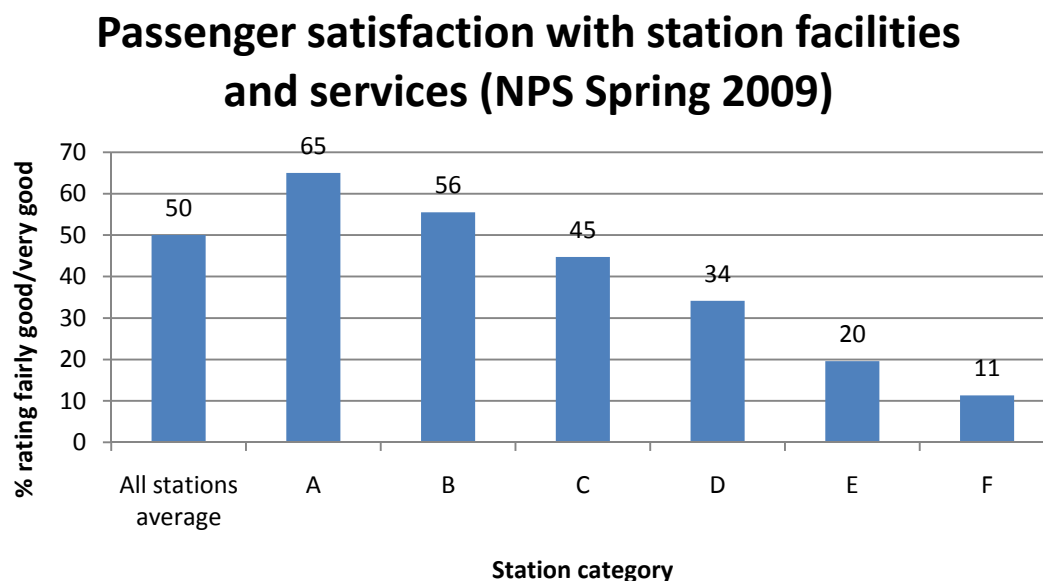
²⁹ Passenger priorities for improvements in rail services, Passenger Focus (July 2007)

personal security dropped 12 percentage points, from 61% to 49%, while satisfaction with the availability of staff fell from 48% to 37%.³⁰

These issues – and our recommendations - are covered in much more detail in Passenger Focus’s report on passenger perceptions with security³¹.

Facilities and services

Passengers today have a much wider experience of transport infrastructure than previous generations; they see what motorway services and airports can offer in the way of facilities, and not unreasonably want to enjoy some of the same things when they travel by rail. Needs and expectations however need to be realistic for each type of station; it would be impractical to suggest that a wayside halt station should have the same facilities as a major London termini. It is therefore important to ascertain what minimum level of facilities each type of station should make available to passengers. National Rail stations are currently divided into six categories, A-F³² and each provides different levels of facilities in terms of: information provision; security, waiting rooms and shelter, platforms, footbridges and subways, transport integration, customer facilities, disabled access, and general facilities.



A practical way of considering the different level of needs that passengers have at stations is to place them in a hierarchy. At the bottom are the basic facilities and physical requirements needed to enable people to find, and use, the station. Once these needs have been satisfied passengers turn their attention to “comfort” factors which make the station more pleasant to use. At the top, are the luxury elements, which make the station more attractive to passengers. In June 2005 the Rail Passengers Council sort to identify what facilities and

³⁰ Evening Rail Travel, Passenger Focus, (April 2008)

³¹ Passenger Perceptions with personal security. Passenger Focus. (2009)

³² Category A being major termini providing access to major centres and Category F being small unstaffed stations found in low-population or rural areas.

attributes fall into each level of the hierarchy and how these might vary according to the type of passenger, the journey being made and the way the station is being used. Through talking to passengers, in a series of focus groups, it was discovered that the basic needs of passengers are generally consistent:

Passengers need:

- to be able to find the station and their way around it
- to be able to get to the station and their platform
- to feel safe
- adequate light and shelter.

Once these basic needs have been met differences between passengers' requirements start to appear. The different needs become conditioned by factors such as time spent at the station, how busy it is, time of day and the passenger's familiarity with the journey. There are some facilities however that are a common need for all passengers – for example: real-time information.

Regardless of the above factors passenger expectations will also vary depending on the size of the station; with passengers being fairly pragmatic about what facilities the smaller, unstaffed stations, should offer. For instance, remote stations that merely act as a pick up point would require a simple shelter and seats, adequate lighting and real time information. Passengers agree that more comfortable waiting areas and retail facilities should be concentrated at busier stations, where people spend more time.

Our report in 2005 set out a matrix of needs:

Basic features	Universal features	Comfort features	Attractor features	Special features
Essential features at all stations	Facilities that are expected by customers at all stations	Facilities which make the stations easier to use or more comfortable and should ideally be at all stations	Facilities which help to attract people to busier stations	Facilities appropriate only to particular stations which help to make them special
Reasonably safe and secure	Ramps	Bus Stop	Travel info in the waiting area	Airport lounge style waiting area
Well lit	Car parking	Taxi ranks	Range of shops	TV with news
Basic shelter and seating	Signs to the trains	Cycle racks	Cash point	Office facilities
Basic signage	Real-time information screens	Signs to facilities	Baby changing facilities	Luggage trolleys
	Real-time PA announcements	Station maps (visual)	Escalators and travelators	
	Timetables	Station maps (tactile)	Lift	
	Departure boards	Newsagent		

	Clocks	Kiosk		
	CCTV	Cafe		
	Staff	Vending machine		
	Pay phone	Help point		
	Ticket machines	Booking office		
		Heated waiting room		
		Disabled access toilets		
		Automatic doors		

What passengers want from stations, Rail Passengers Council (June 2005)

Those facilities/services highlighted in grey are more relevant to less regular leisure and business passengers, than commuters.

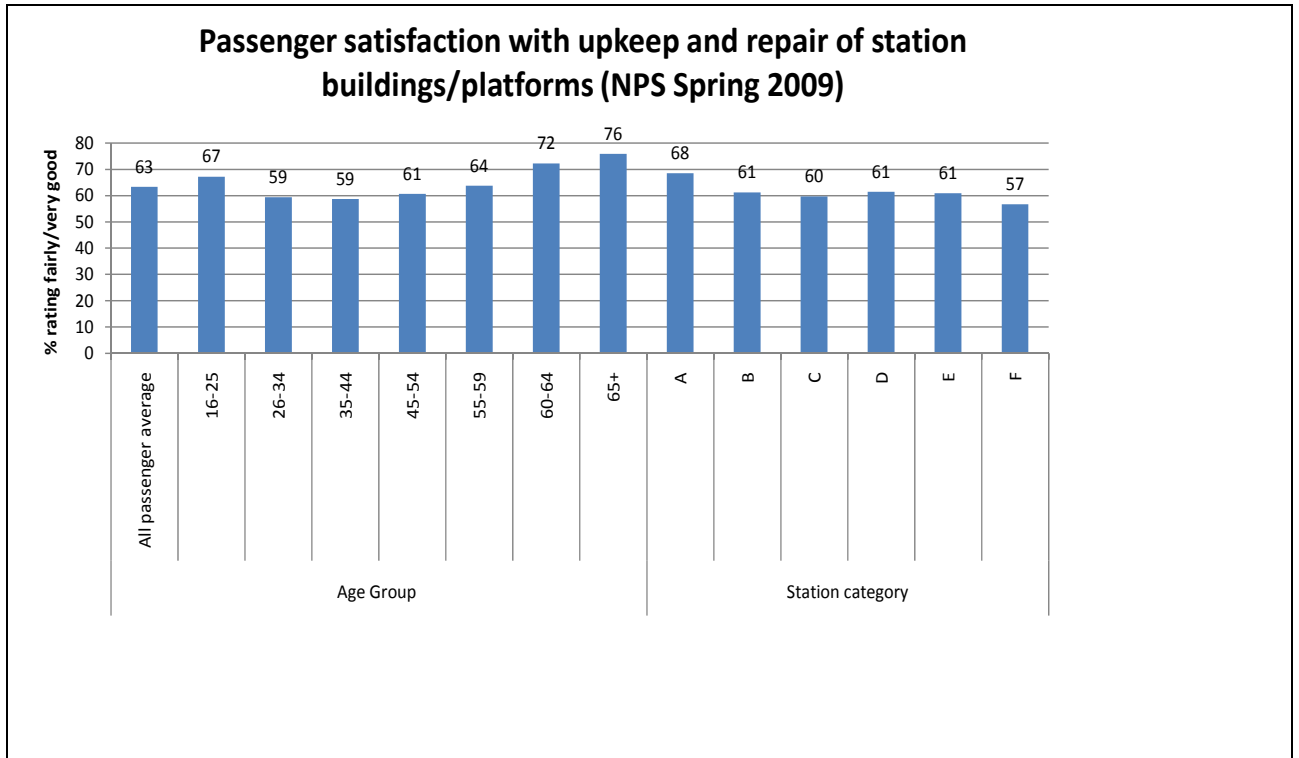
At many D and E category stations most passengers felt there were often a lack of basic facilities such as real time information, ticket machines and waiting rooms. They felt that providing these things would take the stations up to an acceptable level. With category B and C stations passengers want the environment to be more comfortable and to have plasma type information screen³³.

Upkeep and repair of station buildings

The upkeep and repair of station buildings scores relatively poorly in the National Passenger Survey with an overall rating of 63%. This places it eighth out of 12 station attributes in terms of satisfaction. Looking at the ratings provided by the different age groups, scores are reasonably consistent, though those over 65 years of age again have a higher level of satisfaction than others.

There is little variation in satisfaction between category B – E stations. However Category A and F stations are very different. As may be expected category A stations receive the highest score of 88% while only 57% of passengers at category F stations considered the upkeep and repair of the station buildings to be either fairly or very good.

³³ What passengers want from stations, Rail Passengers Council (June 2005)

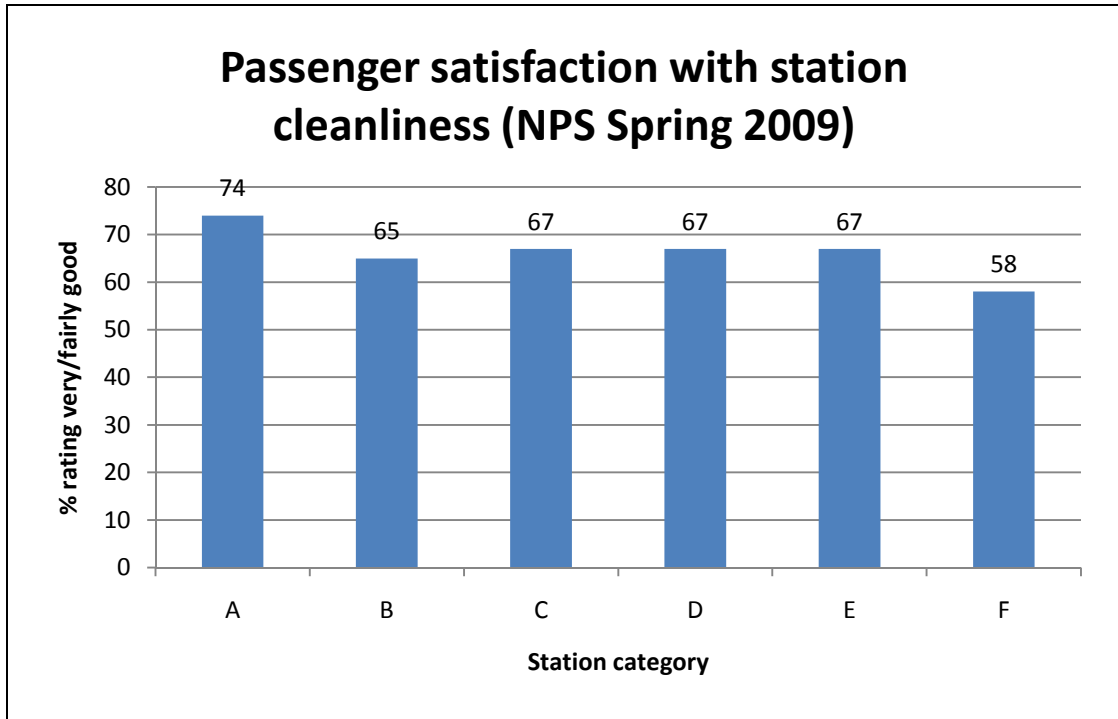


Cleanliness of the station

Litter is a persistent problem on the railways, inflicted on passengers by a minority of rail users and neighbours; and in many cases it contributes to the perception that the railway is a poorly managed environment. Train companies and Network Rail do not cause the problem but they have legal responsibilities for litter control and should do what they can to reasonably fulfil them.

Station platforms and other public areas are generally kept free of litter but other railway land, such as trackbeds, are all too often in an unsatisfactory state. This is made worse by the lack of rigorous procedures to ensure the line side is kept free of litter.

However satisfaction with the cleanliness of the station scored relatively well, with an overall score of 69%. Typically those over the age of 65 were most satisfied and there was little difference between the scores provided by men and women, or disabled and non-disabled passengers. Similar to other station attributes, however, station cleanliness received the lowest scores from commuters (63%) whilst leisure passengers were the most satisfied (75%). As with ‘upkeep and repair of buildings’ the cleanliness of category A and category F stations was rated very differently by passengers, with the latter only scoring 58%.



Passenger Focus recommends

On main line railways the responsibility for clearing litter is divided between the station operator, usually a train company, and the infrastructure operator, ordinarily Network Rail. In most cases the distinction is clear. Station buildings and platforms are the station operator’s responsibility, while operational areas such as the trackbed and trackside land are Network Rail’s. There are also some areas associated with the station, which are also Network Rail’s responsibility. These are usually fenced off from the public.

Passenger Focus is keen to see litter control provisions from the Environment Act take full effect. Much can be done by local authorities and individual citizens to encourage railway operators and land owners to comply with the letter and spirit of the legislation; not least through the use of litter abatement orders. The report ‘Good riddance to bad rubbish’, produced by The Rail Passengers Council and London Transport Users Committee, provides guidance on how to get reluctant operators to clear stations (and linesides) of rubbish within the terms of the Act. Partnerships between railway operators, local authorities, rail user groups and others, to raise awareness of the issue amongst law enforcement agencies and judicial authorities are also to be welcomed.

As with station facilities, Passenger Focus would also like service quality targets for cleanliness to be set within the franchises and a rigorous monitoring regime required of the successful bidders.

The need for change

One third of all national rail journeys start, or end, at one of the 15 largest railway stations in Great Britain, where provision for passengers is often excellent. However urban regeneration schemes and investment in new trains only serve to emphasise the comparative lack of progress at some 'intermediate stations'. A fact that is reflected in the lower satisfaction scores of category B-F stations.

When asked about what aspect of the railway they consider to be a priority for improvement passengers tend to place issues connected with the station fabric and environment fairly low down the list³⁴. However there is much room to improve passenger satisfaction with stations. By asking passengers what aspects of the station environment they consider important, a good indication of where Train operating companies (TOCs) should target their resources can be gained.

Facilities that are important to have at stations

When surveyed by Passenger Focus in 2007³⁵ passengers travelling on the Southern network gave a clear indication of what station facilities they consider to be important. Across eight Southern rail routes passengers stated that the most important facilities to have at their station were³⁶.

Most important facilities to have?	Total %	Commuter %	Business %	Leisure %
Accurate <u>visual</u> information as to when trains will arrive	52	57	60	49
Toilets	47	43	49	51
Staff at station	44	45	44	44
Accurate <u>announcements</u> about <u>delays</u>	34	41	35	30
Accurate <u>announcements</u> on <u>arrival/departure times</u>	30	33	32	29

Passengers in Wales attach similar levels of importance to the same facilities. When asked which is the most important to have at the rail station you boarded the train, passengers selected the following five facilities as being most important³⁷:

³⁴ National Priorities for improvement, Passenger Focus, (June 2007)

³⁵ Route based research – identifying what passengers want from South Central (April 2008)

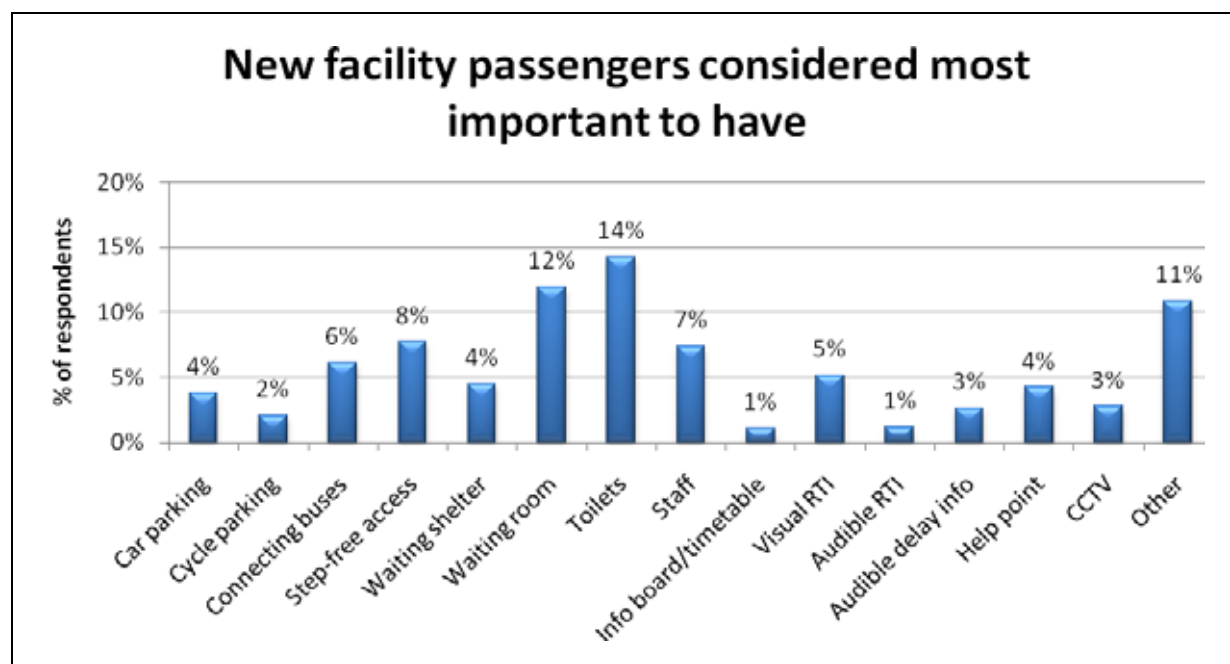
³⁶ NB. Respondents could choose up to four categories

³⁷ Research report Welsh routes, Passenger Focus (May 2009)

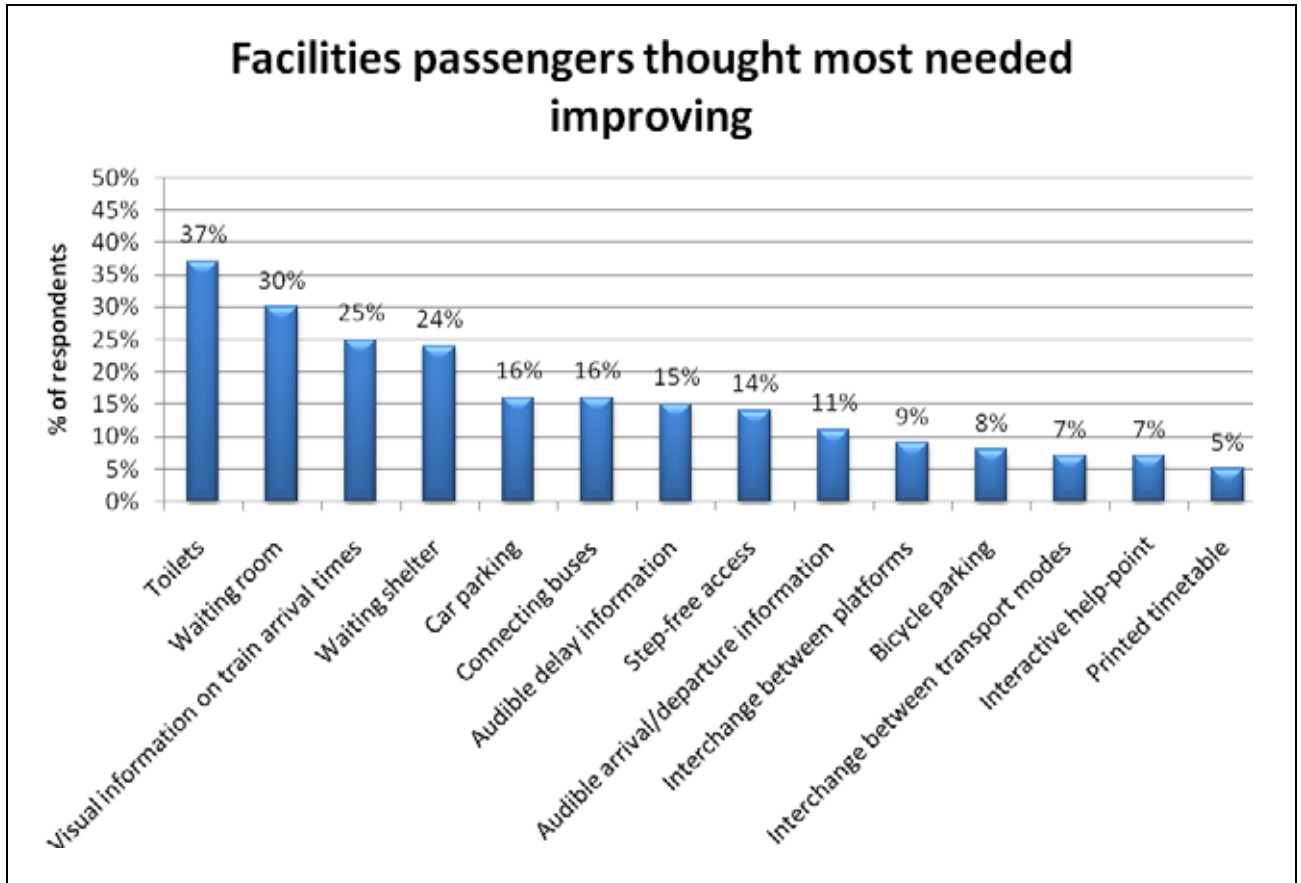
Most important facilities to have?	Total %	Commuter %	Business %	Leisure %
Accurate <u>visual</u> information as to when trains will arrive	50	54	58	48
Toilets	45	39	47	48
Accurate announcements on arrival and departure times	37	37	35	38
Staff at stations	36	34	39	38
Accurate <u>announcements</u> <u>about delays</u>	36	42	27	35

In order to start improving the passenger experience at stations (with a focus on those stations in the top 500 in terms of footfall) the government has provided funding for the National Station Improvement Programme (NSIP). To help monitor whether NSIP funding makes a noticeable difference to the passenger environment at stations, Network Rail and Passenger Focus have undertaken an ongoing piece of research, to measure and benchmark the level of passenger satisfaction at the first 25 stations to undergo improvement works funded by the scheme.

As with the two research projects on passenger views of the Southern and Welsh rail networks, passengers at the NSIP stations attached a great deal of importance to visual real time information, staff, and toilets. The level of importance attached to these stations attributes was broadly consistent with the desire of passengers for these facilities to be installed where they don't already exist. When asked directly what new facilities they would like at their station passengers gave the following response:



Passengers at the 25 stations were also asked to rank the top three facilities most in need of improvement.



Passenger Focus recommends

Network Rail owns most of Britain's 2507 stations and is responsible for their structural repair and renewal. It also operates 17 of the largest stations. It leases the remaining stations to train operating companies (TOCs) who take responsibility for day-to-day maintenance and operations, such as selling tickets and providing travel information. TOCs have to comply with basic station requirements set out in their franchise agreements.

Passenger Focus expects stations to be welcoming and convenient, providing a suitable and pleasant gateway to the railway and to the town/place of destination. They have for too long been the Cinderella of the network, with vital refurbishment funding held back during lean years when almost all available funding was spent on maintaining train services. Whilst the gap has been narrowed there is still a significant difference between stations' fabric and facilities and passengers' expectations. Passenger Focus accepts that minima have to be specified to ensure that standards are met, but is keen to drive up the standard and level of facility provision. Passengers are becoming more sophisticated in their requirements and are used to the level of facility and comfort offered at Motorway service areas or at airports.

Minimum station standards are currently ill-defined and there is no consistent level of provision applied system-wide, so passengers do not know what they are likely to find at a particular category of station unless they make enquiries before they travel.

The original franchises let between 1996 and 1997 placed obligations on train operators to provide basic facilities such as: adequate lighting during train running hours after nightfall, a public address system, public information displays and/or a freephone link/help point to provide passenger information. Train operators in PTE areas tended to have additional obligations placed on them, which were written into the franchise agreements. These were all minimums and it was expected that train operators would go beyond the basic requirements. In many cases they did, but often only with regard to CCTV and passenger information systems rather than station buildings/fabric. More recent franchises, however, have shown an increased emphasis on station facilities but again these have tended to be based around CCTV, Help-points, passenger information systems and accessibility. There is also a raft of requirements specified under disability legislation/requirements.

It has been suggested that standards at stations are unlikely to be driven up in the absence of an enforcement regime and that the absence of a single organisation co-ordinating the development of stations and the facilities at them has not helped. The service quality incentive regime (SQUIRE) used in Scotland and the English Passenger Transport Executive areas, for example: the major conurbations outside London, has indicated a need for effective monitoring of station standards.³⁸ We are therefore keen to see more attention placed on stations through the franchising regime.

Passenger Focus would like to see franchise specifications made more prescriptive in respect of station standards and more use made of Service Quality Management Systems to drive up the quality of service offered. Station operators need to be incentivised through the terms of their franchises to deliver improved station standards, measured through the systematic tracking of users' perceptions. We support therefore the decision to make passenger satisfaction targets part of the franchise agreement for the South Central franchise - failure to meet them being backed up with financial penalties.

When a franchise comes up for renewal, bidders should be required to indicate what internal targets they intend to set, what the monitoring regime will be, how they will use internal benchmarks to drive up standards, and what they consider the acceptable standards to be to help achieve a significant improvement in passenger satisfaction.

³⁸ Maintaining and improving Britain's railways, National Audit Office (2005)

Conclusions

Although passenger satisfaction with stations has been gradually improving since 2004, it still varies greatly depending on the size of the station, with satisfaction lowest amongst those passengers that use the smallest stations. When looking at the specific station attributes that passengers consider most important, it is clear that real-time information on train arrival and departure times, including information on delays, tops the bill. This is followed closely by the provision of toilets and staff.

- While the **provision of information** scores highly in terms of satisfaction (78%), it is an attribute that passengers consider to be a relatively high priority for improvement (ranked seventh highest out of 30 station and train attributes). This particularly applies to the information that is provided on delays when disruption affects rail services.
- While the industry tends not see the question of **toilets** as a major area to be addressed, passengers consistently flag up the importance of providing them at stations. Furthermore, where they already exist, passengers tell us that the toilets are in need of improvement. At those stations where toilets are not already provided, passengers frequently tell us that they are the most important new facility that they would like to see installed. This is even more important when the trains calling at those stations have no toilets onboard.
- Although not a structural consideration, the **presence of staff** is greatly valued by passengers. Despite telling us that of all station attributes, they are most satisfied with the way station staff deal with their requests, the absence of staff from a large number of stations denies passengers the benefits they can bring. This is reflected in the low satisfaction score given for the availability of staff at stations (58%). As can be seen from the publication “passenger perceptions of personal security on the railway”³⁹ the role of staff goes beyond just providing advice about ticketing and information on train times. The provision of staff also helps provide reassurance to those passengers that are concerned about their personal security whilst travelling by rail.

When looking purely at passenger satisfaction alone, the two areas that would seemingly need most improvement are the facilities provided for car parking at the station and the facilities and services provided at the station.

- It is a fact that for some rail passengers, driving to the station remains the most viable and practical means of travel. The increasing length of a working day and the shift towards a ‘24-7’ week means that it is hard to provide a comprehensive rail-bus service that meets the needs of commuters and/or weekend travellers. Fears over personal security also inhibit the use of alternative transport or walking. For these reasons, **car parking** facilities at stations remain important.

It is the intention of Passenger Focus to cover the issues surrounding access to

³⁹ <http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/news-and-publications/document-search/document.asp?dsid=2572>

stations in a future publication. However, it is likely that the key concerns about car parks, for those that wish to use them, relate to the availability of spaces and the price.

- Whilst there are no minimum standards set for each category of station, every passenger is reasonably entitled to expect that their basic needs will be met when using a station, and that some features such as customer information should be universal. Research indicates that passengers are fairly pragmatic about what level of facilities different sized stations should offer. The low satisfaction score for **facilities and services** (50%) would therefore suggest that in many instances stations are still failing to meet even the most basic expectations. This can only be resolved by providing the facilities where they are missing, which is not always practical because of the infrastructure available, or where they already exist introduce more rigorous cleaning and maintenance regimes. The latter can be ensured by building more service quality targets into the train operating company franchises when they come up for renewal.

What next?

Passenger Focus will continue to provide evidence on passenger perceptions of stations to the industry and seek to identify the most relevant opportunities to use this to influence change. As such Passenger Focus will use its stakeholder role in the re-franchising process to put forward aspirations for new rail franchises. These will include reference to the installation of new passenger facilities at stations, such as toilets (where relevant) and the need for tighter maintenance targets for the existing facilities. These can be set as part of the service quality management system that train operators are asked to adopt by the Department for Transport, and could also be used to address: station cleanliness, lighting, provision of seating, removal of graffiti and maintenance of lifts.

Passenger Focus will also continue to call upon the industry to ensure that the facilities at stations are appropriate to passenger's needs; at present it is often common practice for audits to simply catalogue what facilities are at stations, rather than ensuring they are fit for purpose.

Over the next 12 months Passenger Focus will aim to produce a similar publication on how Passengers access stations, and what the barriers are, which prevent passengers from considering alternative modes of access.



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