A new approach to rail passenger services in London and the South East:

Working in partnership to improve services and support growth.

Transport Focus is pleased to respond to the above consultation.

Our research suggests that passengers are more focused on the outputs that matter to them – how punctual their service is, how many seats are available and whether they are kept informed when there are delays - rather than the structures adopted to deliver them.

Therefore in this submission, we have focussed on what we consider to be the main messages emerging from our own recent research into passenger concerns and priorities, which we think need to be fully reflected in the development of the new strategic framework, and in the many detailed considerations that will flow from it. We are also concerned to ensure that the interests of passengers beyond the boundaries of the London Travel Area are effectively recognised and safeguarded.

**Question1: Do you agree with the principle of a partnership to better integrate the specification of rail passenger services across London and the South East?**

Yes. Train services do not follow political boundaries and passengers want to be able to travel to, from and within London and the South East. So it makes absolute sense for DfT and TfL to plan in tandem to ensure that the needs of all passengers are considered to the widest possible extent.

**Question 2: Do you agree with the principles that the partnership will work to? Are there any specific issues that have not been captured?**

The consultation lists three broad priorities:

* More frequent services, better interchanges and increased capacity
* Greater reliability for all passengers
* High standards of customer service (to include better integration of real-time information and, in time, simplifying fares)

We agree with the general principles. Our research [See Appendix 1 for more details] shows that passengers want a network that will deliver:

* + value for money for the price of tickets
  + improved punctuality
  + reliable services
  + provision of sufficient capacity, both in terms of frequency of service and sufficient seating on the train
  + effective management of any disruption, especially through information to passengers
  + accurate information about trains and platforms

Hence there is a good degree of overlap between these aspirations and the principles set out in the consultation document.

Our research consistently emphasises the importance of punctuality to passengers. We do not, however, feel that the existing mechanisms within DfT franchises for measuring performance adequately reflect the experiences of passengers [Appendix 2 contains further details]. Therefore we think it important that any new franchise/ concession also looks at the metrics used to measure performance. Our clear preference is for greater use of right-time performance.

We think there is also merit in including transparency as one of the core DfT/TfL principles. Giving rail passengers access to performance figures on their own service(s) will help them to hold the train company to account and to ask what is being done to improve services in return for the fares they pay. Indeed the availability of accurate data may actually help dispel negative perceptions – a particularly bad journey can linger in the memory and distort passengers’ perceptions. Hence, we believe there is a case for providing performance data at a disaggregated route level or, ideally, on a train-by-train basis (i.e. the performance of ‘my train’). We believe transparency is important enough to warrant a specific mention in the principles

**Question 3: Do you agree with the proposed governance arrangements?**

**Question 4: What form do you propose the input from local authorities and LEPs could take?**

**Question 5: Do you agree with the safeguards for transfer of inner suburban services to TfL, as set out here?**

London Travelwatch and Transport Focus produced a set of safeguards in 2013 designed to address the needs of passengers within and outside the London area. These covered:

* + Seamless access for passengers

As part of our submission to the Northern and TransPennine Express franchises we asked passengers for their views on devolution[[1]](#footnote-1). They recognised that devolution could help in capturing the views of local people and businesses. However, they were also keen that it did not make it harder to access the rest of the network. Passengers recognised the concept of a ‘network’ and wanted a seamless delivery of service between the devolved element and the rest. This included the timetabling and frequency of services, fares, and the provision of information especially during disruption.

This is equally applicable in a London context. Passengers will want to see interavailability of tickets, seamless provision of information, especially during disruption and an agreement between operators to work together in the best interest of passengers.

* + Even handedness in track access

Proposals will also need to establish a mechanism for dealing with ‘longer-distance vs local’ issues when it comes to allocating capacity both during normal times and when planning for major engineering projects. In an ideal world there would be sufficient capacity for all aspirations to be met but with demand already being high - and forecast to continue growing – there will inevitably be clashes. It will be important that decisions on devolution clearly specify a mechanism for dealing with disputes.

* + Consultation

We note, and welcome, the commitment within the ‘principles’ to ensure the voice of local authorities and LEPs is heard. We would, however, also like to see explicit commitments to consulting passengers and ensuring that they also get a chance to comment. During the initial ‘split’ it will be very important that passengers who will be on the inner services have every chance to comment on specification of the outer services and vice versa. This will help to ensure that existing journey opportunities or benefits are not lost.

We also think it important that passengers’ representatives are also consulted. We believe that there should be a commitment to regular and meaningful consultation by all parties with Transport Focus and London TravelWatch on all issues affecting passengers. This should be inclusive from the tender design stage by TfL through to day to day operation by the concessionaire, and should at a minimum be comparable to that currently required of train operating companies under the existing franchise arrangements and licensing regime.

We also believe it is important that this engagement with passengers continues throughout the life of any new franchise/concession. We would like the specifier of the franchise/concession to set out how they intend to gather the views of passengers on the services being provided on an ongoing basis. Traditional ‘hard’ measures on delays, cancellations and crowding are important but so is the quality of service being provided. On the latter our strong preference is for targets based on what passengers think – the best judge of quality being those who have used the services in question.

At present new franchises let by DfT include targets for passenger satisfaction – as measured by the National Passenger Survey (conducted by Transport Focus). Our experience with NRPS confirms the value of benchmarking service quality. Being able to compare performance across operators and sectors as well as over a period of time has real benefit to passengers. There is a genuine reputational effect in doing so – everyone wishes to be the best at something, no one likes to be the worst. You lose this ability if there is no consistency between franchises or service groups. It will be important that there is still a degree of comparability between the inner and outer services. We would, of course, be happy to discuss this further with TfL

To this end we are pleased to see the document committing the partnership to ensuring that “all the region’s passengers benefit from a joined up approach” and to seeking greater input from local authorities.

When looking at rail specifications the devil is invariably in the detail and it will be difficult to assess the impact on all passengers until individual specifications are produced and examined. However, the document does go a long way to allay any concerns when it makes two very important commitments:

* No detrimental effect on fares, either at stations served by TfL services or at other stations outside London
* No adverse impacts on the frequency, journey times or stopping patterns of longer distance services to and from London. Extra capacity on peak local London services would only be added if there is no negative impact on longer distance services no detrimental effect on fares.

We welcome these specific commitments

**Question 6: Are there other outcomes you might expect to see achieved?**

We have covered this in the sections above.

We would be happy to discuss this response in more detail with DfT and TfL should you find it useful.

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**APPENDIX 1: Passenger Priorities for Improvement**

Transport Focus has conducted research on passengers’ priorities for improvement[[2]](#footnote-2). Over 3,500 passengers across the country were asked to rank a series of train and station categories in order of their perceived priority for improvement.

The results can be broken down in a number of ways. For the purposes of this submission we have used the results for the London region compared to the overall findings for Great Britain as a whole.

The table below shows the top ten priorities for improvement.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Passenger Priorities for Improvement (top 10 – in order of priority)** | **London Total** | **Great Britain**  **Total** |
| Price of train tickets offers better value for money | 1 | 1 |
| Passengers always able to get a seat on the train | 2 | 2 |
| Trains sufficiently frequent at the times I wish to travel | 3 | 3 |
| More trains arrive on time than happens now | 4 | 4 |
| Less frequent major unplanned disruptions to your journey | 5 | 6 |
| Train company keeps passengers informed about delays | 6 | 5 |
| Fewer trains cancelled than happens now | 7 | 7 |
| Accurate and timely information available at stations | 8 | 8 |
| Journey time is reduced | 9 | 9 |
| Less disruption due to engineering works | 10 | 13 |
| Sample size | 1658 | 3559 |

As well as getting the rank order of priorities, the research can also be turned into an index score in order to get a sense of relativity between each item – i.e. by how much more, or less, important is one factor compared to another. The table below shows the relative scores for each of the above.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Passenger Priorities for Improvement (top 10 – index scores)** | **London Total** | **Great Britain**  **Total** |
| Price of train tickets offers better value for money | 511 | 494 |
| Passengers always able to get a seat on the train | 329 | 367 |
| Trains sufficiently frequent at the times I wish to travel | 283 | 264 |
| More trains arrive on time than happens now | 205 | 178 |
| Less frequent major unplanned disruptions to your journey | 186 | 161 |
| Train company keeps passengers informed about delays | 185 | 163 |
| Fewer trains cancelled than happens now | 156 | 136 |
| Accurate and timely information available at stations | 131 | 132 |
| Journey time is reduced | 112 | 105 |
| Less disruption due to engineering works | 102 | 90 |
| Sample size | 1658 | 3559 |

The priorities are shown as an index averaged on 100. In this case 100 = the average share under the assumption of equal importance of all attributes. The number of points above 100 is equivalent to the ratio of actual preference share to this theoretical average. So for example 150 = 50% more important than average, 300 = three times as important as average, 50 = half as important as average

The results emphasise the importance of what might be termed the ‘core product’ - an affordable, dependable service on which you can get a seat. From the index scores in particular we can see that value for money is not only the top priority for improvement but is around five times as important as the average priority. While clearly linked with the price of tickets we also know from previous research that this is also influenced heavily by train punctuality and the ability to get a seat. Getting a seat and frequency of service are in the second ‘block’ of priorities; with delays and disruption featuring strongly in the third main block of priorities.

**APPENDIX 2 : Right-Time Punctuality**

Given the significance of performance/punctuality to passengers we have carried out a series of research to understand more about the relationship between passenger satisfaction and performance, mapping satisfaction with punctuality (as measured by the National Rail Passenger Survey, NRPS) against the actual train performance recorded by the train company over the same period.

An initial study was conducted on London commuter services with (the then) National Express East Anglia, with three further studies carried out on Northern Rail regional commuter services (into and from Manchester) and on longer distance journeys with Cross Country and East Coast[[3]](#footnote-3). In all this covered around 12000 journeys. In each case we established that passengers notice delay well before the ‘official’ threshold of delay determined by the current PPM[[4]](#footnote-4) measure (i.e. up to five minutes for shorter-distance services and 10 minutes for longer-distance).

Key findings included:

* + Average lateness experienced by passengers is worse than that recorded for train services. The existing measure of performance is calculated at the final station so it is possible for passengers on-route to be late arriving at their station only for the ‘empty’ train to arrive on time – in other words the train is on time despite most of the passengers being late. Reporting on performance at key intermediate stations will help to address this.
  + On average, passenger satisfaction with punctuality reduces by between two and three percentage points with every minute of delay.
  + Commuters (except those travelling long distances) notice lateness after one minute of delay, not just after the five or ten minutes allowed by PPM. Their satisfaction with punctuality falls by an average of five percentage points per minute during the initial period of delay.
  + Business and leisure users and long distance commuters tend to change their level of satisfaction with punctuality after a delay of four to six minutes.

The effect of performance on passenger satisfaction can be demonstrated by mapping passenger satisfaction with punctuality from each NRPS wave against the trends for both PPM performance and right-time[[5]](#footnote-5) performance.

The following chart shows performance and satisfaction for LOROL. It is very noticeable that levels of passenger satisfaction are more closely aligned to right-time performance rather than the official PPM measure of performance.

In other words, passengers are very sensitive when it comes to performance and begin to notice delays well before the train is officially classed as being late.



1. [Passenger views of Northern and TransPennine rail franchises](http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/passenger-views-of-northern-and-transpennine-rail-franchises). Transport Focus. December 2012 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Passenger Priorities for Improvement. Passenger Focus. October 2014 <http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/research/publications/rail-passengers-priorities-for-improvements-october-2014> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. East Anglia: <http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/media/17fd34c0186edeb89b553f105f99e7a58bcdd0b0/what_passengers_want__towards_a_right_time_east_anglian_railway_mar2010.pdf>

   Cross Country: <http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/media/5c2e2a5986cdf704979854edd940319f642b655b/relationship_between_customer_satisfaction_and_performance__crosscountry.pdf>

   Northern:  <http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/research/publications/relationship-between-customer-satisfaction-and-performance-northern-rail>

   East Coast. <http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/research/publications/examining-the-links-between-customer-satisfaction-and-performance-east-coast> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Public Performance Measure - allows the train to arrive at its destination 5 minutes after the scheduled arrival time before it is considered late. This is measured in 4-week periods and by amalgamating periods to create a moving annual average (MAA) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Defined as arriving within 1 minute of the scheduled arrival time. This is also measured in 4-week periods and by amalgamating periods to create a moving annual average (MAA) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)