



The next three years 2017-20: **Making a difference for** **transport users**

Contents

Our role	3
1 How we've made a difference in the last few years	4
2 How are we going to make a difference in the next three years?	5
3 Key work themes	5
4 How we will achieve our goals	6
5 We are travelling in different ways	8
6 Excellent delivery, value for money and governance	9
7 Work and Insight Plans 2017-2018	9

Our role



Jeff Halliwell



Anthony Smith

What is Transport Focus?

Transport Focus is a consumer organisation – a champion for the transport user. Our mission is to make a difference for transport users, to make transport services better.

We are the independent, statutory, consumer watchdog for Britain's rail passengers, bus, coach and tram passengers in England (outside London) and all users of England's motorways and major 'A' roads – the Strategic Road Network (SRN). Transport Focus's statutory roots go back nearly 70 years.

We aim to be useful to those who make decisions about transport to help them make better decisions. We use evidence to drive change and make a difference. Transport Focus strives to give all transport users as powerful a voice as those that provide transport services and we listen to those users in a variety of ways.

We use a mixture of insight, active advocacy, user group engagement, speaking at events, public meetings, media (including social) and a newsletter (*Transport User Voice*) and a website to get our message across and secure change.

The Scottish Government, Welsh Government and London Assembly each appoint one Board member, with others appointed by the Secretary of State for Transport. We have offices in London and Manchester and we have peripatetic workers and non-executive Board members spread across Great Britain.

Making a difference

Some changes can be brought about relatively easily. Others take years. While investment has underpinned improvements to transport provision in the last few years, there is still much to be done with fares, information and dealing with disruption – all key things that affect the consumer experience alongside the bedrock issue of performance.

In addition, we aim to ensure that every major decision taken about transport services – from local government funding of bus services to government

decisions about rail franchises – has user needs clearly taken into account. Our evidence and advocacy should inform and drive those decisions. We will do this with pride, energy and passion.

Devolution


All of our work is used by governments and the transport industry across Great Britain in helping shape services to better meet user needs.

Continued devolution to Scotland and Wales, the rise of Transport for the North and other devolved organisations, will have a growing effect on where we work. We have therefore set out detailed specific work in particular countries or regions where it is focused on one area or funded by third parties in those areas.

How we perform

We recently carried out a stakeholder attitude survey. With 95 in-depth interviews and more than 700 online responses, this has provided a powerful, useful and interesting insight into how others view us.

Our effectiveness, influencing and the way we work were strongly endorsed – with special mention of our staff. We are going to plan for even more effective engagement, making sure we articulate our wins more clearly and continue to be seen standing up for transport users.



Jeff Halliwell
Chair

June 2017



Anthony Smith
Chief Executive

1 How we've made a difference in the last few years



For rail passengers

- Radically improved the way train companies deal with passengers without 'valid' tickets. The Government is now setting up, with our help, a new independent appeals body for Penalty Fares and has introduced a one-off leniency policy for passengers who forget railcards.
 - Boosted the passenger voice in the rail franchise replacement process, leading to better services. Passenger priorities, based on our evidence, now guide the drafting of the franchise contracts and discussions with bidders, and are hard-wired into franchise targets.
 - Dealt with thousands of complaints where passengers have become deadlocked with train companies. Achieved over 70 per cent passenger satisfaction with how we dealt with their complaints. Fed back issues raised to Government, Network Rail and train companies and helped improve train company complaints handling.
 - Amplified the passenger voice in operational and investment decisions – again, leading to better services.
- Over a million passengers have now had their voices heard in our National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS). Our seat on the Western Route Supervisory Board puts passengers at the top table. Our work on trust and passenger priorities for improvement is guiding government and industry investment decisions.
- Our insight and advocacy work (carried out over eight years) now underpins the *Action plan for information on rail fares and ticketing* created jointly by the Government, industry and Transport Focus. In time this will lead to improvements in ticket vending machines, fares information and, hopefully, end the need for 'split ticketing'.
 - The current industry work on improving information during planned and unplanned disruption stems directly from our advocacy. We have helped improve the handling of passenger information during works at Glasgow Queen Street, Bath, London Waterloo, Reading, Birmingham New Street and London Kings Cross.



For bus passengers

- Built the Bus Passenger Survey (BPS) from scratch. Since 2009 more than 270,000 passengers have taken part. The comparison of services across the country and between bus companies drives change – local authorities and bus companies want and need to be seen to be doing well. It is now funded equally between bus companies, local authorities and Transport Focus.
- Helped to drive the introduction of smarter ticketing on buses, removing potential barriers to travel. Our extensive insight work in this area has helped ensure a passenger focus to improvements.
- Boosted the passenger voice in operational and investment decisions. We chair the West Midlands Bus Alliance and take part in the Merseyside City Region Bus Alliance. The BPS is a key tool for these partnerships, measuring performance between authorities and bus companies and helping to improve services.
- Provided a major input to the Bus Services Act, helping to ensure its provisions are passenger-focused. In time the use of the powers in the Act, or changes driven in the light of it, should lead to improved services.



For road users (since 2015)

- Set up, from scratch, a new Strategic Roads User Survey, which is now being piloted. This dramatic boost to the road user voice will, in time, give a new vibrancy and urgency to the need to listen to users' views.
- Helped focus Highways England's attention on the need to improve the handling of incidents and roadworks. There have been improvements to information provision and a reduction in the use of very long sections of roadworks as a result.
- Put improvements to road surfaces at the top of the agenda. Our priorities for improvement research flagged this as a key issue and highlighted the need to properly maintain and renew existing roads, as well as expand capacity.
- Made sure HGV drivers' views were heard in discussions about facilities at the proposed Kent lorry holding area. Highlighted that lorry drivers need better information on the approaches to Dover. More generally, drove debate about the quantity and quality of roadside facilities for HGV drivers.
- Helped ensure the road user voice is being heard loud and clear in development of the Government's second Road Investment Strategy 2020-25. This will make the investment decisions made more relevant to user needs.

2 How are we going to make a difference in the next three years?

Main goals

We all build our lives around our transport decisions. We need to get to work, get home to pick up kids, get to the cinema or visit friends at the weekend. Lorries deliver virtually everything we rely on. Transport matters to individuals and the economy. Day in, day out, consistent performance is key.

Our first goal is to **make a difference for today's transport user**. We cannot always wait for long-term improvements. Today's users want the promises made to them (for which they pay a lot) about timetables, journey times, information, ticket types and complaints handling kept.

Of course, things will sometimes go wrong or there will be disruption caused by improvement works. Users know and understand that. However, how they are treated when things go wrong or services or road networks are disrupted is an acid test. In transport industries where service delivery is sometimes monopolistic it is crucial there is strong, reliable feedback from users.

An important part in improving services is long-term investment. That is why our second goal is **making a difference for tomorrow's transport user**.

Significant investments are being made across transport modes. Stakeholders and local communities rightly have a strong voice in how priorities are decided. We think it is time transport users, who underwrite much of this investment

through fares or taxes, had an equal voice.

Our ability to make a difference for today and tomorrow is built around Transport Focus becoming a **hub for user insight and evidence** – our third goal.

We should be the first port of call when major decisions are being made about transport services and investment. We should be the first place journalists and commentators come to when writing about transport. We can influence effectively only if we have strong evidence to back up our arguments. Everyone has anecdotes about their journeys. We have spoken to hundreds of thousands of transport users to find out their priorities. We will do more to deploy that evidence to great effect.

We need to create a modern workplace where our people can do their best work. They need good IT, training and management. So our fourth goal is to build **a modern workplace for great people**. We are currently in a good place. Staff attitude surveys indicate good levels of satisfaction and engagement from staff. We need to maintain and boost this.

"Transport users' key need is services and networks they can rely on. Our insight and advocacy work underscores this. If services are disrupted users want reliable information to help put them back in control."

3 Key work themes

We will continue to use our respected brand of evidence-based advocacy to bring about change in a number of key areas. We have identified these areas from our existing insight work, complaints, and understanding where opportunities for change exist.

Across all the modes of transport we work on we will use our existing or new **tracker surveys** to spot and track good and not-so-good performance. We will also drive change for transport users by the use of this comparative benchmarking data – no operator wants to be sitting at the bottom of their peer group and everyone wants to be top!

In addition, our overarching plans for each mode of transport are to:



Road users

We will:

- improve the handling of information around roadworks and unplanned disruption
- Make sure the road user voice is clearly heard in debates around the second Road Investment Strategy
- Better understand and prioritise user needs regarding road surfaces and then use that knowledge to bring about improvements.



Rail passengers

We will:

- improve the fares and ticketing system to help passengers make better-informed choices and access better value for money fares
- Help the industry improve the quality of information during planned and unplanned disruption – HS2-related works at Euston for example
- Improve the quality of rail industry complaint handling
- Influence new rail franchise contracts to ensure that passenger interests are placed firmly at the heart of future operation.



Bus, coach and tram passengers

We will:

- help local authorities and bus companies identify and address areas of poor performance, often caused by congestion
- Use the Bus and Tram Passenger Surveys to benchmark and drive improvements for passengers
- Help local authorities and others with decisions about future franchising or other choices about local bus service provision.

"Achieving our goals will make transport services and networks more reliable, easier to use and better value for money."

4 How we will achieve our goals

Making a difference for today's transport user

- We will talk to hundreds of thousands of transport users about their last journey. We carry out four main tracker surveys: the NRPS, BPS, Tram Passenger Survey and the National Road User's Satisfaction Survey (to be replaced by our Strategic Roads User Survey). This work provides unique, high quality, benchmarked comparative data on performance. This drives change. Human nature tends towards (and some contracts reinforce) the desire to improve, to be best in class. Our work inspires, tracks and records that delivery.
- Those surveys highlight where we need to do extra insight and advocacy work to fully understand issues and drive change. We are focusing on information during planned and unplanned disruption, fares and ticketing and areas of poor performance.
- We will continue to help train companies improve their complaints handling processes. Longer-distance rail passengers are more likely to complain than commuters – a unique experience perhaps drives expectations. How a complaint is handled is a touchstone of trust. A service user has taken the trouble to tell a company something; this is

valuable information. Handled well and the complainant can become an advocate. Handled badly, the complaint will simply become magnified and inspire or reinforce mistrust.



Making a difference for tomorrow's transport user

- Transport users now fund a major proportion of the day-to-day running costs of rail and bus services. Much investment is underpinned by this future income. Road users pay taxes, some of which fund road investment. In future, when vehicle excise duty is more closely tied to spend on strategic roads, the link between payment and use becomes closer. So, it is right that the user voice is heard loud and clear. We will plan for even more effective engagement with the people making these decisions.
- It is vital that governments and industry make efforts to talk to – and listen to – users when investment decisions are made. This has become more commonplace in the energy, water and other industries. It is rightfully becoming more common in transport and we intend to reinforce that trend.
- On the railways, investment is made in individual projects, through franchises and the so-called Control Period five-year investment plans – the next one running from 2019-24. Other investments are made by devolved administrations and the private sector.

On roads there are five year 'Road Investment Strategies' – the next one from 2020-25. Bus investment is more regionally focused but less predictable, although more franchising and partnership arrangements may follow the implementation of the Bus Services Act.

We aim to ensure all these major decisions are made following an in-depth analysis of our work on users' current experiences and priorities. This should lead to better decisions and better services for the user.

Making Transport Focus an insight and evidence hub

- We will use our evidence to influence governments and transport operators, and to back up our arguments for change. We have a unique, independent perspective. We aim to make a difference for all transport users – we are not pro bus, rail, HGV or whatever. Where choice or competition doesn't exist we believe professional, sustained, focused advocacy helps promote and protect the consumer interest. We have no axe to grind or hobbyhorses to pursue. Importantly we always produce priorities, not wish lists. This is the best way to be useful and to drive change. However, all this must be based on a solid foundation of evidence.
- We aim to spend at least one third of our income on insight activities. The quality of this work is crucial. You may disagree with our policy recommendations based on the research, but we don't want arguments about methodologies. We have built up good, long-term relationships with the research agencies which we commission to carry out most of our work. The NRPS is an Official Statistic – we are proud of that. We will continue





to improve innovation and quality in our insight work, trying to build faster feedback which retains the representativeness and ultimately usefulness of what we produce.

- We aim to make more use of this rich insight to drive thinking and planning in transport. We can now draw insights across different transport modes on common issues such as handling disruption, complaints handling, the experience of disabled and younger users and the user voice.
- We want to lead the debate about how transport user satisfaction is gathered as we and others develop more digital and innovative ways of gathering satisfaction data. We want to hold a conference to gather views, ideas and best practice from other sectors. We will hold this conference in conjunction with a partner organisation.
- All of our work is published, available to all and used by many. All our work adds to the general, common understanding of transport issues.
- We will publish and update a rolling Insight Plan which will detail our forthcoming work on www.transportfocus.org.uk/about/our-goals/. It will be updated regularly.

A modern workplace for great people

- We are focused on managing performance within Transport Focus simply and fairly with systems and procedures that support people and remove the barriers to them producing great work.
- We will promote and attract the right people based on their attitude, experience, knowledge and skills. We develop staff to make sure they can make the best of internal opportunities.
- We are committed to promoting the principles and practices of diversity and equality.
- We offer competitive salaries comparable with Civil Service organisations. However, quality of life, flexible working, opportunities and a supportive working environment is also a big part of how we recruit and retain staff.
- We will provide our people with a good environment to work in with modern IT to help them be productive.



5 We are travelling in different ways

New, different transport choices

We know that transport users' main need is for reliable, consistent performance from public transport and the roads they use.

However, the population is rising, the number of working people increasing and the economy growing. We are also changing the way we travel: more rail and road use, less bus use. As a result the number of rail passengers and the volume of road traffic (particularly van deliveries) is rising. This places strains on transport networks and their ability to perform reliably. This is often exacerbated when works designed to improve network performance cause more short-term disruption.

Bus use is declining in some areas as congestion saps reliability, while other on-demand (often app-based) services grow, and local authority funding pressures can lead to reductions in the level of bus services.

The traditional barriers between public and private transport are slowly starting to blur. The increase in hail and ride and app-based services continues and is expanding into more traditional bus services. Car and bike hire, sharing and pooling continues to expand. Taxi and minicab services continue to play an important part in public/private transport. The arrival of autonomous vehicles will bring further change. What is the role for user representation in all this?

Now that we represent users of road and other forms of transport we want to start stitching together what we know to help inform debates about the end-to-end user experience whichever forms of transport are used. We can then better understand why people make certain choices and help them make better informed choices in future.

The coming into effect of the Consumer Rights Act 2015 in the transport sector will, in time, bring change. While the Act itself represents an evolution rather than a revolution in consumer rights, it will focus much more attention on the promises made to transport users and their delivery. We intend to monitor the effect of the Act across different transport modes.

6 Excellent delivery, value for money and governance

Transport Focus is sponsored by, but independent from, the Department for Transport. Most of our funding is from taxpayers although an increasing amount comes from third parties. It is right and proper we spend that money well. So we are committed to excellent delivery, value for money and governance.

How we plan and account for our resources (of which people and time are far the biggest part) is important. We have a good track record on receiving a clean bill of health following National Audit Office inspections. We have a good track record on governance and internal audit. Transport Focus is well run and we are determined to keep it that way.

- We will ensure we have in place effective, proportionate work planning, risk management, governance, reporting and audit processes to help us make the best use of our resources.
- We are determined to deliver good value for money for taxpayers and fare payers. We can best do that through good planning, reviewing and learning from what works and what does not.
- As transport decisions are increasingly made at regional level we will intensify our already-good engagement with devolved governments and regional organisations.
- We will continue to monitor stakeholder and staff views of our usefulness and effectiveness through surveys.

Transport Focus currently has eight Board members. The Scottish Government, Welsh Government and the London Assembly each appoints one, with other members appointed by the Secretary of State for Transport. The Board's key roles, supported by Transport Focus staff, are to:

- set the organisation's strategy
- agree the Workplan, budgets and key performance indicators, and oversee performance against these
- oversee operations, including finances, remuneration and risk assessments
- set the policy framework, and agree lines on major policy issues.



Transport Focus's **Work and Insight Plans 2017-18** set out the details of our key campaign, insight and work objectives set in the context of this longer-term plan. The **Work Plan 2017-18** and **Insight Plan 2017-18** can be found here: www.transportfocus.org.uk/about/our-goals/



Contact Transport Focus

Fleetbank House
2-6 Salisbury Square
London
EC4Y 8JX
w www.transportfocus.org.uk

Transport Focus is the operating
name of the Passengers' Council.

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Design and Print by TU ink www.tuink.co.uk (15545)