

What do passengers want from Cross Country services?

The next Cross Country franchise is expected to begin in late December 2019.

We carried out research, on behalf of the Department for Transport, to understand what passengers want from the new service. This time we have looked at attitudes to interchange and the reasons why rail users and other travellers may not use Cross Country.

As might be expected, a key determinant of usage is whether the train serves the locations where people wish to travel. However, some people actively select alternative modes of transport, partly for reasons of cost and/or convenience.

For some, travelling by train is seen as a potentially risky business. There can be uncertainty about what the experience may be like and anxieties about delays or an uncomfortable environment. In some cases, a previous negative rail experience has led to this view. There is low brand awareness of CrossCountry, a lack of knowledge about routes and destinations and, consequently, little reassurance about the overall travel offer.

Passengers consider changing trains a stressful and often complicated process. Even people who interchange frequently can find the process difficult. Specific elements that cause uncertainty and stress to passengers are time pressures, wayfinding, difficulties or obstructions at stations, delays and unclear or incorrect information on trains or at stations.

Interchanging can be particularly demanding for passengers with disabilities and support was often needed over and above the general assistance available at stations. Passengers with disabilities will travel for longer to avoid interchanges as it is seen as such a potentially stressful and difficult process.

Our 2015 research explored passengers' views of the current operation and their aspirations for the future. We found that whilst Cross Country has a low profile, passengers are generally pleased with what it has to offer. However, there are some key areas for improvement. These include a more obvious staff presence at stations and more seats.

CrossCountry is quite well liked, and its services hold up well to other forms of transport, and other train companies. However, some day-to-day service elements could be enhanced, such as carriage environment, free and improved Wi-Fi, cleaner toilets and better luggage facilities.