

Passenger Voice

Independent national passenger watchdog



Views on value for money revealed

Passenger Focus has published the results of its major study into rail fares and ticketing. The study, carried out at the request of government, focuses on passenger satisfaction with value for money and compares fares and service levels in Great Britain with those in continental Europe.

Colin Foxall, Passenger Focus chairman, said: "This major new study lays bare why Britain's passengers are broadly happy with the quality of rail services, but are not happy with the value for money they are getting. Price of tickets is a key factor behind this, but so is train punctuality, overcrowding and information during delays. When compared with other European countries, Britain's railways are generally more expensive, especially in

London and the South East. However, most of Britain's passengers seem better served than other European passengers by the number and frequency of trains available."

Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief executive, said: "Alongside these findings we are publishing recommendations about the measures that could be taken to improve passenger satisfaction with value for money. Tackling overcrowding and continuing to improve punctuality are crucial. Government has already accepted one of our key recommendations –



Price of tickets is key

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Passenger Focus drives bus and coach work forward

Passenger Focus has started work in three areas of England to test how it should engage with bus and tram passengers, operators and stakeholders, at local, regional and national levels. These

tests/pilots are now being run in the South East, South West and West Midlands. The Department for Transport is preparing draft regulations on the powers to be assigned to Passenger Focus in its new role, and these will

be made available for public consultation in the spring. There will be a three-month consultation period, and the responses will help to shape the role which will be given final parliamentary approval.

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Challenges ahead as Passenger Focus looks to air

Passenger Focus is taking on new and exciting roles. Starting to represent bus and coach passengers while continuing to deliver on rail passenger issues in England, Scotland and Wales, represents a considerable challenge

In addition, the Department for Transport has just issued a consultation document on the future economic regulation of airports. This proposes that Passenger Focus's remit is extended to cover air passenger representation. Passenger Focus would welcome this new role, building on the skills, knowledge and experience of the Air Users Council.

In the meantime, Passenger Focus has set itself a number of priorities for the next 12 months. These issues have been selected on the basis of passengers' priorities and where we feel we can make most difference:

1 Rail fares and ticketing.

This includes looking at retailing accuracy, queuing times and the release of advance purchase fares as well as improving passenger confidence in the fares and ticketing system.

2 Passenger information during disruption.

Passenger Focus research shows that the main driver of passenger satisfaction is punctuality. The main driver of dissatisfaction is how delays are dealt with. We will research the passenger experience and push the industry to improve both planned and unplanned disruption management.

3 Building Passenger Focus's knowledge, experience and skills in bus and coach passenger issues and representation. Passenger Focus needs to trial and test how to combine research and on the ground advocacy.

4 Air passenger representation.

Passenger Focus looks forward to developing proposals for how we could contribute to making a difference for air passengers.

Passenger Focus has set these main campaign objectives for the year:

- Campaign for changes to the fares regulation formula to, among other things, tie fare rises to performance improvements; securing the introduction of widely available direct debit schemes for annual season tickets; the widespread introduction of carnet style products to help part time travellers; posters at every station clearly displaying the main off peak walk up return prices available



- Getting national published train performance data (the Public Performance Measure) broken down by route as well as train company. This will allow a much more effective scrutiny of good and not so good performance within individual train companies and Network Rail areas

- Secure a commitment from Network Rail and train companies to reduce the use of bus replacement services
- Secure improved quality monitoring of disabled assistance services
- Seek improved recording of overcrowding.

Passenger Focus is an influencing organisation – we have few formal powers. Our success will continue to rely on good research and argument.

Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief executive

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removing train companies' ability to increase some prices by more than the headline inflation plus 1%."

Mr Foxall commented: "It's not fair that some passengers face higher price rises because operators have freedom to increase some regulated fares by up to five points above the average increase. We have lobbied for this flexibility to be removed and we are pleased the Government is addressing this." Following the launch of the research, the Government announced that if the July 2009 retail prices index figure is negative, regulated fares will fall in January 2010.



Passenger Focus is now in discussions with the industry and the Government about the implementation of its other recommendations, including that government reviews its intention to

shift the cost of funding the railway from taxpayers to passengers. Passenger Focus also examined fares, ticketing and value for money satisfaction for passengers making long-distance journeys. It found that the underlying fares structure is too complex; that it must be seen to be fairer to passengers; and that the price of flexibility in travel plans is too high. The research found that if you can get a ticket at the cheapest possible 'buy in advance, one train only' price, long-distance travel to London can be cheaper than travel to Paris, Hamburg, Milan, Amsterdam, Madrid, Stockholm and Zurich. However, travelling at short notice or needing flexibility about the train you catch can be more expensive when travelling to London than to the other cities.

Safeguarding service quality

A number of train operating companies (TOCs) are looking to reduce staff in the face of economic difficulties

While it is not for Passenger Focus to be prescriptive about the way TOCs organise their business, any reduction in staff numbers should not impact on the quality of service passengers receive.

Passenger Focus was at the forefront of opposition to the reduction of hours at 114 South West Trains ticket offices, but the company has now announced its intention to shed 660 jobs, including ticket office and platform staff. Cuts in cleaning regimes have already produced concerns about dirty and littered carriages. Passengers understand that there is a recession, but they cannot understand why these cuts are necessary when fares continue

to soar and trains are still busy.

Jocelyn Pearson, Passenger Focus manager, said: "Train operators must make certain that the service offered to passengers does not unduly suffer as a result of these significant job losses. Our research shows that passengers want a staff presence on trains and at the station. They provide advice, help for passengers with accessibility issues and can sell tickets. Having visible staff gives reassurance to passengers and a greater sense of security."

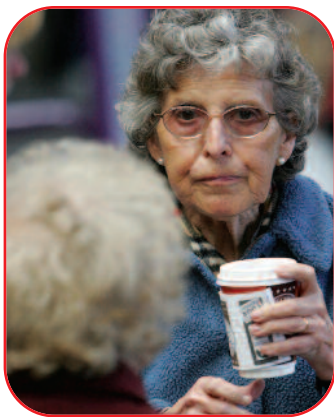
Smaller job cuts are envisaged by Southeastern and ScotRail. First Capital Connect has applied to make reductions to ticket office hours and both National Express East Coast and National Express East Anglia have shed catering staff, ending a restaurant car service on most trains.

Some train operating companies have reduced carriages on off-peak services, but this has caused complaints as passengers regard some of the shorter trains as overcrowded.

It is worth noting that the Government has announced funding for the railway for the next five years, which gives more certainty to the industry than many other parts of the economy.



Staff are crucial to passengers



Research into concessionary fares

The concessionary fares scheme allowing those over 60 to travel free on buses outside peak hours has created various financial and operating problems for local authorities and bus operators, which have fuelled national debate. Passenger Focus has been carrying out research with passengers and speaking to

bus operators, Passenger Transport Executives and the Passenger Transport Executive Group to look into the issues surrounding the scheme.

The underestimation of the concessionary fares scheme's popularity has been at the heart of the issue. It has left some councils with

such a shortfall in their budget that they are having to look at possible service cutbacks and rises in Council Tax. For the operators, it can mean leaving behind passengers at bus stops at the start of the non-peak period. This may be preventing operators from growing their business and alienating bus passengers.

Geoff Hoon addresses conference

Geoff Hoon MP, the Secretary of State for Transport, will be the key speaker at the Passenger Focus annual conference 2009. The event will see industry figures come together to launch Passenger Focus's new bus and coach passenger representation role.

Key themes will include fares and ticketing, what can be done to improve future services, and

the issue of which serves passengers best – trains or buses/coaches?

Chaired by Passenger Focus chairman, Colin Foxall, there will also be speeches from Iain Coucher, Sir Moir Lockhead and Richard Bowker CBE. Workshop sessions will allow more in-depth discussions to take place.



Get more business

Passenger Focus's latest research has revealed there is potential for the industry to attract greater numbers of business travellers onto the train

Record numbers (84%) of business passengers say in the National Passenger Survey (NPS) they are satisfied with their rail journey. The NPS also found 83% of business passengers are happy with their train's punctuality and reliability.

Because the Department for Transport's (DfT) own research shows business travel often takes place at off peak times, Passenger Focus believes there is opportunity for the industry to encourage greater use of the network among the business community.

In a study of employers' travel needs, business

passengers identified benefits of travelling by rail included having the ability to work on the train (37%), it offers a less stressful form of transport (33%), speed of the journey (28%) and the elimination of parking problems (21%).

However, the study of employers has revealed the railways are perceived as being too expensive, unreliable and inconvenient to make it the obvious choice for business travel. Business passengers will avoid catching the train if they need to carry goods/samples (23%), the station is too far away (23%), have their cars available (22%), and their



destination is not on the rail network (21%).

A third of employers said they are not happy with the price of the train ticket – 35% said it was too expensive.

Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief executive, said: "The study shows that the rail industry must keep up its focus on performance and look at value for money and ticketing issues to ensure that the train can be a viable choice for more employers."

News roundup

- **Commitment to customer service.** Passenger Focus is now a member of the Institute of Customer Service (ICS), the professional body for customer service. In joining the ICS, the watchdog hopes to maintain and raise its overall service.
- **Open access operators in NPS** Grand Central and Wrexham & Shropshire open access operators are participating in the Spring 2009 National Passenger Survey (NPS). Their participation in the survey is on a trial basis. Heathrow Express and Heathrow Connect already take part in the survey.
- **Security Focus** Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief executive, has highlighted the importance of staff at stations at the Railway Community Safety Forum 2009. Mr Smith presented Passenger Focus's latest document 'Passenger perceptions of personal security on the railways' at the forum which explored how to reduce crime on Britain's railways. The national rail watchdog's document brings together all of Passenger Focus's research looking at safety and security at the station and on the train.

Helping passengers

A sample of cases that the Passenger Advice Team has dealt with recently:

- After boarding the train, a passenger realised that he only had his seat reservations and not the actual ticket. Despite carrying proof of purchase, he was made to pay an additional £80. Passenger Focus was able to secure a full refund in rail travel vouchers.
- Two passengers made a complaint when

the train in front of them broke down and their journey took six hours to complete. Upon arrival at their destination, they had missed all public transport and had to get a taxi. Passenger Focus was able to secure a cheque from South West Trains covering the full cost of the purchased tickets, along with two first class complimentary tickets for a future journey.

- A man was loading luggage onto the train for his wife, who after recently undergoing surgery, was unable to carry her suitcases. As he attempted to exit, the doors failed to open and the train departed, resulting in him missing a meeting. After Passenger Focus's intervention, CrossCountry has now agreed to provide the passenger with two complimentary tickets for future travel.

Rail watchdog to focus on Welsh services

The rail watchdog's work across Wales and the services passengers receive from train operators in the country will be the focus of the next Passenger Focus Board meeting, which is being held

in Cardiff. The Passenger Focus Board is holding a public meeting on Wednesday, 13 May at the Millennium Centre. Doors open at 9am and will feature developments in the watchdog's Welsh Language Scheme, a

review of Arriva Trains Wales and First Great Western services and a progress check on Passenger Focus's bus and coach work.

Simon Pickering, Passenger Focus manager, will be addressing the meeting covering

his recent work in Wales and key issues for passengers. Spokespeople from the Welsh Assembly Government, Arriva Trains Wales, First Great Western and Network Rail will also address the Board.