

Passenger Voice Scotland

Independent national rail passenger watchdog

Passengerfocus
putting rail passengers first

West Coast Main Line upgrade

The West Coast Main Line (WCML) upgrade will deliver passengers extra services to Glasgow, Manchester and other places, will mean more trains at the weekend and a substantial cut to journey times along the route

The additional trains and shorter journey times should go some way to addressing passenger priorities for extra trains and more trains running on time.

The industry acknowledges the engineering work needed to bring these massive improvements has caused years of weekend pain and disruption to passengers on an ongoing and frequent basis. Therefore, it is now essential that engineering works do not overrun into 2009 and cause further delay and disruptions to passengers.

Passenger Focus has raised its concerns to the industry that many passengers have had to pay full-price fares for disrupted and longer journeys, often on bus replacement services. This has sometimes been because of train timetables being loaded on to the website too late to offer lower advance purchase fares.

There is now also concern about how



Engineers work to upgrade the line

the upgraded line will cope with the increase in services from December 2008. However, Passenger Focus will be monitoring this situation very closely. And, Network Rail assures us that its plans are running to time and from January 2009 the inconvenience and distress caused to passengers will fade into a distant memory.

Proposals for open-access?

Platinum Trains has applied to set up open-access services between Aberdeen and King's Cross, calling at Dundee only to achieve a timing of under six and a half hours. Two weekday and one weekend services are proposed, with a start date of late 2009. Five-car Adelante trains would be upgraded to incorporate a galley and airline-style seat-back TV screens for internet and DVDs. A decision on whether the East Coast Main Line has the capacity for the extra trains is expected from Network Rail in January.

Passenger Focus manager Robert Samson said: "We await the details, but increasing competition and faster journey times are worthy of further examination to improve passengers' choice of services."

First ScotRail franchise extension

In the last issue of Passenger Voice Scotland we commented on the surprise announcement to extend the First ScotRail franchise and the lack of any meaningful consultation. Having studied the contract extension agreement, we are pleased that this further investment demonstrates a clear commitment to improving rail services and the passenger experience. We look forward to the Transport Scotland consultation on the extension that will give the opportunity to comment on the proposed options within the agreement and examine other proposals from interested parties.



Pictured is Transport Minister Stewart Stevenson MSP

News roundup

- **Scottish Transport Awards**

Passenger Focus board member for Scotland, James King, will be chairing this year's Scottish Transport Awards Conference at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Glasgow on 19 November. The keynote speaker will be Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change, Stewart Stevenson MSP.

- **NPS in the field**

Work is currently underway on the Autumn 2008 National Passenger Survey. For Spring results, see www.passengerfocus.org.uk/nps

- **Passenger Focus on video**

The Passenger Focus corporate video explaining the watchdog's role is now available to view at www.passengerfocus.org.uk

- **Passenger views**

Passenger Focus is working with Transport Scotland to identify research projects that the two parties can collaborate on.

More help required

As part of an ongoing programme of work into accessibility issues on rail, Passenger Focus has published a report on the Assisted Passenger Reservation Service (APRS) and its delivery to disabled passengers.

We set a group of mystery shoppers the task of booking assistance and testing the delivery of assistance across Great Britain. The results were not encouraging.

While train companies answered phone calls quickly and were polite, they couldn't always provide the information required. When passengers arrived at the station, one in three shoppers were not met as arranged.

Some mystery shoppers received excellent service from helpful staff but others did not have such a positive experience. In a large number of cases, when things went wrong with the journeys, station/train staff tried to put things right. However, when the APRS isn't delivered as booked, it causes many passengers anxiety and uncertainty.

The APRS just isn't consistent and we are asking the Department for Transport (DfT) and the train companies to get it right. We have requested the industry to build in a tracking system which is regularly audited and the results are published to ensure we are aware of the improvements.

Robert Samson, Passenger manager for Scotland, will be delivering the results to First ScotRail and working with the operator to improve the service for disabled passengers across the country.



Survey online

An online database version of Passenger Focus's twice-yearly National Passenger Survey (NPS) is now available. Besides providing all the information in the report, the Reportal database allows registered users to review previous years' surveys and devise their own comparisons based on specific interests.

The NPS is the largest study of rail users in Europe with over 53,000 passengers completing questionnaires about their rail journeys each year. The results are used industry-wide, helping train operating companies, Network Rail and others determine how they can improve services based on passenger priorities.

In addition to Reportal, Passenger Focus has created an on-line facility which will allow the user to access comments made about services provided on the train and at the station, giving a clear idea of passenger feedback. For further information, go to www.npsreportal.org.uk

James King on board



Passenger Focus's Scottish board member since 2005, James King (pictured left), has had a long involvement with the railway industry from the passenger's perspective. It began

with the founding of a rail users' group for North Berwick at a time when the rolling stock was so bad that passengers could not sit near the doors because of rain. A strategic business and marketing consultant, James was appointed to the British Transport Police Authority as passenger and Scotland representative in 2004.

James was also appointed by the Scottish Government to the Passenger

Focus board, and his role differs from that of other board members because of the largely autonomous nature of the railway in Scotland – only policing, regulation and safety come under the jurisdiction of Westminster. James said: "Scotland, procures its own rolling stock and diverges from English policy in its active promotion of re-openings, extensions and electrification. The investment criteria for re-openings are more favourable in Scotland. The pace of decision-making can be faster, and I have regular meetings with Transport Scotland and the Scottish Transport Minister on strategic issues so that we understand what they are trying to achieve and make sure passengers' interests are at the fore."

"Naturally I work closely on responses to consultations with Scotland's passenger manager, Robert Samson (pictured right), who does an excellent job monitoring the five franchises operating in Scotland and reporting to Transport Scotland."

