

Passenger Voice South West

Independent national rail passenger watchdog



Better information on First Great Western stations

A lack of timely and accurate train running information at First Great Western (FGW) stations has been a major complaint in research by Passenger Focus. So we are pleased to see installation of a new Customer Information

System at Oxford and Slough stations, the first two stations to trial the new systems. This is the precursor to new systems being used across the whole franchise area in an effort to provide 'real time' train running information to passengers. A local

system has also been installed at Ivybridge in Devon and Hanborough in the Thames Valley area, with a larger local pilot scheme planned for the Severn Beach Line near Bristol. All stations should be equipped by Autumn 2010.

Buffet cars saved on First Great Western

First Great Western (FGW) has responded to widespread opposition to remove buffet cars from a significant number of its High Speed Trains by reversing the decision. Passenger Focus has consistently objected to their removal and welcomes FGW's recognition of passengers' preferences. The intention now is for buffet cars to undergo a refresh programme to offer a much wider choice for passengers.



Buffet cars to stay

Image: Keeping Track

D-Day for Waterloo gates

The biggest set of railway ticket gates in Europe went live at the beginning of January without a hitch. The 160 gates at London Waterloo have to deal with around 100 million journeys a year, as recorded through ticket sales, Travelcards and Oyster.

Passenger Focus manager Jocelyn Pearson

arranged for representatives of Rail User Groups (RUG) to be shown the gates by Network Rail (NR) and South West Trains (SWT). The RUG representatives were impressed by the careful planning and specification of the gates, which are able to handle the next generation of ITSO (Integrated Transport Smartcard Organisation)

smartcards as well as the current magnetic stripe tickets and Oyster smartcard.

A few tips to users: don't laminate your ticket as it won't work on the barriers, and don't store tickets next to your mobile phone as it damages the ticket and may not operate the gates.

First Great Western scores up in South West

Passenger Focus has found record numbers of people across Great Britain are satisfied with their train journey

Launching the Autumn National Passenger Survey 2008 in the Winter 2009 Passenger Voice bulletin, the rail watchdog has reported that 83% of passengers are satisfied with their rail journey.

The results are particularly good news for First Great Western passengers with overall satisfaction scores jumping from 74% in Autumn 2007 to 80% in the latest survey.

South West Trains maintained its good report card with scores up 2 points to 87%.

However, Passenger Focus manager Mike Greedy said passengers would argue there was still room for improvement. South West Passenger Focus managers Jocelyn Pearson and Mike Greedy will now work with train operators to make certain passengers' concerns are addressed in 2009.

South West			
Train Operating Company (TOC)	Overall % satisfied	Passengers' satisfaction up	Passengers' satisfaction down
Arriva Trains Wales	86	Car-parking facilities	Availability of staff at the station
CrossCountry	84	Car-parking facilities	Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand
First Great Western	80	How well the train company dealt with delays	No decline in satisfaction scores
South West Trains	87	Punctuality/reliability	Overall station environment

Smartcards rolled out

South West Trains (SWT) has reported to Passenger Focus that its franchise commitment to install ticket gates capable of validating ITSO smartcards has been met. However, because 96 per cent of SWT's season-ticket holders pass through London, their use will be very limited until gate lines elsewhere

in the capital are also ITSO-compatible. The Department for Transport is responsible for co-ordinating the roll-out of ITSO smartcards, and it will be 2010 before the process is complete in the capital. However,

SWT is working to introduce smartcards in non-metropolitan areas that will cover both trains and buses.

Passenger Focus is working with SWT to identify mutual benefits for integrated cards, such as loyalty offers for passengers who often make the same journey but not frequently enough to warrant purchase of a season ticket. Smartcards will be provided for free. Tickets can be requested by phone, internet or through the ticket machines, and can be loaded through a ticket machine or automatically as the card is placed on a ticket reader.



Decision to save ticket offices

Passenger Focus has welcomed the Department for Transport's (DfT) decision to reject many of South West Train's (SWT) revised ticket office opening hours

After lobbying from Passenger Focus and London TravelWatch, the Government has told SWT it can reduce ticket office opening hours only where it has fewer than 12 sales an hour. In instances where understaffing had reduced ticket sales to date, the DfT has rejected proposals to reduce opening hours.

Passenger Focus received thousands of objections from passengers to SWT plans to slash its ticket office opening hours. Initial analysis shows that the DfT has significantly reduced the number of offices that SWT can close completely over the weekend.

Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief executive, said: "This is a victory for the thousands of passengers who stood up and told the Government they didn't want to lose their ticket office staff. The Government has listened to passengers'

concerns and has saved those ticket offices which are currently well used. The DfT has supported our call that train companies can't get away with blanket closures as passengers tell us they need staff for security, journey advice and ticket sales."

Jocelyn Pearson, Passenger Focus manager covering SWT, agreed that some passengers would still lose out under the DfT approved plans. "There will still be cuts across the SWT network and there will be ticket offices which will remain closed all weekend. However, the Government has backed our request for help points to be made available for passengers to obtain accurate journey and ticket advice when ticket offices are shut. We will push the train company to make sure passengers are put through to a staff member who can give accurate journey and fare advice."

Overcrowding around Severn Estuary

Lines on both sides of the Severn Estuary are suffering severe overcrowding. The position on Gloucester to Bristol trains is so bad that passengers at Yate are being left behind on the platform. Passenger Focus manager Mike Greedy is

lobbying for a review of capacity on this route, but First Great Western has no spare rolling stock to add an extra car to the two-car unit. Mike is also working on bespoke research on the line to inform the Great Western

Route Utilisation Strategy.

On the other side of the estuary, overcrowding has been common at Severn Tunnel Junction on trains from Cardiff to Bristol. However, this position should be eased by an additional stop at 8.25 am.

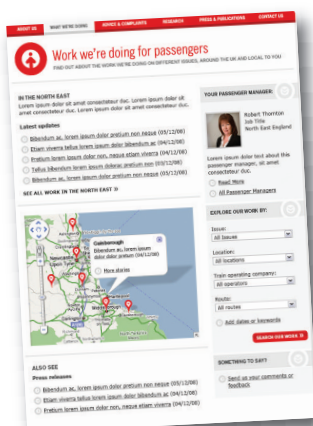
Massive job cuts in the south west

South West Trains (SWT) has announced it will be cutting almost 500 jobs.

Jocelyn Pearson, Passenger Focus manager, said: "SWT must make certain that the service offered to passengers does not unduly suffer as a result of these significant job losses. Passengers will want to know where these cuts are going to be made and how job losses are going to affect their journey.

"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."

Passenger Focus will now monitor the service delivered and passenger satisfaction.



New 'regional' area on Passenger Focus website

In February Passenger Focus will launch a new section on our website to show the work we are doing on behalf of passengers around the country. The new area of the site will show our work by region and nation, train operating

company, route and issues such as getting a seat or fares and ticketing. It will also feature Google Maps™ technology which will allow website users to view any Passenger Focus work with a specific geographic location.