

Commons Select Committee
-Transport Committee

please reply to:
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23rd May 2016

Improving the Rail Passenger Experience – Written Submission

Dear Sir,

Railfuture is a national independent voluntary organisation campaigning for a bigger, better railway in Britain, so we welcome the opportunity to provide an informed response to the select committee. The response has been coordinated by Chris Fribbins (chris.fribbins@railfuture.org.uk) Head of Passenger Group, Railfuture.

Railfuture recognises the importance of providing improved rail services that offer more journey opportunities to a wider range of travellers, as a contribution to the wider issues of economic, employment and skills, social inclusion and the environment.

Our response is attached. If you require any more detail, or clarification, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours faithfully

Chris Fribbins

Chris Fribbins
Railfuture
Head of Passenger Group

**www.railfuture.org.uk www.railfuturescotland.org.uk www.railfuturewales.org.uk
www.railwatch.org.uk**

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1. Introduction

Our members and affiliated rail user groups have a wealth of rail industry and rail passenger experience across England, Scotland and Wales. There have been a number of representations to, and by, Railfuture on both good and bad experience, as well as comparisons between our national providers and those on the international scene. Representations are also made to train operating companies (TOC), Network Rail (NR), government departments, local authorities, and rolling stock providers.

A report into disruption handling was compiled recently and published in spring 2016. It is intended to distribute this across the rail industry via our TOC Liaison Contacts and other parts of the industry. We found that, whilst the causes of disruption were well understood, the response to it was very variable - even within a single TOC as well as between TOCs, with both good and bad examples.

There is also personal experience of the author in working on behalf of contractors to a TOC in providing rail replacement services for passengers.

It is accepted that there has been a consistent growth in train passenger numbers in recent years, and alongside this has come an increasing reliance on those services – on a regular basis for commuters, to ad-hoc passengers and a wide range between. There have been many weekend disruptions that effect the ad-hoc passenger, who is often unaware of the planned disruption and so needs to arrive at their destination on-time (i.e. Airport check-in, theatre or other appointments). An hour or more can be added to their journey.

I refer the committee to work that is underway to identify best practice and comparisons both within the UK and internationally. www.railfuture.org.uk/go+and+compare

2. Railfuture Vision for the Future of the Passenger Experience

- 2.1. Focus on more efficient use of the current infrastructure – More, trains, faster journeys, improved frequency, increase in seating, longer trains where applicable (we accept that the removal of seats on metro services are going to be required, but journey times for these should be strictly managed to less than 30 minutes).
- 2.2. Improved connectivity within the rail network and with all other modes (pedestrian, cycle, bus, tram, car etc.) – improved journey opportunities.
- 2.3. Exploitation of digital services:
 - Improving the efficiency and capacity of the current network
 - Using smartphone capabilities and Wi-Fi - Improved information across the end to end journey, especially at stations and on trains, for passengers and staff, using smartphone/tablet and WiFi capabilities. The current 'yellow dot-matrix' platform indicators are extremely limited in the information they can supply (and only visible at limited parts of the platform). Larger displays can also be constrained as they page through lists of stations that a train service is planned to call at (and a significant delay until 'your' page comes around again). Information can be tailored to the passenger and displayed on their own device, or on local screen.
 - Improved ticketing, with the information available to make effective choices of ticket, understanding restrictions where necessary and what journey options are available.
 - Information available, related to that ticket, across the end to end journey.
 - Information on where there is seating available on the train (or at worst, less crowded carriages).
 - The human interface is still important and there are still major benefits in being able to contact somebody, ideally at the station – both in aiding the passenger and providing a safer environment – an informed member of staff will be able make use of this information, and local knowledge. At an unattended station, they could aid a passenger by displaying information on a remote screen at the station.

- 2.4. Better handling of disruption. There will always be disruption, and there needs to be a more consistent, higher level, approach to dealing with passengers, before, during and after disruption. Passenger should not be expected to pay rail prices for an extended bus/coach journey.
 - 2.5. Reduction of disincentives for the rail industry to innovate and share best practice. The timescale for development of digital solutions can be measured in weeks, not years!
 - 2.6. Improved approach to disability issues. At present there is major investment to ensure train fleets comply with DDA regulations in 2020, but although people will be able to travel on the trains, they will meet major constraints at the stations.
 - 2.7. Protection against the weather is also a basic requirement at stations. Many smaller stations have little or no protection against wind and rain. Even recent station improvements at larger stations have left passengers bunched under limited platform cover and contribute to extended dwell times in stations. We have also seen examples of access to lifts (primarily for passengers with mobility issues) that have been left out in the rain. Design standards for stations do need improvement and priorities to ensure costs are not increased.
 - 2.8. Expansion of the rail network, where justified (both heavy rail and light rail as applicable).
- 3. Information provided to passengers before, during and after rail journeys, including information provided at stations, in trains and via National Rail Enquiries, operators' websites and online apps (excluding in relation to the process for claiming compensation for delay/cancellation)**
- 3.1. There has been a major investment into passenger information, especially via online apps and web sites. However, this information is useless to those who are not 'tech savvy', or who cannot receive it for want of a phone signal or Wi-Fi connection (or having no battery life left!). Because of the open nature of train running and ticketing data, it is often the case that passengers have more information than many railway staff, and some TOCs are addressing this within operational and safety constraints.
 - 3.2. Information also needs to be kept up to date when changes occur. It is particularly frustrating when our members draw attention to an error to no avail.
 - 3.3. There is still a need for better communication via radio and television broadcasters and paper based information (e.g. posters at stations) as appropriate to planned and unplanned disruption. Often it is difficult to identify the full impact on passenger journeys. For example, TOC web sites, apps and literature concentrate on the rail closures, but although their journey may not be impacted, passengers might arrive at a station to find no car parking due to rail replacement for other destinations.
 - 3.4. For planned disruption, signing at all stations affected needs to be improved and more consistent. There are examples of stations with no service having no clear indicators other than the platform indicator showing bus times, rather than the train and no indicator where to pick up the bus! Too often there is no personal contact with the passenger during these disruptions. Passengers also feel cheated when they are expected to pay the full price of the rail ticket only to find a bus or coach (of variable quality and often much longer journey time). They are also unable to claim delay/repay because the rail replacement timetable is used instead of the rail one.
 - 3.5. Although it is expected that there will be de-briefs, within the rail industry, after problems, this is not commonly shared with or involves any experience of passengers involved.
 - 3.6. We commend the information and personal deployment of staff from Transport for London (TfL) and have had excellent reports on Chiltern Railways and GWR The current and future

direction of TfL disruption handling is best practice and should be spread further.

4. Ticketing, including overcoming obstacles to the more widespread delivery of “smart ticketing” and part-time season tickets.

- 4.1. There is a clear direction in the provision of “smart ticketing” solutions, but the technology is moving faster than the delivery. Swipe Card solutions in London appear to be catching up with Oyster.
- 4.2. An issue for passengers will be to ensure access to information about journeys and the ‘ticket’ availability is still available. The orange ticket remains a common interface between passengers and rail staff and although there has been some improvement in the information displayed on the ticket, we have been working on possible improvements.
- 4.3. It will be essential that ticket barriers are technologically updated and/or manned at all times to ensure all passengers can pass impeded irrespective of the physical or electronic type of ticket they may be using.

5. In-train facilities including on-journey Wi-Fi and power.

- 5.1. Wi-Fi and power is becoming a common requirement, but delivery across TOCs has been patchy. Service quality can also vary. We would also urge that roll-out to stations should also be provided as often access to online information at stations can be poor, especially at unmanned stations. This is a key part of the journey and not knowing when to expect a train service and onward journey information can cause considerable stress.
- 5.2. We also often have representations on basic requirements of a journey such as seating capacity and an unobstructed view out of a window. For example, there are pressures to increase the capacity of trains by removing seats.
- 5.3. Toilets should be provided on all new trains for services in excess of 30 minutes, unless facilities are available at all relevant stations.
- 5.4. We would also question the suitability of some rolling stock for the nature of the journey. Metro stock is being deployed on longer journeys (e.g. Thameslink from Peterborough to Horsham, and Cambridge to Brighton) and lacking the basic facilities that passengers expect (a power point, WiFi, table, face to face seating). While we can understand that there is often a compromise in the specification, often the rolling stock is provided to a strict design (due to cost) and no passive provision is included. This means that costs to retro-fit these during the life of the stock can be either very expensive, or prohibitive.

6. Performance measures in relation to passenger experience, including passenger survey methodologies.

- 6.1. The Public Performance Measure (PPM) is a very blunt measure. We welcome the change to reporting on lines of route, but it does not show the variations across TOCs. For example, the total trains run by C2C are about 400 a day and Southeastern 1,800. It is also clear that PPM can be hit significantly because of minor problems outside of the TOC control (e.g. ill passenger).
- 6.2. For longer-distance trains performance information should be recorded and made public at major points along the route(s). For instance, on the hourly Edinburgh to Plymouth trains at present PPM is only recorded in relation to the arrival at the final destination, however these trains call at several major cities en-route (including Newcastle, Leeds, Birmingham, Bristol and Exeter) at which performance is equally important from the passenger’s perspective.
- 6.3. Passengers personal experience is often at odds with the PPM and the ones that have a negative view are keen to express it on social media and perhaps it is something that is more likely to reflect in Which surveys, rather than Transport Focus. Perhaps a better measure of

impact is required, and also an indication of repeated problems.

7. Mechanisms to hold operators to account for poor performance and spread the best practice across the industry.

- 7.1. Some of our commuter members and affiliated rail user groups often feel that poor performance never leads to operators being held to account and there are often campaigns to strip a TOC of its franchise. We are not aware of any franchise being withdrawn on grounds of poor performance; where they have been terminated, it was due to financial issues.
 - 7.2. Another key feature of the passenger experience is the performance of the infrastructure that the train runs on and there have been too many failures in recent years, due to poor weather conditions and project planning issues. We are concerned that NR do not appear to have a suitable knowledge of the infrastructure and too many major problems have been identified by a passenger train passing over or near the incident. Although we recognise and praise the safety of the network in recent years, there does need to be some focus on the core network before a major failure occurs.
 - 7.3. Unfortunately, passengers (and too often the media) blame a TOC for delays outside its control, or conflate the two causes. Accordingly, we are not calling for franchises to be withdrawn and recognise that any TOC will inherit the same rolling stock, stations and staff and operating rules in any case. Instead, we would suggest that more transparency is introduced into TOCs so that passengers can recognise that their problems are being understood and action taken where necessary.
8. Railfuture welcomes any initiative that brings representative groups into contact with the DfT, NR and TOCs, to furnish their mutual understanding. Both rail user groups and community rail partnerships can play a vital role in shaping the experience of rail passengers, both in planning and making their journeys.