

TravelWatch NORTHWEST

Princess St Manchester: Tel 07807 768124
 Email: admin@travelwatch-northwest.org.uk
 Website: www.travelwatch-northwest.org.uk
 Correspondence address – 11 Harvelin
 Park, Todmorden, OL14 6HX

Winner of CILT award for best practice in passenger transport (2013)

promoting quality public transport.....

Transport Committee
 House of Commons
 London SW1A 0AA

25th May 2016

Dear Committee Members,

Improving the rail passenger experience

1. TravelWatch NorthWest is an independent Community Interest Company representing all public transport users in North West England. We are pleased to give our views to this inquiry.

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 a delay/cancellation)

2. Understanding the passenger experience is paramount in journey planning. Sadly journey planning systems often fall short of providing accurate and correct information. This is particularly the case when services are disrupted due to planned engineering work. The recent advice offered on both Traveline and the National Rail websites to travel during engineering disruptions has been quite bizarre in many examples. There is often a lack of co-operation among franchises when work on a line affects their services. There is a tendency for individual operators to just publish details of their own services and replacement services without regard to the broader picture. There seems to be little in the way of consistency in the many outlets for information and this needs to be addressed by the industry as a whole.

3. To give two examples concerning current engineering work on the WCML –

(i) There have been 3 different rail operators involved between Lancaster and Oxenholme, each running their own replacement road services. TPE and Virgin have coaches replacing the WCML trains, while Northern have coaches replacing the Windermere trains. This means a person travelling from say Warrington, has to change from train to coach at Lancaster, then change coaches at Oxenholme. It would be less inconvenient to passengers, if coaches ran Lancaster - Oxenholme - Windermere and vice versa.

(ii) Although the West Coast work is scheduled engineering work, newly issued pocket timetables showed no indication that there was anything but the normal service running, although both advised one to call in if travelling at weekends. No insert or leaflet was given out with either timetable.

4. Information at stations is improving all the time but there are still some rural stations without any real time information. Information on trains can be haphazard. Again it is at times of disruption, including planned engineering work, when weaknesses in the system are demonstrated. Attention to detail and accuracy should be paramount.

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

5. Consistency in pricing is an issue as journeys of similar length can exhibit a wide difference in fare calculations, particularly where an InterCity operator has a monopoly of local services. (e.g. Virgin between Oxenholme - Carlisle and Lancaster to Crewe (£30 for a journey of less than 1 hour!). Additionally car parking at stations exhibits significant differential pricing depending upon operators. These factors can be a disincentive that encourage car use rather than trains.

6. The maintenance and indeed enhancement of ticket retailing at stations is important. In many cases the purchase of a rail ticket is often linked with the provision and requirement of information. At places where casual travellers are commencing journeys, such as tourist destinations, it is not unusual for the passenger to be requesting information and travel options at the same time as buying a ticket. There is scope for making station ticket offices a lot more attractive and encompassing the station shop format. The M2Go model of retail found at Merseyrail stations appears to be a very successful format and it also creates a less intimidating experience for the casual traveller. We would like to see M2Go or similar rolled out more widely.

7. It is important that the most appropriate ticket (e.g. cheapest) is sold to passengers in an impartial way without favouring the company running the ticket office.

8. Many passengers are unaware that they can buy tickets at station ticket offices from any other station to any other station, or that TOC websites offer this. Ticket Vending Machines suffer from offering a restricted range of tickets for sale. Ideally they should have a wider range and at least give clear information that the range is limited and give advice as to where and how other tickets may be purchased.

9. Looking to the future the expansion of smart, contactless and mobile phone applications will revolutionise ticket sales methodology. The application of smart ticketing should be seen in the context of moving towards a fully integrated public transport system and there are some signs that this is the ultimate aim. It must be remembered though that smart ticketing is simply a means to purchase ticketing product types and those products have some

way to develop before we see comprehensive multi modal/integrated ticketing in this country.

10. Part time season tickets would be very useful for many travelling patterns. We have also long pressed for the availability of multi journey tickets over a consistent set of routes. They do this on the continent quite well with "10 journey" tickets that can be used flexibly by the holder for her/his own set of journeys or for a group travelling together.

In-train facilities, including on-journey Wi-Fi and power

11. Train capacity, internal design, the provision of luggage space, attractive toilet facilities, accessibility and accommodation for mobility impaired users and cycle spaces are all major concerns for passengers. Sadly, particularly on local services such as Northern Rail, these issues have for many years been subject to inadequate compromises often dictated by cost considerations. In our part of the country supply has failed to keep up with demand and overcrowding on trains is still very much with us.

12. The recent franchise changes in the North will likely worsen overcrowding in the short term on certain Arriva Northern routes, given current rolling stock availability. We are not convinced either that the prospect of new trains in the future, which we welcome, will adequately cater for the ongoing growth in demand. Prospective passengers are already (and have been for some time) discouraged from using rail because of full to capacity trains at peak times and grossly inadequate car parking space at many stations. We understand that the design of the new trains for Arriva Rail North will comprise self-contained 2 and 3 car sets with no end corridor connections. This is less flexible and convenient for passengers compared with most current designs running on Northern (except for Pacers which are going) that have end gangway connections.

13. Seating capacity /length of trains needs to be tackled – this implies longer platforms at many stations. Bus/ rail integration could also be vastly improved. Also train service frequencies directly affect the total capacity to carry people and thereby improve the comfort of the journey. There is an urgent need for enhanced track capacity improvements to permit more trains and to permit freight which does not interfere with passenger services.

14. In terms of in-train facilities, yes internet connections are de rigueur (but do not necessarily have to be wi-fi). Two specific and basic necessities demand much greater detailed attention -

- Toilets on trains – there is a need for a standard seat/ number of toilets ratio - anecdotally there are probably too few now and their condition and operational functioning can often be suspect.
- Leg room – this seems to have progressively worsened over the years in many cases – a philosophy of cramming more seats in to save on

the number of carriages needed (often with detrimental effects on luggage space) with attendant cost savings.

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

15. Regarding punctuality, the only measure of performance which appears to be important is whether the train is within 5 or 10 minutes of right time at its *final destination*. This is often achieved by missing out stops, never holding connections even by a few minutes as well as the general practice of padding out the last stage of the journey to tick the right boxes. Punctuality figures can also be improved (massaged?) by turning round late running trains short of their destination. This is very inconvenient for passengers. Also the overall figures which are an average mask significant variations by route and time of day (peak/ non peak).

16. In general terms the National Passenger Survey work that Transport Focus carries out is worthwhile and can be used to highlight lapses in a wide range of service quality performance measures by route group and type of travel (e.g. commuters in Manchester and Liverpool).

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

17. Transport Focus and London TravelWatch have a statutory role in this but as a national body Transport Focus is limited in getting involved in regional and local issues. The TravelWatch network, which tries to fulfil this role, does not cover the whole of the country and is not formally supported. With continuing growth of rail usage and greater emphasis on political devolution perhaps now is the time to look again at properly resourced regional representation to more effectively hold rail (and indeed other public transport providers and operators) to account.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond

Yours sincerely,

John A Moorhouse

John Moorhouse, Company Secretary