

Evidence from Transport Focus

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Transport Focus is the independent consumer watchdog promoting the interests of rail passengers throughout Great Britain; bus, coach and tram passengers across England, outside London; and users of the Strategic Road Network in England. We have a Board Member for Wales appointed by the Minister for Economy and Transport.
- 1.2 We welcome the opportunity to provide evidence from our passenger research, to aid the Committee's scrutiny.

2 Transport for Wales: whether the current governance, structure and funding are effective and transparent

- 2.1 Passengers want a sense that there is 'someone' in charge when it comes to the delivery of services¹. They want someone to take overall responsibility and for this person/body to be accountable for decisions made and the quality of service provided.
- 2.2 One of the keys to accountability is transparency. Giving rail passengers access to information that matters to them will help them to hold the train company to account and to ask what is being done to improve services in return for the fares they pay. Joint research with the Office of Rail and Road showed that passengers particularly want punctuality data that is relevant to their journey rather than a companywide average². Even when they admit that they will be unlikely to read it themselves they see the value in it being available as it helps keep the operator on its toes. Indeed the availability of accurate data may actually help the railway – a particularly bad journey can linger in the memory and distort passengers' perceptions. Accurate, relevant data can help challenge these negative perceptions.

¹ Putting passengers at the heart of rail services. Transport Focus. 2004

² [Putting rail information in the public domain](#). Transport Focus and ORR. 2011

- 2.3 An element of transparency is not enough on its own. Passengers also want a sense that their voice matters and that the person//body in charge is actually listening to them. Passengers should not be the passive recipients of major decisions made on their behalf behind closed doors.
- 2.4 Our 'Passenger Power' report³ in 2013 argued for a much-increased voice for passengers in rail service contract replacements. We called for passengers:
- to be consulted on what services were to be specified
 - to be given a clear statement setting out contract commitments and any targets and then regular progress reports to provide greater accountability and transparency; and for
 - their voice to count through the life of that contract.
- 2.5 The yardstick for passengers will be the extent to which the specification and service address current issues and offer what they want for the future. Understanding this was a fundamental element of the procurement process. The consultation and engagement during the process was welcomed, however views differ on how inclusive this was of passenger groups across Wales and the Borders.
- 2.6 Whilst the branding of Transport for Wales is appearing across the network and there is awareness of a change in operator, what is not clear to passengers is what this should mean in terms of values. Their key measure and priority is the day to day reliability of services, which are crucial for getting to work, medical appointments, education and the daily journeys they want to make. Expectations for the new service have been built up, particularly in the media. In our research on the future of the Wales and Borders rail service⁴, passengers highlighted overcrowding, short-forming and service failures. Having had their expectations and trust battered by persistent delays on parts of the previous Arriva Trains Wales

³ [Giving Passengers a Voice in Rail Services](#). Transport Focus 2013

⁴ [The future of the Wales and Borders rail service: what passengers want](#). Transport Focus. 2017

network, they are severely disappointed at not seeing any improvement.

- 2.7 In addition, there has been negative feedback from passengers in the Borders, feeling excluded by apparent branding and promotion of transport *for Wales*.

3 What actions should be taken to develop these aspects of the organisation? And what other governance models and good practice are available?

- 3.1 Our work to explore passengers' relationship with the rail industry⁵ found that to improve trust, train companies not only need to get the basic service right day-to-day, they need to put effort into building long-term relationships with their passengers. For Wales and the Borders, it is important to get the basic service right ahead of everything else. Then, building on closer relationships with their passengers. One way is through high quality communication. Passengers should feel that train companies are 'on their side'.
- 3.2 Communication and engagement need to continue – with considerable scope to widen it beyond the procurement process. Our input to the 'Bowe' report⁶ set out the need to engage more with passengers when it came to major enhancement programmes. The report acknowledged that there was engagement – passenger views and user priorities were sought and considered at the start of the High Level Output Specification (HLOS) process; and via the various 'route studies' carried out by Network Rail. Bowe also noted the Office of Rail and Road's (ORR) public consultation as part of the Control Period process.
- 3.3 However, the report found: "...there is less evidence that passenger and user views are fed into the planning of how enhancements should be delivered, as distinct from what those enhancements

⁵ [Passengers' relationship with the rail industry](#). Transport Focus. 2014

⁶ Dame Colette Bowe's [review](#) of the planning of Network Rail's enhancements programme for Control Period 5, from 2014 to 2019. 2015

should be. In most cases, the delivery of enhancements involves disruption to existing services, either via short term possessions of the network, longer term closures and diversions or, as at London Bridge during the Thameslink works, extensive modifications to service patterns.

- 3.4 “The failure to engage effectively with users in this planning of delivery has had two impacts. First, it can be seen as contributing to cost escalation, via inefficient planning of possessions and the associated performance payments required to operators through their track access agreements with Network Rail. And second, it may contribute to passenger dissatisfaction on the occasions when things do go wrong.”
- 3.5 The Shaw⁷ report into the future shape and financing of Network Rail reached similar conclusions – it also acknowledged the need to give ‘users’ a say in the planning process. She envisaged a process where stakeholder panels would feed into the planning decisions made within each network rail route.
- 3.6 The report suggests that the route board and stakeholder panel: “...should work together to oversee all enhancements planning at route level and make recommendations for both desirable outcomes and specific projects, drawing on the strategic priorities set out in the government’s long-term vision for rail. The stakeholder panel and the alignment between enhancement strategies and the wider route-based action plans provides stakeholders with a way of holding the route board to account for planning and delivery, and would also be able to make suggestions to the route board on a variety of issues, including whether to accept or reject third party funded proposals, how best to monitor progress on pre-existing enhancements projects, and when and how to carry out ex-post reviews of completed enhancements projects.”
- 3.7 We believe that such engagement is not just a ‘nice to have’. Our research constantly demonstrates the value of involving passengers and the benefits that accrue to the industry. For example, research

⁷ Nicola Shaw’s [report](#) into the future shape and financing of Network Rail. 2016

on engineering work at Reading/Bath⁸ and at Waterloo⁹ shows that giving passengers timely, accurate information can improve satisfaction levels with the way that the disruption was managed and leads to greater acceptance of the alternatives such as bus replacement services. Another good example surrounds the design of new rolling stock. We have been working with Merseytravel in gathering the views of passengers on the design of their new rolling stock¹⁰. The end result will be a train that better meets the needs of those who will use it.

3.8 At both a strategic and a delivery level, greater accountability requires high-level, dedicated consumer representation and genuine passenger involvement in relevant issues.

3.9 Good practice is being built in a number of locations. The West Midlands Bus Alliance (chaired by Transport Focus) was the first of its kind in Great Britain. It brings together bus operators, local councils, and other partners to focus on improving passenger journeys. Investment and concentration on service delivery over three years are driving improvements. The Bus Passenger Survey¹¹ is showing more passengers are satisfied with their journey and feel it was good value for money.

3.10 Partnerships are also in place in Liverpool City Region and West Yorkshire, as well as West of England and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

4 The future role of Transport for Wales in delivering transport policy. What additional responsibilities should it take on and how should these integrate with the role of the Welsh Government, local government and emerging regional transport authorities?

⁸ [Planned rail engineering work – the passenger perspective](#). Transport Focus. 2015

⁹ [Railway engineering work: Putting passengers at the heart of the London Waterloo upgrade](#). Transport Focus. 2018

¹⁰ [Future Merseyrail rolling stock – what passengers want](#). Transport Focus. 2014

¹¹ [Bus Passenger Survey](#). Transport Focus. 2018

- 4.1 In our focus group research¹², Arriva Trains Wales passengers commented on ‘gaps’ in the network, especially between North Wales, Mid-Wales and South. People also find there to be little coordination between rail and other modes of transport. In addition, there is little sense of an urban or regional ‘plan’.
- 4.2 The National Rail Passenger Survey¹³ shows that satisfaction with connections with other transport modes across Arriva Trains Wales passengers at only 64 per cent. Looking at this regionally, satisfaction with South Wales and Borders/West Wales is 61 per cent and in Cardiff and the Valleys, is 54 per cent. This highlights a considerable need for planning, co-ordination and investment, together with integrated ticketing across Wales and the Borders.
- 4.3 One of the barriers to encouraging more journeys is the ability to reach destinations by bus. This is reflected in our research into bus passengers’ priorities for improvement¹⁴; where buses going to a wider range of destinations ranks sixth overall and fifth in rural areas. It is therefore vital to incentivise development of service networks, across a range of provision with properly planned connections and good standards of information, to give passengers the ability and confidence to make joined-up journeys, including across modes. Bus passengers’ top priority is better value for money, which is also key for rail passengers in Wales. This common interest should mandate working in partnership and consultation with bus operators, to deliver a well-supported door-to-door journey experience across modes, which will be a positive factor towards improving this priority and encouraging travel by public transport.
- 4.4 The closer that national strategy is aligned with passenger priorities the better the potential service for passengers. In an era of cost consciousness and efficiency it will be essential that scarce resources are focussed on the things that deliver the biggest

¹² [The future of the Wales and Borders rail service: what passengers want](#). Transport Focus. 2017

¹³ [National Rail Passenger Survey](#), Arriva Trains Wales, Spring 2018. Transport Focus. 2018

¹⁴ [Bus passengers have their say: Trust, what to improve and using buses more](#). Transport Focus.

passenger 'dividend'. Quality provision should also heed service levels and the impact of service reductions on passengers' quality of life. Passengers need to be assured of the security of funding; firstly to retain services, then to improve them. Also to support connectivity and passenger trust in the ability to make journeys and return again – with services available during evenings and weekends.

- 4.5 A key part of boosting regional prosperity is through making improvements to transport so that people will consider travelling further for employment and other reasons. Our research shows that addressing issues around fares and tickets is an important part of this, particularly where they make travelling easier to understand and use, and more convenient. These must, though, sit alongside improvements to infrastructure and timetabling.
- 4.6 Our recent work with Transport for the North (TfN) on smart ticketing¹⁵ provides some useful understanding. When we asked passengers what stops them from using public transport more, ticketing itself is not a key barrier. As we see in other research, cheaper fares, reduced journey time and more frequent and reliable services are all bigger priorities to passengers and would encourage further use of public transport.
- 4.7 Our research suggests that passengers want their operator to be accountable, with published data to 'keep the industry honest'. The National Rail Passenger Survey plays an important role in formal and independent measurement of rail service delivery and is now providing the means for writing this accountability into new franchise specifications as well as providing a means of benchmarking services across different regions. We believe that in a similar way, a consistent and benchmarked approach, such as delivered by the Bus Passenger Survey, focuses industry attention on key areas for improvement, alongside intelligence on drivers of satisfaction. Wales was included in the Bus Passenger Survey¹⁶ in 2017. Repeating this would also provide a robust basis for securing

¹⁵ [Smart ticketing in the north: what do passengers think?](#) Transport Focus. 2016

¹⁶ [Bus Passenger Survey](#). Transport Focus 2018

continued improvements and the published accountability that passengers seek.

- 4.8 Although the Bus Passenger Survey gives feedback from passengers' journeys, there is also a need to understand the views of those who don't use buses, have recently stopped, or don't have a service they can use. This would provide understanding of their decisions, perceived barriers and potential for policy actions to attract and encourage more people to use public transport.
- 4.9 Providing independent understanding of passengers' attitudes and behaviours, together with commissioning of research to bridge gaps in that understanding has been fulfilled by the Public Transport Users' Advisory Panel. However with the winding-up of that body, it is not clear where the role now lies.
- 4.10 There is a need for clear passenger representation across modes in Wales, to give them a stronger and co-ordinated voice. We would recommend early implementation, to allow more benefit for transport users to be derived from Welsh Government, transport industry and Department for Transport investment. This will allow a much more joined-up approach to transport issues for users and will allow more and better-quality advice, information and insight to be provided to the Welsh Government and others.