

Evidence to the All-Party Parliamentary Group for High Speed Rail Inquiry into Rail Capacity

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Passenger Focus welcomes the opportunity to respond to the All-Party Parliamentary Group for High Speed Rail's inquiry into rail capacity.
- 1.2 This response focuses on the importance of capacity to passengers and draws on our body of research into passenger priorities.

2. Passengers' views on capacity

- 2.1 In 2007 and 2009 we carried out stated preference research that asked passengers to rank a series of station- and train-based criteria in order of their priority for improvement. The table below shows the top ten (out of 30) priorities in 2009 compared to 2007. It also shows the relative importance of each attribute ranking relative to punctuality - the higher the score, the greater priority passengers assign to that service aspect.

2009	Score	Service Improvement Preference	2007
1	1.08	Price of train tickets offer excellent value for money	1
2	1	At least 19 out of 20 trains arrive on time	3
3	0.98	Sufficient train services at times I use the train	2
4	0.86	Passengers are always able to get a seat on the train	4
5	0.79	Company keeps passengers informed if train delays	5
6	0.75	Information on train times/platforms accurate and available	7
7	0.69	Maximum ticket queue time no more than 2 mins	6
8	0.69	Trains consistently well maintained/ excellent condition	8
9	0.67	Seating area on the train is very comfortable	9
10	0.67	Station staff are available whenever required	17

2.2 Analysis by journey purpose shows that the top six priorities are also reasonably consistent across all journey purposes

Priorities for Improvement by journey purpose (2009)				
(rank order, 1 being the highest)	National (GB)	Commuter	Business	Leisure
Price of train tickets offer excellent value for money	1	1	1	1
At least 19 out of 20 trains arrive on time	2	3	2	2
Sufficient train services at times I use the train	3	2	3	3
Passengers are always able to get a seat on the train	4	4	4	4
Delay information	5	5	6	5
Train time information	6	6	5	6
Ticket queue time	7	9	8	8
Train maintenance	8	8	9	9
Seating comfort	9	13	7	10
Station staff available	10	15	12	7

2.3 Alongside work at a national level, Passenger Focus also carries out research into local/regional priorities to help inform our submissions to franchise negotiations and the Route Utilisation Study programme.

2.4 The following table summarises the top five priorities identified for recent franchise negotiations. While the specific order of priority may differ, there is a large degree of consistency between them all with punctuality, value for money and getting a seat featuring in all.

Route based priorities <i>(where 1 = highest priority)</i>	Essex Thameside (2009)	East Anglia (2010)	East Coast Main Line(2009)	West Coast Main Line (2010)
Punctuality / reliability of the train	1	2	1	2
Frequency of trains on the route	2	3		
Value for money for price of ticket	3	1	2	1
Being able to get a seat on the train	4	5	3	3
Your personal security at the station	5			
Journey time		4	4	4
Facilities on board the train			5	
Upkeep/repair and cleanliness of the train				5

2.5 The priorities work, both nationally and regionally, emphasises the importance passengers place on the 'core product': an affordable, reliable, frequent service on which you can get a seat.

2.6 This research shows that capacity is already a priority for improvement on today's railway. And yet forecasts¹ predict continued growth in demand which will add even more pressure on capacity.

3. The need for additional capacity

3.1 This growth, while welcome, has created crowding problems in some areas. As well as the traditional issues with commuting to and from London there are some significant problems with crowding in regional cities. Capacity/crowding is clearly not just a London commuter issue.

3.2 Passenger Focus supports the need for additional capacity. Lengthening platforms and providing more rolling stock will help maximise the use of existing track but there is a finite limit to this – at some point capacity can only be increased by laying more track or radically expanding existing infrastructure

3.3 We believe this is the fundamental argument behind the HS2 case. Network Rail's 'New Lines' study looked at how best to solve the problem of growing demand for rail travel on the routes between Britain's cities. It found that, despite all the investment to date, the route that will be become full first (by 2020) is the corridor to Birmingham and the North West. It recommended that the best solution was the building of a new railway line. There has been much debate about whether the need for additional capacity could be delivered by upgrading existing infrastructure or whether it requires a new line and, moreover, whether any new line would need to be high-speed. From Passenger Focus's perspective it is the provision of additional capacity that is the key priority – the other decisions being driven more in terms of identifying the most efficient and beneficial mode of delivery.

3.4 We are also mindful of the difficulties of modernising an existing line. Passengers know from hard-earned experience that this will just mean a decade of disruption and engineering possessions while, for its part, the industry will lose valuable revenue at weekends and Bank Holidays. Virgin, for instance, has reported significant growth in demand in weekend travel since modernisation work on the West Coast line ceased.

¹ Network Rail's 'Scenarios & Long Distance Forecasts' publication considered a number of factors, including economic growth and development, social trends and sustainability over a 30- year period. All scenarios resulted in growth in demand.

- 3.5 The Initial Industry Plan (IIP) submitted by the rail industry as part of the periodic review process (2014-19) also emphasised the continued need for additional capacity.
- 3.6 We welcomed the IIP's proposals for additional capacity in Leeds, Liverpool, London, Manchester and Sheffield, on top of the expansion that is being delivered through the Crossrail and Thameslink programmes; Great Western and North West England electrification; and the Intercity Express rolling stock Programme (IEP). The document rightly acknowledges that while the Thameslink Programme and Crossrail will result in significant additional capacity to and from central London, there are many other routes in London and the South East where, without additional capacity, overcrowding will be a major problem by 2019. Perhaps most noticeable is the Great Western route into Paddington – the 'top ten' list of most overcrowded train services in London and the South East for Autumn 2010¹⁰ shows all 10 being trains to or from London Paddington
- 3.7 Even after these welcome proposals have been implemented, the average load factor by 2019 in the high peak hour between 08.00 and 09.00 arriving in Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, London, Manchester and Sheffield will be at or above 70% on average. It is important to note that 70% average capacity utilisation broadly equates to 100% seat occupation on average, with the likelihood of significant numbers of standing passengers on particular trains. Passenger Focus has urged the rail industry to focus hard on reducing the cost of incremental increases in capacity to strengthen business cases for further investment in capacity to satisfy demand to commute into Britain's principal cities by train.
- 3.8 It is clearly appropriate for the industry to focus on capacity into Britain's principal cities. However, we also think there should be more emphasis on passengers commuting into provincial centres, where current capacity is often inadequate (perhaps being a single 08.00-09.00 arrival, operated by a one or two coach train). The electrification programme opens possibilities for the cascade of the existing diesel fleet.
- 3.9 In conclusion we believe that increasing capacity is one of the top priorities for the industry and Government.