PASSENGER FOCUS

WRITTEN SUBMISSION

1. Introduction

1.1 Passenger Focus is the statutory watchdog for rail passengers in Great Britain and welcomes the opportunity to give written evidence to the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee on the Scottish Government's draft budget 2015-16.

1.2 We note from the Committee's guidance that its three key areas of focus for scrutiny on the draft 2015/15 budget are: reducing Scotland's carbon footprint; reducing traffic congestion; increasing journeys to work by public transport and active travel. This submission focuses on increasing journeys to work by public transport.

2. Increasing journeys to work by public transport (rail)

2.1 Passenger Focus welcomes the real terms increase in the overall transport budget, given the importance of transport as a key economic driver. The extent to which this contributes towards increasing journeys to work by public transport, however, will depend on how the budget is spent. Passenger Focus research[1] identified rail passengers' priorities for improvement which provides evidence on the most important investment issues for passengers'.

2.2 The headline findings are that the core aspects of any train service are the ones passengers' most wish to see improved. The top priority is price of train tickets offers better value for money. We know from previous research this is influenced heavily by train punctuality, ability to get a seat and the handling of service disruption – as well as by the level of fares.

2.3 The second priority for passengers' is always being able to get a seat on the train, the third priority being that trains sufficiently frequent at the times I wish to travel. The fourth priority being that the train company keeps me informed about delays, followed by more trains arrive on time than happens now.

2.4 The role the internet now plays in our lives is highlighted by the fact free Wi-Fi available on the train is the eighth highest priority for improvement.

2.5 The research also looked separately at passengers' priorities for improvements at stations. The top five are: seating on platforms, toilets, litter bins, platform shelters and waiting rooms. These vary quite significantly by size of station. For example, improvements to platform shelters are less important at high footfall stations than medium and low footfall stations.

[1] Rail passengers' priorities for improvements – October 2014

2.6 The information in this research provides an insight into what passengers most want to see improved will be helpful in focusing investment and management attention on the issues that would increase journeys to work.

2.7 Passengers are increasingly coming to expect services to be delivered to them in smarter ways as technology becomes a bigger part of everyday life. We believe that the introduction of smarter ticketing in public transport could make life easier – and cheaper – for passengers. For this to happen though, it is essential that any smarter ticketing schemes are well designed and properly implemented. Passenger Focus research [2], considers views and needs around smarter ticketing among rail commuters in the South East of England. While the research focussed on the South East of England, and includes respondents who are generally familiar with Oyster in London, the results are relevant nationwide and indicate some key principles that any introduction of smart ticketing should address. The expectation or requirement of smart ticketing is that it should deliver on seven key attributes.

2.8 Value for money: Participants expected that smart ticketing would involve some kind of cost saving, either via cheaper fares or new cost-effective tickets and products. Convenience: Smart ticketing needs to be a convenient option that is easy to use. Simplicity: Simplicity is important, especially for those unfamiliar with smart technology or smart ticketing. Security: Participants were concerned about the security of smart ticketing, so need to be reassured that it is addressed in the design of any system. Flexibility: Alongside a convenient and easy-to-use system, participants wanted smart ticketing to be flexible on ticket options, purchase methods and account management. Tailoring: In addition to new products enabling participants to tailor their smart ticket products to their needs, tailored management of their smart ticketing account is also desired. Leading edge: Participants are clear that the introduction of smart ticketing is a shift into a more technology-focussed way of ticketing. Many of them are keen that the technology used is forward-thinking, although this is less of a concern for some than the other perceived essentials.

2.9 We note that Abellio the successful bidder for the franchise, will be required to work with Transport Scotland, regional transport partnerships and other public transport providers to drive towards seamless inter-modal travel for passengers throughout Scotland. Investment in the current franchise is already delivering the infrastructure for Smart tickets across the whole ScotRail network. The next franchisee will be required to drive up use of Smart across all ticket-types and play a full part in developing a smart ticketing scheme which can be used across all Scottish public transport. An important dimension of this will be to develop Smart flexible ticket products for non-regular commuters i.e. those in part time employment where a season ticket does not currently offer value for money. A flexible Smart ticket product tailored to those in part time employment offering value for money would in our opinion increase journeys to work.

[2] Smart ticketing – what rail passengers want – July 2013

3. Increasing journeys to work by public transport (bus)

3.1 Passenger Focus is the statutory watchdog for bus passengers in England, outside of London. We carry out a yearly Bus Passenger Survey (BPS) to compare and benchmark what passengers think about their bus service. This is one of several pieces of bus passenger research that we carry out throughout the year. Thanks to the cooperation of both First Group in Glasgow and Lothian Buses both were included in the Autumn 2013 report[3].

3.2 In total over 5,000 passengers were surveyed with both operators achieving overall passenger satisfaction of above 90%. Value for money for the price paid for the ticket was over 70% which compared favourably with other bus operators on the routes within the area surveyed which ranged from 43% to 75%.

3.3 Previous research[4] carried out in England but should be relevant in Scotland as well, indicated the following top ten priorities for improvement:

Improvement Rank

1. More buses are on time or within five minutes of when they are scheduled to arrive
2. Buses run more frequently at times when you want to use the bus
3. All passengers are able to get a seat on the bus for the duration of their journey
4. Tickets and passes are available that entitle you to travel on all bus services in your local area, not just those operated by a specific bus company
5. Buses go to a wider range of destinations in your local area
6. Bus fares, tickets and passes offer better value for money
7. All bus drivers are helpful and have a positive attitude
8. Accurate timetable and route information is available at all bus stops
9. Tickets and passes are available that entitle you to travel on all types of public transport in your local area, not just buses
10. All bus stops have a well-maintained shelter

3.4 The information in this research provides an insight into what passengers most want to see improved will be helpful in focusing investment and management attention on the issues that would increase journeys to work.

[3] Bus Passenger Survey Autumn 2013 Report
[4] Bus passenger priorities for improvement – March 2010