

TravelWatch NORTHWEST

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Winner of CILT award for best practice in passenger transport

promoting quality public transport.....

Valentina Licata
 Office of Rail Regulation
 1 Kemble Street
 London
 WC2B 4AN

3rd September 2013

Dear Valentina,

Network Rails Outputs and Funding for 2014-19

TravelWatch NorthWest is an independent Community Interest Company representing all public transport users in North West England. We are pleased to give some brief views on this draft determination.

Our prime concern is that rail passengers benefit as much as possible from Network Rail's delivering the outputs set and from improvements in performance.

Punctuality

We welcome the setting of higher standards but are not convinced that disaggregation of figures has gone far enough. Passengers need to relate to their own experience and are not necessarily impressed with average figures that conceal local and time related variations. Therefore measures aligned to routes, peak / off peak services and intermediate stations are all needed.

Stations

One important issue is the lack of train running information at many of the numerous unstaffed stations in our region. There appears to be an assumption that the rail network is well covered by electronic information at stations. This is not the case in large parts of the North West. For example on the lines around the Cumbrian coast 29 of the 34 stations do not have electronic information displays, and a number are out of range of mobile phone signals.

Train capacity

This may perhaps not be totally relevant to this process but overcrowding and quality of rolling stock are key issues for passengers in our region. We need

more trains and better quality (newer/ refurbished) trains. Hopefully North West electrification will help although there are uncertainties about electric rolling stock.

Engineering disruption

There may have been some improvement overall but passengers are still suffering appreciably from bus replacement. We will always maintain that there should be as full a use as possible of diversionary routes in future planning as passengers prefer to keep on a train rather than a replacement bus even though this is likely to mean extended journey times. Research by Passenger Focus in the Autumn of 2012 confirms this.

That research also said that passengers were unhappy at paying a train fare and getting a bus journey and that it warranted a discount on the normal train fare. This is already being done by at least one operator and should be rolled out across the system.

Some years ago Network Rail affirmed that it was working towards a 7 day railway. This is to be applauded as Sunday is a popular, busy day for rail passengers. However, judging by the amount of work carried out at weekends and on Sundays in particular this appears to be some way off. The whole question of timing of long engineering blockades is also an issue of some controversy. The recent (July) 8 day blockade at Wigan on the West Coast Main Line took place during the Scottish holiday period and severely affected leisure users especially.

Network Rail's costs

To repeat what we have said before we think that Network Rail (NR) schemes / projects should be closely monitored both from the point of view of achieving timescales and importantly cost. There is a perception that small scale projects (and by inference larger ones) have unnecessarily inflated costs and similar work could be undertaken more cheaply if it were outwith the NR umbrella. It would be advantageous to involve stakeholders (including passenger representation) at an early stage in the selection and design of schemes.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond

Yours faithfully

John A Moorhouse

John Moorhouse
Company Secretary