

## Written evidence submitted by Transport Focus

### 1. Introduction

Transport Focus is the independent, statutory consumer watchdog promoting the interests of transport users. Working with transport providers and Governments across England, Scotland and Wales – and in close partnership with our colleagues at London TravelWatch – we ensure that the users voice is heard.

This submission focusses on your question: ‘what the train interior of the future needs to have to ensure continued growth in rail travel, particularly amongst young people and future generations and to be fully accessible to all’.

### 2. Consulting Passengers

2.1 Transport Focus has long argued that it is vital for passengers to be involved in the design of new trains at the earliest opportunity. Failure to consult at the right level, at the right time, can condemn a generation of passengers to travelling in trains that are not fit for purpose or are less suitable than those they might otherwise have had. This view was endorsed by the National Audit Office (NAO) as far back as 2004 in its report ‘Improving passenger rail services through new trains’<sup>1</sup>

2.2 Since then we have worked with operators, funders and manufacturers on a number of projects:

- Research with Porterbrook on the interior design of carriages<sup>2</sup>
- Research with Nexus on passenger aspirations for a new fleet of Metro trains<sup>3</sup>
- Conducting research on behalf of Merseytravel for the design of new Merseyrail stock<sup>4</sup>  
This had two stages Stage 1 involved focus group research and interviews. Stage 2 involved the creation of an online ‘customer community’ moderated by Transport Focus. This community was used to ‘test’ ideas and to provide feedback on mock-up designs.
- Working with Transport Scotland on future rolling stock design<sup>5</sup>
- Asking for passengers’ views on the design of new intercity rolling stock<sup>6</sup>
- Working with DfT on the design of new Thameslink rolling stock<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [Improving passenger rail services through new trains](#). NAO. 2004

<sup>2</sup> [Refurbishing train carriages to suit passenger needs](#). Transport Focus and London TravelWatch. 2020

<sup>3</sup> [Tyne and Wear Metro: what passengers want from new trains](#). Transport Focus. 2017

<sup>4</sup> [Future Merseyrail rolling stock – what passengers want](#). Transport Focus 2014 (Stage 1 report)

<sup>5</sup> [Designing the future – rolling stock design for Scotland](#). Transport Focus. 2011.

<sup>6</sup> [Designing the future: Passengers’ preferences for new national intercity rolling stock from 2012](#). Transport Focus. 2009

<sup>7</sup> [Thameslink Rolling Stock Qualitative Research](#). 2008

### 3. What do passengers want

3.1 It is essential to stress that there is no one-sized-fits-all answer when it comes to train design. Each piece of research was designed to see what worked in a particular environment or market and was influenced by local conditions and experiences. One of our key learning points is that you cannot assume that views expressed are interchangeable – expectations and aspirations can, and do, differ. We believe there is a very strong argument for carrying out bespoke research.

3.2 Notwithstanding this point about regional differences, we have tried to draw out some of the more common issues / priorities highlighted in our research.

#### 3.2.1 'Hygiene' factors

Passengers expect safety and reliability to be a given for any new design.

#### 3.2.2 Accessibility

In our rolling stock research, users consistently talk about the need for manufacturers/designers to think beyond just the regulations. In our recent work with Merseytravel, wheelchair users identified the following points:

- The use of distinctive floor colouring/markings to show the intended purpose of the wheelchair space.
- An information screen within plain sight of the wheelchair using the wheelchair space. The location needs to take account of the possibility that standing passengers might block the view of the wheelchair user.
- The provision of a flexible wheelchair space that allows the wheelchair user to choose the direction of travel.

In other rolling stock research we've conducted, passengers who are deaf or hearing impaired have talked about the need for enhanced access to information, such as a hearing loop within the train.

One specific area often raised by passengers is the interface between the platform and the side of the train, and specifically the step up into the vestibule area. This can be particularly difficult to navigate for those who are mobility impaired or those travelling with children (with or without pushchairs) or luggage/shopping; a difficulty exacerbated when the trains are busy.

#### 3.2.3 Personal security

Having clear sightlines through the carriage (or even through the entire train) and 'live' CCTV monitoring can both help people feel more secure.

### 3.2.4 Connectivity

One of the perceived strengths of rail is that it allows you to do something else while travelling. The University of Western England, using NRPS passenger satisfaction data, showed that passengers were increasingly using technology to get more value out of their journey<sup>8</sup>. This means the provision of free Wi-Fi, better mobile phone reception and power sockets become much more important design features. To some extent these are becoming basic expectations rather than aspirations.

### 3.2.5 Passenger Information

There is a clear desire for good passenger information provision on board trains – both visual and aural. To get maximum benefit this has to be real-time information and cover things like: delays, entitlement to Delay Repay Compensation, whether toilets are working and how full carriages are.

Passengers with hearing impairments highlighted the importance of providing visual information on calling-points and the final destination. Similarly, passengers with impaired sight talked about maintaining the clarity of announcements.

### 3.2.6 Internal environment

This was an area that differs according to the market being served but there were some universal expectations/comments:

- Cleaning – a dirty train gives a bad impression  
Good design can make it easier for people to clean trains – e.g. easy access for vacuum cleaners to reach under seats; materials/colours that 'hide' stains better, making it easy to empty/refill toilets
- Temperature.  
The inability of current trains to provide an ambient temperature in line with seasonal variation is a common frustration for passengers. For some air conditioning was the solution (as long as it worked in high temperatures) but others were less convinced believing that different tolerance levels for heat and cold made it difficult to get the right level of air conditioning. It remains to be seen whether Covid-19 will change views on this issue.

### 3.2.7 Seating/internal layout

This is perhaps the most obvious area where views/aspirations differ. As might be expected seating configurations for long-distance services differed to those on shorter, metro services. It also became clear that there were

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<sup>8</sup> Rail passengers' travel time use in Great Britain. Prof. G Lyons, UWE Bristol. 2012

regional differences in commuting expectations – many of which were driven by local levels of crowding. For instance, those on Thameslink services recognised the need to design for the number of people standing as well as those seated. This included the suggestion that some seats be taken out to make more space for people to stand safely and comfortably.

There are, however, some common areas:

- Comfort of seating – many new builds have been criticised for having hard seats. While it will never be possible to have a single design that suits all shapes and sizes, there is scope for more research in this area.
- Tables/trays/cup holders  
Passengers value having somewhere they can put things such as laptops, coffee cups etc. Not every seat can have a table but every opportunity should be taken to fit pull-down trays/tables on the back of airline style seating.
- Luggage space is another area where local needs will dictate views. Clever design can help to create space between seats and help ensure that modern cabin-bag style suitcases can fit safely on overhead storage.

## **Transport Focus**

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