

CfR NEWS ARCHIVE 2018

19 April 2018
Are You Sitting Comfortably ?



There are five key requirements for rail passengers. Firstly, to be able to travel in safety. Secondly, to have a service that is reliable. Thirdly, to have a punctual service. Fourthly, cost. Fifthly but an important consideration, to travel in comfort.

The early days of railways saw passengers travelling on wooden benches. Now, in its specification of new trains, the Department of Transport seems to be taking the issue of comfort back to those times.

Being able to travel in comfort has often been sold by the marketers as one of the advantages of travelling by rail. The likes of the Great Western Railway would herald the launch of improved carriages for their crack express trains like the Cornish Riviera Express and the Cheltenham Flyer. The modern railway too, in its advertising, has pushed the comfort of travelling by rail, most famously via the “Relax” campaign of British Rail’s InterCity sector.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UyTgEpVttBE>

After all, you can’t really play a game of chess, or kick off your shoes easily in the car, whilst negotiating a contraflow system in rush hour on the M5.

Comfort should have been one of rail’s competitive advantages. The seats specified in the new fleets of trains being introduced around the network though are not comfortable. They are a step backwards. Michael Holden, someone who should know a thing or two about railways being a senior executive for

both BR and the privatised companies recently took a journey on the Great Northern in a class 387 unit. After just a short journey, he was glad to get off, describing the seats as “rock hard”.

Class 700 trains have been introduced onto the Thameslink services between Bedford and Brighton. The journeys passengers make on these services are not short; they can last for an hour or more, longer than some InterCity journeys. Whatever advantages and improvements that the new trains offer have been washed away by the trains seating, described by commuters as like sitting “on an ironing board”. The issue has been reported by the “You and Yours” programme on Radio 4. One passenger commented to the programme that he’d had several operations to his spine and now avoids travelling by train between Brighton and London as the seats on the class 700’s are so uncomfortable.

Even the flagship class 800 trains, bought for InterCity services on the Great Western Main Line, have been slammed for the comfort of their seating. First Class passengers might wonder if it is worth paying extra. RAIL magazine has described the difference in quality between first class on an HST and a class 800 as “marked”, and a “reduction in quality”. There are rumours feedback has been so negative from passengers that GWR are considering replacing the seating on these trains which are barely out of the box.

So, why are seats on new trains not “comfybold on your botty”, as Professor Stanley Unwin might have said? The train operators say this is due to fire safety and crash regulations, together with ensuring seats are vandal-proof and they are entirely the specification of the DfT. The Department for Transport claim the seats on new trains have been consulted on via focus groups, and that passengers in these focus groups preferred the design. However, how big were these focus groups? Did they include the growing number of passengers with disabilities, including those suffering back problems?

There are suggestions though that the real reason why the comfort of these seats is so poor is nothing to do with regulations, or a focus group, but is down to the old chestnut – money. According to Nigel Harris, the editor of RAIL magazine, comfy seats that are fire compliant are available, but they cost £100 more. Commuters paying several thousand pounds per year to commute from Bedford or Brighton to London will be furious at this revelation, which seems to show there is a penny-pinching attitude amongst the Sir Humphreys in Marsham Street. If passengers endure the commute on these services and develop back problems as a result, then they’ll be off work – costing their companies thousands of pounds a year in lost productivity.

The whole affair is revealing. It shows that the railways, despite being privatised, are subject to the same petty micro managing from Government that British Rail endured in the nationalised era, where new trains for commuter routes like the Cross City in Birmingham would only be approved if 3 + 2 seating, instead of 2 + 2 seating was specified. A new fleet of trains is on order for Cross City, and a number of other franchises serving the Midlands are due to have competitions soon including Cross Country and East Midlands Trains. No doubt the bidders for the new franchises may come up with proposals for new trains. If they continue to feature the same quality of seats offered in the current generation of new trains then any bounce from a new fleet will not happen. Likewise, *Campaign for Rail* expects that the new trains promised in the West Midlands will be rather better appointed than those put into service over the last few years. There is still plenty of time to ensure that the new trains promised by the West Midlands Trains franchise have comfortable seating for passengers, not ironing boards.

Meanwhile the manufacturers of travel cushions, who’d seen their business decline as the railways upgraded their fleets, will be rubbing their hands with glee.

What do you think of the quality of seating on the trains used on your route?

Tell Campaign for Rail – E-Mail contact-us@campaignforrail.org.uk

22 June 2018
A Single Brand For West Midlands Public Transport



Anybody using public transport in London will recognise the iconic London Transport roundel which has graced underground stations, bus stops, London street maps, the sides of Underground and Overground trains, and the sides of buses over the years since 1907 when it was first designed. In addition, the red London bus is recognised worldwide as a symbol of London.



Now, over a century later, the West Midlands has introduced its own distinctive logo which will be used on trains, trams and buses. Here in the West Midlands, the logo will be a hexagon, made up of individual triangles and diamonds, with the central diamond indicating the mode of transport - orange for rail, blue for tram and red for bus.

The train livery for West Midlands Railway is currently being finalised but will be orange and purple, and it is hoped that the first units will be repainted into the new livery from August.

On 24 June, the Midland Metro, previously operated by National Express West Midlands, will be taken over by Transport for West Midlands and trams will be repainted from the current pink and white into a two-tone blue livery over the next year or so. From the same date, it will be known as the West Midlands Metro.

It is intended that buses operated by all companies will be repainted from the individual company colours into a corporate two-tone red livery.

Finally, there has been a lot of confusion between the names West Midlands Trains (WMT), West Midlands Railway (WMR) and West Midlands Rail (WMT). To reduce confusion, West Midlands Rail (the consortium of 16 local authorities) will be renamed West Midlands Rail Executive (WMRE) and will adopt a turquoise logo in the same style as the other three logos.

14 August 2018
CrossCountry Train Services Must Improve



The following is a press release issued by Campaign for Rail on 14 August 2018 at 14:00.

Longer trains providing seats for all, trusted fares that guarantee value for money and better information and staffing at stations are the three main things that require to be resolved says a leading Midlands based rail campaign group.

West Midlands based Campaign for Rail has made the comments in response to a consultation that ends on 30 August and is being ran by the Department for Transport (DfT). The consultation is asking groups and members of the public what they want to see in the new franchise for Cross Country train services.

The current Cross Country franchise, which is due to end in 2019 and is operated by Arriva, has Birmingham at its heart of operations with services linking South Wales, the East Midlands, the South West, north west & north east of England as well as Scotland.

Ian Jenkins, the Chairman of Campaign for Rail – West Midlands said:

“Cross Country train services are very popular with many services regularly overcrowded. It’s crucial that the new Cross Country franchise includes new trains that have more carriages and seats for passengers.”

“Passengers are entitled to easily obtain the best value rail fare but current Cross Country fares severely limit this ability with the consequence of passengers frequently paying too much or being

put off travelling by rail altogether. This is not acceptable and must be changed with the new Cross Country franchise whoever it is awarded to.”

The rail campaign group have also said that Cross Country staff should be present to help passengers on main stations that are served by Cross Country train services. The current franchise employs no staff to be present on any rail station across the UK network.

“With many people using Cross Country services to travel significant distances they should be supported and helped by the train operator they are paying. This means Cross Country staff being on hand, certainly at the larger railway stations, to handle enquiries and to provide assistance”

The group have submitted their views to the Department for Transport Consultation on the new Cross Country Rail Franchise and are encouraging as many people that use Cross Country rail services in the Midlands to do the same.

“People who use Cross Country services, particularly overcrowded Cross Country services, have a real opportunity here to make their voice heard and we are encouraging as many people as possible to do so before the closing date of 30 August and ensure the DfT are left in no doubt that Cross Country users need new, longer trains with more seats, trusted value for money fares and better information and help at stations”. Ian Jenkins added.

