

# 2012 stakeholder conference

post-conference: your notes & feedback



Dear colleague

It was impressive to see delegates representing more than 30 organisations gathered together for our annual London Midland Stakeholder Conference in Northampton.

This year's conference took as its theme 'Focus on the Passenger'. There was plenty of lively debate about passengers' experiences of train travel, what we have got right and areas where we need to improve.



As well as stakeholders representing passengers, railway development groups and managers from London Midland; we also had representatives of the Department for Transport, Network Rail, the Association of Community Rail Partnerships and Passenger Focus in attendance.

The event gave us a much better understanding of the issues and aspirations of our stakeholders and it also gave us an opportunity to describe the challenges and constraints that we face in operating a safe and successful railway operation.

I hope that you also found the day to be as worthwhile and enjoyable as we did.

Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patrick Verwer". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Patrick Verwer  
Managing Director



## What are we here to do?

We aspire to be a modern railway company delivering a punctual service, informing and putting our customers at ease by doing our utmost to make their day go well.

## Why a conference?

Our purpose was very clear; we wanted to update you and hear your views on London Midland and our progress so far, to share with you what passengers are telling us and look at how we use communication to help when things go wrong. We also looked at exciting new developments in the world of 'new media'. It was good timing for a conference as we were able to squeeze in a session on our Station Staffing Review that the Department for Transport had just announced, we heard about the work of Passenger Focus and, importantly, we were able to spend some time together!

## The update

Patrick Verwer MD of London Midland outlined the purpose of the day giving a progress report on our achievements and challenges. We aim to be very much a modern railway operator, this could not be achieved without significant investment and he went on to describe the passenger benefits of our investment of;

- £11.5m for station improvements e.g. car parking and bicycle storage, automatic ticket gates, ticket vending machines, repairs and renovation of station facilities and the installation of modern customer information systems.
- We have made a big investment in our people with Investors in People re-accreditation leadership & management development programmes and our Ambassador Awards
- We focus on providing information at times of disruption as well as ensuring that our people have the time and dedication to make a difference
- £243m for new & re-furbished trains including; 27 brand new class 172 diesel trains, these fast, quiet and comfortable air-conditioned trains are much better than the 25-year old class 150s they have replaced.
- We have more Class 350 Electric Desiro trains to operate Euston services. In fact an additional 10 x 4 car 110mph capable Desiros are ordered for delivery in 2014.

## Investment in rolling stock

The average age of our train fleet is now just 9 years compared to 13.6 years at the start of our Franchise. The current National average is 17.9 years

There have been timetable improvements too; since the 2011 Stakeholder Conference we have introduced an hourly Sunday service on the West Coast (Trent Valley) Mainline, there are now three trains per hour between Birmingham and Euston with additional weekend capacity.

Partnership is the key to success, with the help of our partners, several of whom were at the Conference; we have been able to raise an additional £8.2m to fund benefits for our customers. Everyone in the room has helped us understand our customers' needs

## What are our customers are telling us

*“Well done to London Midland, Merseyrail and Heathrow Connect, all of whom improved significantly. Particularly impressive was London Midlands' whopping 17% rise in how they dealt with delays.” Anthony Smith, Chief Executive Passenger Focus*

Commercial Director Richard Brooks described what our customers were telling us through the six-monthly National Passenger Survey. This impartial survey is carried out by Passenger Focus and comes as 'two waves' of data, (spring and autumn).

We were very pleased that for spring 2012 London Midland scored higher than the national average. The percentage of passengers satisfied overall with London Midland's performance was 87%, compared to 83% for train operators as a whole. We also did better than national average in a range of other categories. 83% of passengers were satisfied with the provision of information at our stations against the national average of 81%. The attitude and helpfulness of our staff scored as 2% above the 71% average and the investment we've made in new rolling stock has also been recognised by customers. In the category of coping with delays, we were one of only three train operators singled out for praise by Passenger Focus.

## PIDD! communication with passengers when things go wrong

PIDD or, if you prefer, Passenger Information During Disruption is a network wide initiative that came out of the lessons learnt during the severe winter of 2009/10 when rail services (and the roads for that matter) were badly disrupted by snow and record breaking low temperatures.

When reviewed it became clear that procedures were too complex and some of the information was inconsistent, language was poor and staff training was inadequate. A lot of work went into understanding the 'end to end' process to put this right. Part of this was to do with giving our staff the tools to do the job and using new products then becoming available;

### What you said;

During disruption it's crucial that customers are informed of the length of delay (even an estimate) so they have a chance to make alternative travel plans. Information must be updated frequently to give customers the confidence that it's accurate. Ideally there should be a constant flow of information; before leaving home, at the station and on the train.

- New Customer information systems showing train running information real time
- Instant Messaging from London Midland's Control Room to a network of hub stations for onward distribution to ticket offices and platform staff.
- Blackberry phones for station and revenue teams so they have e-mails
- Other Blackberry applications are National Rail Enquiries and Tyrell (the railway's internal train running system) so staff have the full picture.

### What you said;

Reassurance is required when things go wrong. There is a need for a 'human voice' done in the right way – information should be presented with advice about onward connections including platform information, bus stops and routes and ticket acceptance regardless of whichever TOC is involved.

We work closely with Passenger Focus and we've supported them in understanding best practice and we have completely changed the customer information system functionality at our stations and continue to develop new ideas. We are proud of the fact that we are one of the first train operators to set up a PIDD compliancy group inclusive of Network Rail.

### What you said;

Real time train running information must be available everywhere and it must be consistent across the channels of communication. Help points don't always work, but everyone in the workplace uses laptops, passengers often have better information than staff!

## Put passengers first; customer service, technology & new media

Travel information needs to be simple; this is why it's ideal for the new media. Before exploring this we should remember where we came from; not so long ago the main sources of information were things like paper timetables, service update boards, often hand written and, of course, the telephone enquiry bureaux.

## What you said;

Customers would like e-tickets, printing tickets at home to save queuing. Technology should be simple enough to be usable by young and old alike. There is a significant 'trust' issue over information obtained through technology, also, please don't forget those people who don't have it or those who have never used technology of even a ticket machine! Overall technology must not replace face to face contact.

Now anyone with access to a computer or smart phone has access to real time online journey planners, at stations there are digital screens with live updates. National Rail Enquiries has telephone and web access to live station departure boards. Public address systems are now automatic and regular. As said earlier; travel information must be simple & straightforward, it helps us to put customers first by empowering staff; enabling them to make the right decisions based on the information at their fingertips

Sample Twitter page



The image shows a screenshot of the Twitter profile for London Midland (@LondonMidland). The profile picture is a green and yellow train. The bio states: "Here to help from 7am (8am weekends). We aim to reply to all tweets, but pls try to be polite if things have gone wrong – we're real people just trying to help!". The location is listed as "London, Midlands, North West". A link to the website is provided: <http://www.londonmidland.com/live> with the text "Twitter page" below it. At the bottom, the statistics are: 19740 Followers, 9154 Following, 100014 Tweets (highlighted with a speech bubble), and 335 Listed.

19740	9154	100014	335
Followers	Following	Tweets	Listed



Now we can reach a wide audience just about anytime of day, those on Twitter have almost instant access to information; we needed to set some ground rules early on;

- We chose a style so as to fit in the 140 character limit, this is informative, chatty and, where appropriate, with humour.
- To understand what we want to achieve? i.e. information exchange, conversations, advocacy, customer satisfaction
- To help engage/resolve problems to exceed expectations and respond to negatives
- To get to know our audience and what they need

Sample of a positive Twitter conversation

**asadd Asad Dhunna**

Really impressed by @LondonMidland responding to commuters affected today.  
#nowthatswhaticallgoodcustomerservice

**nicminers Nick Miners**

Very impressed with @londonmidland twitter account. Comprehensive updates on train service, reads like a human too.

**Tinovim**

@LondonMidland Thank you for keeping us regularly updated. Highly professional. Well done.

**Blurtoncllr**

@LondonMidland well done for keeping passengers updated where possible, very few operators provide this level of service

**Elaine Burnett @lainie\_bee**

@LondonMidland I haven't been telling you in a long time, but I still adore your tweets & how you keep them going. You rock! :)

**\_ciaran**

@heIAbbo I agree @londonmidland have done a superb job this evening keeping people informed on twitter

**John-Evans Jones @JohnEHydro**

Fair play to @LondonMidland their Twitter service deserves to win awards. No one interacts like them!

Going forward we would like more coverage with a larger Twitter team including specially trained customer champions to create a consistent and sustainable service. Also to help more with service at times of disruption, this would ensure personal interaction, every question answered, creating a knowledge base of regular tweeters.

## **Workshop 1 – what do you need?**

“In one form or another we’re all involved in customer service; providing it or experiencing it. If you think you’re not, think again!” Heather Whaling

The spotlight was then turned on the table groups. Having heard about nationwide customer information initiatives, and new ways of communicating, we asked you to discuss, at times of service disruption, what information you need and when you would need it (this question not being as obvious as it seemed).

There was lively debate particularly around new media and technology vs. face to face communication, accuracy, confidence and content. The general consensus being that both ways are important and complimentary! We were also interested in delegate’s views on the truth or otherwise of the assertion that older people won’t use new technologies.

### **What you said;**

Remember – there are vulnerable groups, such as the young, the elderly, disabled customers and visitors to the country travelling by train

## **Workshop 1 – summary of what you said**

### **What information do passengers need and when is it needed?**

The length of delay (possible/likely), the information must be updated frequently and there is a need for a ‘human voice’ – done in the right way. Advice about onward connections, regardless of the TOC, this includes platform information, advice about buses, ticket acceptance and reassurance. Ideally information should be available before leaving home and obviously at stations and on-board the train.

### **What channels?**

Online (but not exclusively), on-train and station PA and Smartphones, Twitter and other social media but don’t forget the basics; posters, whiteboards, help points and CIS. The human voice is important; people need to be available on the train and at the station



## Preference?

Passengers are happy to use any available form of communications but the information must be correct and up to date to maintain credibility. Modern communication channels are accessed by most people nowadays. The idea that older people don't use new technology is a bit of a fallacy – it depends on the individuals. Real time train running information should be available everywhere. All the channels must be consistent in the information they give out. There is a need to educate customers that some methods of communication may not be as up to date as others, i.e. I-Phone vs. PIS, by going over to new media we may lose or discourage those customers who cannot access the information in this way. Alternative methods of making the same journey should be published and can we have e-ticketing (printing tickets at home to avoid queuing)?

## Workshop 2 – what's your experience

“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”

George Bernard Shaw

We were interested to know about your recent railway travel experiences and any recent travel experiences of others that you represent – both good and bad customer service. Did it have a lasting effect on your attitude towards rail travel in general and London Midland in particular?

Personal anecdotes do throw a light on particular incidents and particular days so we asked for a consensus on each table so that the discussion was focussed on the broad issues that could be identified. Main issues could include; good/bad communication, staff attitude, management failure, someone going out of their way to help etc.

### What you said;

A broken down LM train; an off-duty member of staff assisted and sorted out refreshments, we were kept informed with constant PA announcements, plus; Delay Repay forms were handed out

## Workshop 2 – summary of what you said

### The good

- During disruption; Cross Country at New Street gave accurate advice with alternatives, a bus was provided
- To feel cared for, as a valued customer; the personal touch
- Staff taking responsibility for the problem and fixing it, Taking the initiative, and looking at the problem in different ways; a passenger focussed / common sense approach
- Witnessed revenue protection after every stop
- On a crowded LM service, someone had loud headphones, the conductor intervened very well, I was surprised and delighted

- LM staff generally more friendly
- Information available when the trains stopped – good practice, the conductor showed an interest in the passengers
- Euston ‘major incidents’ announcements are good

### What you said;

A great train journey is uneventful, it smoothes your day and you come home happy

### And the bad!

- Train to Great Malvern; announcement of ‘This train will terminate here’ but no further information was given, the effect on new customers, ‘will never travel again’
- At Wolverhampton, there was no assistance or coordination
- Disruption ruined a good day
- A lack of PA seems to be standard across other TOC networks.
- The customer service approaches can be inconsistent
- Staff criticising the company and other staff within earshot of passengers
- Not being able to sell all products on the train or from TVMs.
- Information screens not working during disruption
- Early closing of ticket offices
- All stations, services capped – express went through, connections – missed by seconds!
- Station facilities & accessibility, i.e. Lichfield Trent Valley
- Not holding connecting services on MV when the mainline is late running
- Information – not having to hunt for it
- Nuneaton station – checked on the website for opening times. It wasn’t open when I arrived due to staffing issues. Couldn’t find anyone to speak to.

### What you said;

Experienced no revenue protection and lack of staff presence; this is poor customer service

### Looking Forward

Since we last met we have introduced:

- An hourly Sunday service on the Trent Valley
- 3 trains per hour Birmingham – London
- Additional weekend capacity

We are looking forward to December when we launch the innovative 'Project 110', this increases the speed of our 30 Class 350/1 electric Desiro trains from 100mph to 110mph. The faster journey times creates capacity, i.e. more trains and more seats for our customers travelling on the West Coast Main Line to and from London Euston.

- A new Trent Valley evening service 16.46 / 17.24 / 20.13 (from December)
- An improved service at Stone
- Trent Valley Sunday services, hourly and with an earlier start (from December)

## Event review

Delegates were asked; what have you got out of today?

- An opportunity to express concerns to London Midland
- Twitter and Communications presentation was useful
- We can feed back to others not here today
- A good introduction to the London Midland team and their areas of responsibility
- Interesting marketing and promotions information
- We've made suggestions for next year
- Good to meet up, networking and passing on ideas
- Our viewpoints have been heard by the managers present
- Presentations were useful
- Discussion about the problems of new technology
- Freedom to discuss any topic with TOC staff
- Hearing views and information from other
- Opportunity to give direct feedback to London Midland

What would you like next time?

- We need longer discussions/workshops
- The venue to be closer to the station please
- A more accessible venue
- Report back on the actions taken
- Do the conference more often (possibly split at New Street)
- The format works well – it may be better to group the tables on a more geographic basis
- Mix of regions – change tables at lunch

### Published by:

Franchise Management & Communications, London Midland, 102 New Street, Birmingham, B2 4HQ  
December 2012

