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Consultation response

**The Station Champions' report 'Better Rail Stations'**

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## 1. About pteg

**pteg** represents the six English Passenger Transport Executives (PTEs) in England which between them serve more than eleven million people in Tyne and Wear ('Nexus'), West Yorkshire ('Metro'), South Yorkshire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside ('Merseytravel') and the West Midlands ('Centro'). Nottingham City Council, Transport for London (TfL) and Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) are associate members of **pteg**, though this response does not represent their views. The PTEs plan, procure, provide and promote public transport in some of Britain's largest city regions, with the aim of providing integrated public transport networks accessible to all.

## 2. Responses to specific consultation questions

**1. The report argues the need for improved passenger satisfaction with stations. The satisfaction rate is currently 65%. What do you consider would be a reasonable target to be achieved within five years?**

[        ]%

**Please add any further comments below:**

Improving passenger satisfaction with stations is important, but is important to set a target that is achievable, and as far as possible, not influenced by other factors, such as train performance. Study should be made of stations that have undergone significant improvement in order to understand what levels of improvement in customer satisfaction are possible **pteg** would suggest that targets need to be appropriate and achievable for each TOC based on deliverable investment.

The monitoring of customer satisfaction must be undertaken in such a way so as to ensure that all stations are regularly and randomly surveyed and TOCs cannot focus improvements on stations they know are due to be surveyed. As NPS data is only based on a relatively small sample of stations there is a risk that the smaller stations with low footfall can be ignored by TOCs without a significant influence on the overall customer satisfaction results.

In all PTE areas, services and stations are provided by more than one TOC, and passengers will regularly interact with multiple operators and providers in the course of their journeys. It is therefore important that customer satisfaction is understood on an area basis and not just by TOC.

Customer satisfaction monitoring also needs to adequately address the fact that there is a balance to be struck between the importance of having adequate facilities, and how customers are handled by staff.

It is also important that the wider views of the community on rail stations are also understood, and not just those of rail users.

**2. (a) Do you agree with the changes which the report proposes to the way in which stations are categorised?**

YES [ X ]    NO [   ]

**(b) Do you agree with the changes of category they have proposed for some stations?**

Broadly with some exceptions

**Please add any further comments below:**

In general **pteg** supports the proposed categorisation of stations but with some exceptions which are referenced in individual PTE responses to this consultation. However, there is a national under-reporting of the usage of PTE stations because of the use of PTE tickets that are not recorded in the national LENNON data. This means that the usage of many stations is considerably under-stated in the ORR/Deltarail tables (often by factors of more than 100%). As such **pteg** believes that the categorisation of PTE areas stations needs to be reviewed.

It should be noted that the distinction between category E and F stations is often based purely on the fact of whether they are staffed. There are many busy unstaffed stations that would benefit from having a staff presence, and there are also quite a few staffed stations that have quite low footfalls. Often the availability of staff is based purely on local or historic circumstances, such as a policy decision by the PTE to support staffing. This can lead to quite significant changes in staffing policy as boundaries are crossed. **pteg** believes that there are strong benefits from having a staff presence at stations, although their deployment needs to be undertaken so as to maximise their benefit to customers. **pteg** believes that there should be a process to review the provision of staffing at the busier category F stations in order to consider whether staffing ought to be provided. This is particularly relevant at unstaffed stations that have experienced considerable recent traffic growth.

Station classification therefore needs to have some flexibility to take account of local circumstances that may not be reflected in a purely footfall/revenue based classification.

**3. Do you have any amendments to suggest to the detail of the proposal for Minimum Station Standards, bearing in mind the need to balance provision for passengers with affordability and value for money?**

**pteg** is broadly supportive of the proposed minimum station standards. However **pteg** would comment that:

- The issue of staffing needs to be reviewed, as discussed above, especially with regards the busier category F stations
- At stations where access is provided by lifts and escalators, these must be available at all times that trains are running, and not just when the station is staffed
- The provision of Real Time Information at stations ought to be provided in a consistent national format. There are currently considerable variations between stations creating difficulties in interpreting information.
- Many PTEs have rolled out a standard public transport signage policy across their areas. This has included rail stations and we would not wish the benefits of having a consistent local multi-modal signage policy lost through a national standard signing policy. Consideration is therefore needed on finding a way of combining the two most effectively and not losing the benefits to local transport integration, should a national rail signage policy be rolled out.

- **pteg** believes that good passenger security is essential at all stations, and CCTV provision is often of greater value at unstaffed stations than those with a staff presence. All category F stations should therefore be considered for the provision of CCTV.
- The provision of luggage trolleys at all category B stations may not always be appropriate if the station primarily handles local commuter traffic, and does not therefore have a lot of passengers that are encumbered by luggage.
- **pteg** does not consider that the provision of long-term parking is required at all category A, B and C stations. It would be inappropriate, for example, to expect Birmingham New Street to provide parking for 15% of its users.
- The report recommends providing parking at all stations except those classified as "Inner Urban" (which needs defining). **pteg** considers that the provision of an appropriate level of parking is an issue that is influenced significantly by local factors, and that it is unreasonable set an absolute national standard that is appropriate in all circumstances. For example, a town centre station may already be surrounded by local car parks, or it may be physically impossible to provide a car park due to land availability. Car park charging policy also significantly influences what an appropriate level of provision should be. A car park with a £10 daily charge is clearly going offer a different level of attractiveness to users compared with a free facility.

**4. The report recommends that the new station standards form the basis of future franchise agreements. Over what time period do you think it reasonable for these standards to be met for the overwhelming majority of stations?**

[ 5-10 ] years

**Are there other steps which should be taken to meet these standards across the generality of stations?**

**pteg** considers that the experience on Merseyside shows the considerable benefits that have occurred through the PTE having a close specification and funding role in the provision of stations (and more widely in other areas of service provision). As long-term players in the transport industry, PTEs would be well placed to take a more active role in the provision of rail stations, perhaps by taking over the role of Station Facilities Operator at all or some stations. **pteg** is concerned that the commercial focus of TOCs is not always aligned with the wider requirements of local rail users in PTE areas, where revenue generation is low, but usage is high and the wider transport benefits are large.

**5. Do you agree that there is a need for a substantial programme of additional car parking at stations**

YES [ X ] NO [ ]

**Do you believe it can be self-funding through additional parking revenue?**

YES [ ] NO [ X ]

**Please add any further comments below:**

**pteg** recognises the importance of car parking at rail stations, and many PTE area car parks are significantly over-subscribed creating considerable suppressed demand, especially in the

off-peak. Most PTEs have pursued a policy of free parking which is seen as an important factor in encouraging the use of the rail network when driving into regional city centres remains a practical option, unlike in London.

Where journeys are longer than in the PTE areas and fares are higher, car park provision costs can be reasonably recouped through charging, however in the PTE areas, charging to fund expansion costs would represent such a significant proportion of total travel costs that overall rail demand would be significantly affected, impacting substantially on the wider policy benefits of rail. Other funding mechanisms for car park expansion in the PTE areas therefore need to be found.

As rail is competing with the car, and delivering modal shift is enshrined in local, regional and national policy, it is important that any charging policy at car parks reflects these wider policy objectives. If charges are set at a level that discourages local rail use, then this would defeat the purpose of both providing the car park and also the effectiveness of rail in delivering policy objectives. Providing subsidised parking should therefore be justified in exactly the same way as subsidising loss-making rail services, in terms of the wider benefits it provides.

Introducing car parking charges at some stations may also have the undesired effect of motorists congesting surrounding streets to avoid parking charges, with inevitable conflict between residents and commuters which may well lead to new traffic management measures being sought at an overall greater public cost than that which car park charges could recoup.

**6. (a) Do you have any comments on the recommendations in the report concerning the need for improved bus services and improved car, cycle and pedestrian access at stations?**

*pteg* supports the need to improve access to stations. There is a need to understand the success of the Station Travel Plans initiative at the pilot stations before deciding on whether it is appropriate to roll it out to A-C1 category stations, as it may be that more stations should be covered, or it may appear not to deliver significant benefits and resources could be better targeted elsewhere.

**(b) Is there a need for new Government guidance in this area?**

YES [ X ] NO [ ]

**Please add any further comments below:**

In PTE areas encouraging improved bus/rail interchange often proves difficult given the deregulated bus environment. The government ought to give consideration to ways of making it easier for PTEs to encourage better bus/rail integration when commercial bus operators do not necessarily recognise the benefits of linking in with rail services, rather than competing with them. Some PTEs are looking at the powers they have under the Local Transport Act 2008 in order to better regulate bus services, and this could be a way forward, however it is currently too early to see whether these powers can be effective in this regard.

**7. Do you have any comments on what the report says about the community use of stations?**

*pteg* agrees with having greater community involvement in the use of stations where this is possible. This is an area where, if PTEs had a more direct involvement in station provision, it

might be easier to encourage community use rather than being dependent on a commercially driven TOC.

**8. Do you agree that there is scope for more retail facilities at many stations, potentially including combined retail and ticket sales, bearing in mind the balance between retail provision and operational convenience?**

YES [X]    NO [ ]

**What type and range of retail facilities would you expect to see in stations, taking account of relative size?**

There is scope to provide more retail facilities at stations, and the appropriate level of provision will be significantly influenced by local factors, as well as footfall. Consideration should also be given to whether it is possible to part-subsidise the provision of facilities at locations where there are significant passenger benefits, but where the footfall alone cannot make provision profitable. The best way of doing this is probably through the letting of concessions for the provision of facilities in groups of profitable and less-profitable stations, so that the more profitable locations can cross-subsidise the less profitable.

**9. Do you have any comments on the vision for the future set out in the report, including the type and style of stations which will be required in 2030?**

The vision for future stations needs to encompass all categories of stations, especially those medium and small stations where commercial opportunities are more limited. Small stations need to fulfil their potential to be gateways to the rail network, and passengers should not feel they have to travel further to larger stations to access the network just because their local station does not offer them the service they should.

**10. Do you have any further comments on any aspect of the report?**

It is disappointing that the report has not given stronger recommendations on resolving the institutional problems associated with separate owners, operators and funders – and the consequential difficulties when trying to improve standards.

PTEs have also had recent experiences that when stations are upgraded, the disruption to passengers can be considerable and information also poor. For example, the current closure of Tipton station in the West Midlands for platform renewal is planned to take over 6 months, and passengers only found out about the closure about a week before it happened. The industry has got to get better at managing such situations, and also look at creative ways of minimising disruption, perhaps through the provision of temporary facilities such as Network Rail proved they can build at Workington North. Many of the benefits of upgrading stations will be lost if passengers are seriously inconvenienced while work takes place, leading to many choosing to use different modes of travel instead.

Again **pteg** believes that many of these issues could be better managed in PTE areas if PTEs had a much stronger role in the provision of stations.