

Passengers protest as concern about train overcrowding swells

Standing complaints

TRANSPORT

Complaints about train overcrowding to a transport watchdog have almost quadrupled in a year, Which? can reveal.

Passenger Focus told Which? it received 80 complaints between November and January compared with 23 in the same period last year.

The news followed a marked increase in passenger protests across the country about the issue since Christmas, while in January a Department for Transport (DfT) head caused outrage by dismissing the problem. Dr Mike Mitchell, head of the DfT's rail division, told the Commons Public Accounts Committee it was acceptable to pay £5,000 for a season ticket to stand.

But this does not sit well with members, who have told us about their experiences. One of them, Chrissy Davis, works in London and travels from Ashwell and Morden in Hertfordshire. She pays £4,300 a year but always has to stand on her 6.15pm 40-minute journey from King's Cross. She said: 'It's not enjoyable after a long day's work.' In the mornings, since Christmas, she has had to travel 14 minutes earlier on a slower, longer train after her 7.03am train was cut by First Capital Connect due to overcrowding.

Sarah Duckett, of the Ashwell and Morden Users Group, told us: 'They have taken away choice by cutting trains. It makes no sense. Putting us off the service is not the way to address the problem.'



Chrissy Davis has to stand every night on her way home

The group wants longer trains and thinks passengers would accept having to get off in the middle of trains where stations have short platforms.

A spokesman for First Capital Connect said options were limited at peak times. He insisted longer trains would require lengthening platforms and upgrading power supplies, which would need government funding. It has submitted a proposal to increase capacity to the DfT.

Anthony Smith, Chief Executive of Passenger Focus, said: 'There is mounting evidence that the industry needs to turn its attention to the fact that more people are travelling now than ever before.'

TAKE ACTION!

■ To complain, contact your train company and Passenger Focus on 0845 302 2022 or at www.passengerfocus.org.uk

In brief

HOME PACK CHANGES AGAIN

■ There have been further changes to the government's controversial home information packs (Hips). All property sellers were due to supply Hips from 1 June. Now properties on the market before June will not need a Hip until 31 March 2008. And homes withdrawn from sale do not need an updated Hip if they are put back on the market within a year.



WATER METER THREAT

■ Compulsory water metering could be on the way in dry areas. The Environment Agency has identified 11 'areas of stress' where enforced water efficiency measures should be considered, including Thames Water, Southern Water and Three Valleys Water, all of which recently lifted their hosepipe bans. For details go to www.environment-agency.gov.uk. See also 'Your letters', p78.

HEARING AID INQUIRY

■ MPs are looking at why people wait so long to get hearing aids on the NHS. The Health Select Committee inquiry comes as figures show that, on average, people wait 41 weeks to get their first hearing aid, and a year to get a digital aid.



NHS HELPLINE CHALLENGE

■ A Scottish woman is suing NHS 24 over the death of her partner, who she claims was misdiagnosed over the phone with flu – he had toxic shock syndrome. It's thought to be the first legal action against the helpline. Our research shows consumers are sceptical of how a telephone service, like NHS 24 or its English equivalent NHS Direct, can decide if someone is seriously ill.

CONTACT US

■ If there's something you'd like us to investigate, call 0800 252088 and leave a message or email news@which.co.uk

And finally... Beware the Easter egg box

In our egg test (p26) we were confused about why we should not use this box again. Cadbury told us it was a safety warning 'so it isn't used for something it's not designed for, such as a tray for hot drinks'. Unlikely, we think.



GET IN TOUCH

Send your examples of daft or misleading products or promotions to
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