Parking at the station

Results of car park research for the East Midlands region and the Midland Main Line to London St Pancras

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Passengerfocus
putting passengers first

Contents

Chief executive's introduction

Anthony Smith

This research into passenger satisfaction and current usage of station car parks in the East Midlands region and along the Midland Main Line to London St Pancras highlights four key issues.

First, there is a strong call from passengers for lower car-parking prices. This is the top priority for improvement among 49% of the 1000 plus passengers taking part in this research.

Second, the need for a comprehensive investment programme to increase car-parking capacity at, not only those stations already at or near capacity, but also where a small increase in current demand will cause problems for passengers. For example, at Loughborough 84% of spaces are full by 9am but one third of passengers surveyed reported an occasion in the preceding three months when they had been unable to park. Bicycle-parking facilities also need to be expanded at a number of stations and capacity for blue badge holders should be increased at some locations.

Third, there is a need for better arrangements to pay the parking fee. Current satisfaction in this area stands at 17% and it is the third highest priority for improvement – reducing the transaction time is one issue passengers raised.

Fourth, the need for further efforts to reassure passengers about their personal security when using car parks after dark, including whether there is adequate lighting.

It is encouraging that the final East Midlands RUS acknowledges that car-parking capacity is a problem. Having done so, I urge the industry to take firm steps to tackle the capacity issue, as well as the other areas highlighted in this research. The industry should not forget earlier research by Passenger Focus which found that a lack of car-parking capacity* at East Anglia stations was suppressing use of the railway and leading to increased use of cars.

A.J.C.

Anthony Smith
Chief executive
Passenger Focus

*Getting to the station – Findings of research conducted in the East of England.

Map of stations surveyed

The text in blue indicates the 15 stations where research into passenger satisfaction was undertaken; all other stations were audited.

Executive summary

In November 2009 Passenger Focus carried out research into car parking at railway stations in the East Midlands region and along the Midland Main Line route to London St Pancras. This research, undertaken in part to inform Passenger Focus's input to Network Rail's East Midlands Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS), has two elements.

First, to understand passengers' opinions about aspects of station car parks and bicycle-storage facilities and, second, an audit of how full car and bicycle-parking capacity is at 42 stations (see map on page 2).

The passenger satisfaction research took place at 15 stations in the East Midlands region and on the Midland Main Line to London. Questionnaires were distributed in the station car parks on weekdays between 6am and 11am, and between 4pm and 7pm. A total of 1085 passengers completed the questionnaire. The sample included commuters, business and leisure passengers.

Passengers' priorities for improvement

The top five priorities for improvement are:

- Cheaper one day parking prices 28%
- Cheaper season ticket parking prices 21%
- More efficient pay machines 10%
- More spaces for cars 8%
- Larger parking spaces 7%

Passenger satisfaction

The areas with the lowest passenger satisfaction are:

- Value for money 10%
- Car park payment machines 17%
- Traffic flow around the car park 39%

This report provides the key results from the research. More detailed information for each of the 15 stations is available on the Passenger Focus website at **www.passengerfocus.org.uk**.

TRAVELWATCH East Midlands

Capacity audit

Passenger Focus worked with TravelWatch East Midlands to audit current car park occupancy in the same area. Focusing on weekday occupancy prior to 9am at 42 stations, the results highlighted where capacity was an existing problem and where car park expansion may be required as demand grows.

Passenger satisfaction

4.1 Statistics

- 80% of car park users surveyed live two to 10 miles from the station
- 85% of passengers surveyed had been using the car park for over one year
- 25% of passengers surveyed had been using the car park for over 10 years
- 76% of commuters surveyed use the car park three or more times a week
- 25% of leisure passengers surveyed use the car park once a month.

The Department for Transport's National Rail Travel Survey, 2008, shows that the proportion of passengers arriving at these 15 stations by different modes is: walked 38%; bus/coach 14%; car parked at or near the station 20%; car dropped off by someone 16%; motorcycle, less than 1%; bicycle 3%; taxi 7%; tram 3%; and 'other' less than 1%.

4.2 Finding a space

Passengers want it to be easy to park their vehicle or bicycle, so it is essential that car parks are easy to navigate with an adequate number of well-sized spaces.

Table 1 Satisfaction with car park services (% of passengers saying fairly or very satisfied)

		Total
1	The ability to find a space	72%
2	The space allocated for each parking space	42%
3	The ease of driving/cycling into and out of the car park	40%
4	The way the traffic flows around the car park	39%

Although the survey shows that almost three quarters of passengers were satisfied with their ability to find a space, this varies greatly between commuter and leisure passengers. The survey found 74% of commuters and business passengers were satisfied with the ability to find a space, compared with only 58% of leisure passengers. This suggests that car parks are full or near full prior to off-peak travel times.

Satisfaction with access/egress to and from the car park and traffic flow around the car park differs both by passenger type and location. Only one third of commuters are satisfied with driving into and out of the car park and the way the traffic flows compared with over half of leisure passengers. Only 21% of passengers travelling from Bedford and stations south were satisfied with the ease of driving into/out of the car park compared with 54% at Wellingborough and stations north. Harpenden and Luton suppress the average satisfaction with ease of driving into and out of the car park; 14% and 17% respectively. Satisfaction with the space allocated for each bay also differs by geography with 37% satisfaction among passengers travelling from Wellingborough and stations north, compared with 50% of passengers travelling from Bedford and stations south. Less than a quarter of passengers surveyed at Leicester, Kettering and Wellingborough were satisfied with the size of the car park spaces.

4.3 Payment

The lowest areas of passenger satisfaction are with the value for money offered by station car parks and with the machines available to pay your parking fee.

Table 2 Satisfaction with car park services (% of passengers saying fairly or very satisfied)

		Total
1	The machines available to pay your parking fee	17%
2	Value for money of the parking fee	10%

Commuters are the least satisfied with the car park pay-machines and value for money with 13% and 7% respectively. This compares with leisure travellers who were

42% and 31% satisfied with the same categories. There appears to be very little difference in satisfaction across the route, however where car parks were free of charge value for money satisfaction was, understandably, a lot higher.

4.4 Safety

Passengers want to know that when they use a car park, both they and their vehicle or bicycle are safe. Five separate questions were asked about safety in the survey.

Table 3 Satisfaction with car park services (% passengers saying fairly or very satisfied)

		Total
1	Feeling safe in the car park area in the daytime	84%
2	The walking route from where you park your vehicle/bike to the station	58%
3	Feeling safe in the car park after dark	53%
4	The security of your vehicle/bike when you leave it	49%
5	The lighting provided in the car park at night	46%

This research shows that most passengers are satisfied with safety during the daytime (84%), however satisfaction with safety when using the car park at night is significantly lower (53%). The results of all the safety measures are fairly consistent across passenger type. Of the stations surveyed, Luton station car park scored poorly, with just over one third of passengers satisfied with safety in the car park after dark and just over one quarter satisfied with the lighting provided at night.

4.5 Upkeep and maintenance

Commuters tend to be least satisfied with the upkeep and maintenance and the tidiness and cleanliness of the car parks. Satisfaction levels with both were lower at stations south of Wellingborough by just under 10 percentage points. This was particularly the case at Harpenden where satisfaction with the upkeep and maintenance of the car park was only 28%.

Table 4 Satisfaction with car park services (% of passengers saying fairly or very satisfied)

		Total
1	The tidiness and cleanliness of the parking area	60%
2	The upkeep and maintenance of the parking area	50%

4.6 Priorities for improvements

We asked passengers what single thing they would like to see improved about the car park at their station. The top 10 results are shown in Table 5. Key findings include:

- 49% of passengers surveyed said that cheaper parking would be the thing they would most like to improve about parking at the station
- Commuters were most keen to see price reductions in both one day and season ticket prices (56%)
- After cheaper parking, business passengers would most like to see more efficient pay machines (21% – faster transaction times and the ability to pay by credit/debit cards)
- Leisure passengers would like more car parking spaces (21%)
- More and larger parking spaces are key for passengers travelling from Wellingborough and stations north
- Better access into and out of the car park was twice as important for passengers travelling from Bedford and stations south, where passengers suggested either putting in a second entrance/exit or widening the existing entrance/exit.

Table 5 What one thing would you most like to improve about parking at this station?

		Total
1	Cheaper one day parking prices	28%
2	Cheaper season ticket parking prices	21%
3	More efficient pay machines	10%
4	More spaces for cars	8%
5	Larger parking spaces	7%
6	Better vehicle/bike access into and out of the car park	4%
7	Improved lighting at night	3%
8	Improved security for vehicles/bikes	3%
9	More spaces for cyclists/motorbikes	3%
10	Better traffic flow around the car park	2%

Capacity audit

Table 6 shows car park occupancy prior to 9am on weekdays at each of the 42 stations surveyed. It highlights that many of the car parks currently over capacity are at smaller stations, some on branch lines. The audit found that 11 stations in the East Midlands RUS area are at 90% or greater occupancy by 9am on weekdays: these being Beeston, Bottesford, Cromford, Duffield, Elstree & Borehamwood, Flitwick, Harpenden, Longton, Mill Hill, Oakham and Stamford. There are a further eight stations between 80 and 89% occupancy by 9am: these are Bedford, Harlington, Leicester, Loughborough, Uttoxeter, Chesterfield, Newark Castle and Bingham. Bicycle spaces are between 90 and 100% occupied by 9am at Bedford, Nottingham and Derby, while it appears that the number of blue-badge spaces may be insufficient at Wellingborough and Newark Castle.

Table 6

Station	Car Park	Total no. of spaces for cars	Occupancy by 9am: Cars	Motorbike	Blue-Badge	Bicycle
Ambergate		30	75%	na	na	0%
Bedford		710	85%	75%	29%	90%
Beeston		22	100%	na	0%	45%
Belper		207	40%	na	90%	0%
Bingham		0	na	na	na	na
Bottesford		15	*160%	na	0%	na
Burton on Trent	Station Front	28	100%	na	0%	40%
	Main Car Park	125	10%	na	na	na
Chesterfield	Main Car Park	473	83%	25%	0%	70%
	Short stay	28	85%	na	100%	na
	Executive car park	18	66%	na	na	na
Cromford		15	*110%	na	0%	0%
Derby	North	144	*106%	62%	0%	96%
	South	203	50%	na	na	na
	Pride Park	181	75%	na	33%	50%
	Executive car park	35	50%	na	na	na
Duffield		25	*125%	na	na	0%
Elstree & Borehamwood		206	95%	33%	38%	80%
Flitwick		261	90%	50%	18%	80%
Harlington		129	85%	50%	26%	40%
Harpenden		744	90%	80%	86%	80%
Hendon	All Premier parking	44	40%	na	22%	50%
Hinckley		70	40%	na	0%	10%
Kettering		281	90%	na	50%	70%
		228	40%	na	70%	na
Leagrave		393	75%	50%	52%	50%
Leicester	Forecourt – short stay & executive	27	81%	na	100%	74%
	Rear car park	491	80%	na	72%	58%
Long Eaton		158	40%	na	15%	35%
Longton		15	*125%	na	na	na
Loughborough		121	84%	na	57%	53%
Luton	Midland Road	22	40%	75%	n/a	60%

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Table 6

Occupancy by 9am

Station	Car Park	Total no. of spaces for cars	Cars	Motorbike	Blue-Badge	Bicycle
	Station Road	499	75%	na	37%	na
Luton Airport Parkway		826	60%	20%	10%	20%
Mansfield		108	30%	na	20%	0%
Mansfield Woodhouse		107	45%	na	0%	0%
Market Harborough	Main car park	312	75%	na	0%	60%
	Executive car park	15	50%	na	0%	na
Matlock	Rail user only (dedicated spaces within main car park)	37	5%	na	0%	0%
	Rest of car park	162	20%	na	0%	na
Matlock Bath		155	5%	na	0%	0%
Melton Mowbray		67	40%	na	33%	42%
Mill Hill	All Premier parking	44	100%	20%	48%	50%
Narborough	Station Road	61	50%	na	0%	10%
	Station Front	7	*200%	na	na	na
Newark Castle		98	86%	na	100%	40%
Nottingham		512	60%	na	65%	96%
Oakham	A	30	100%	0%	0%	20%
	B	9	80%	0%	0%	0%
Radlett		313	75%	50%	13%	65%
St Albans	Station Road	594	90%	70%	1%	80%
	Ridgemont Road	158	95%	80%	n/a	95%
	Victoria Street	813	45%	na	52%	20%
Stamford		72	*105%	na	0%	40%
Uttoxeter		33	80%	na	0%	0%
Wellingborough	North	129	60%	na	na	25%
	South	428	45%	na	100%	na
	West	233	15%	na	na	na
Whatstandwell		25	40%	na	0%	0%

* Capacity over 100% was recorded when all car park spaces were full and cars were parked either within, or in close proximity to the station car park, but weren't in designated spaces.

As part of the satisfaction questionnaire, passengers were asked if there had been any occasion in the last three months where they were unable to park their vehicle or bike at the station. Overall, 16% said this happened, and where it had 79% of passengers said it happened between one and five times. However, the 16% average masks significant variations between stations. Table 7 shows the percentage of passengers who were unable to park at particular stations in the last three months.

Table 7

Station	Base*	Percentage of surveyed passengers unable to park vehicle/bicycle in last three months
Stamford	45	76%
Harpenden	119	51%
Harlington	27	41%
Loughborough	51	35%
Derby	41	29%
Flitwick	46	20%
Market Harborough	91	15%
Leagrave	40	10%
Bedford	144	7%
Nottingham	56	7%
Kettering	52	6%
Leicester	112	6%
Wellingborough	115	5%
Chesterfield	97	4%
Luton	42	0%

*CAUTION: Low base sizes for some stations. Data from stations with a base size of less than 50 should be interpreted with caution.

Conclusion

Passengers have told us that the price they are paying for car parking is poor value for money and that when it comes to making improvements lower prices are their top priority. Other priorities include having more efficient pay machines, with transaction time cited as a problem by some (17% satisfied and it was the third priority for improvement).

This research shows that 11 stations in the East Midlands RUS area are at 90% or greater occupancy by 9am on weekdays, with a further eight at between 80 and 89% occupancy. Spaces to park a bicycle are between 90 and 100% occupied by 9am at three stations: seven more stations having an occupancy level between 70 and 89%.

Network Rail received the results of this research while the East Midlands RUS was being finalised and that document states:

"Around half of the stations within the RUS area provide car parking, with just 10 of those having more than 500 spaces. Overall, the provision of car-parking spaces relative to the population is low compared with some other parts of the country. At the busier locations, station car parks generally fill up early and hence constrain off-peak demand. Passenger Focus carried out a survey of car parks across the RUS area in November 2009 to identify stations where parking was already at or near capacity. The survey also verified the accuracy of the baseline data and included an assessment of passenger satisfaction with car parking in the RUS area. Network Rail, in conjunction with train operators, will continue to review and assess opportunities for improving capacity at stations for cars, motorbikes/bicycle storage and blue-badge holders at those locations already exhibiting high levels of occupancy where there are no schemes under development, particularly: Bottesford, Cromford, Duffield, Longton, Mill Hill, Newark Castle, Oakham and Stamford."

It continues:

"Schemes already under development at Beeston, Bedford, Nottingham, Derby and Wellingborough should be examined to ensure that they address the capacity issues highlighted by the Passenger Focus survey. Once capacity at these locations has been addressed, those stations surveyed with greater than 80 percent occupancy represent the next priority for scheme development."

It is vital that the rail industry now takes firm steps to deliver a comprehensive investment programme to increase capacity at the locations listed in the East Midlands RUS. Capacity for bicycle parking and the number of blue-badge spaces must also be expanded at some locations.

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