



# Uncomfortable reading



## Portsmouth-Waterloo commuter services - report and passenger survey





## Introduction

From late 2004, passengers on the Portsmouth-Waterloo service were served exclusively by white Class 444 trains which proved immediately popular.

In Oct 2006, 65% of these daily mainline services were replaced with suburban Class 450 trains. These caused widespread passenger resentment due to cramped and uncomfortable conditions, largely caused by their 2+3 seating arrangement.

The proportion of Class 450 trains was reduced to 49% in December 2007 following complaints, but the problems remain.

South West Trains (SWT) and the Department for Transport (DfT) have declined to conduct an independent survey to establish passenger views. Portsmouth City Council has worked with commuters and rail-user groups to produce such a survey.

This report explains why the issue is important to the city and to local rail passengers, and presents the survey results, which overwhelmingly confirm that the 450s are not fit for purpose and should be withdrawn from this route.

## Class 450s

Class 450 trains are high-density suburban trains intended only for outer suburban routes, e.g. Waterloo-Basingstoke (see Rail Passengers Council report *The Right Train?* March 2005). This was previously indicated on the route maps located above the train doors. At 97 minutes, Waterloo-Portsmouth is a main line route.

Passengers are unable to work with papers, use laptops or relax on 450s.

Many passengers have complained of sciatica and other back-related illnesses while using the seats for extended periods.

Train crews receive regular complaints from passengers about the 450s.

Many passengers have adjusted their daily routine to use the remaining 444 services, distorting loading figures.

Many passengers have changed jobs to avoid commuting to London by train, or started driving instead.

Refreshment services are seriously curtailed due to narrow aisles.

Lack of bicycle space has caused passenger incidents due to blocked aisles and exits.

## Regional issues

Inferior public transport links compromise economic growth and business development in the important south Hampshire and Isle of Wight regions.

Portsmouth is the only south coast destination regularly served from the capital by suburban trains.

Portsmouth enjoys direct rail links with London and several major cities. A high quality rail service is vital to the city's future prosperity.

Portsmouth is a key transport interchange, providing a direct link between the capital, the continental ferry port, the Isle of Wight and Gosport. It warrants adequate main line trains.

Since 2009 many passengers have turned to the Greyhound and National Express non-stop commuter coach service from Portsmouth to London. The Hindhead tunnel is due to open in 2012, which is likely to increase road traffic by 8% on the A3.

## Franchise and passenger satisfaction

Rail services provided by SWT have improved significantly since privatisation. Trains now largely run on time and staff are loyal and efficient. SWT enjoys a monopoly on the Portsmouth main line. A contract of trust must therefore exist between the company and its passengers (source: Passenger Focus). On renewing its franchise in Oct 2006, SWT stated that DfT asked "all bidders to cater for significant further growth". However, DfT has not stipulated the provision of more seats per coach. (source: DfT Service Level Commitment [Commercial in Confidence]). DfT stipulated that SWT provide 21% more seating. This should have been directed at suburban, not main line services. SWT appears to operate within the strict framework of the franchise set by the DfT with limited regard to the concerns of fare-paying passengers. This contravenes the government's recommendation that passenger consultation should be enshrined in law (House of Commons Transport Select Committee Report on Passenger Franchising: 2005-2006).

## Reasons for change

In 2006, DfT stated that national rail passenger numbers had increased by 40% since 1997. Figures for the Portsmouth main line were not substantiated.

SWT's stated reason for introducing Class 450s was based solely on overcrowding. A 12-coach 450

provides 140 more standard and two more first-class seats than a 10-coach 444 train. Much of this extra capacity is formed of tip-up seats, unsuitable for long-distance use.

## Overcrowding

Of the 856 services from Portsmouth to Waterloo each week, only 55 (6.4%) are even remotely busy and then only between Woking and Waterloo at peak times (source: SWT).

Crowding only occurs on occasions of delay, cancellation or short formation.

In reality, only 11 (8.1%) of the 137 weekday services, and none at weekends, are 12-coach 450 trains (source: 2006 PIXC figures), the length apparently required by SWT to provide additional capacity.

The DfT document Southern Area RPA for the Railway (Jan 07) makes no mention of overcrowding on the Portsmouth line, only in the London suburban area. In its list of the 10 busiest stations, Waterloo is the only Portsmouth-line station.

The DfT document Delivering a Sustainable Railway (Jul 07) also makes no mention of overcrowding on the Portsmouth line. It does however recommend that the government work more closely with cities to secure improvements (para 5.39) This has not been achieved to date.

DfT has not defined what "overcrowding" means (source: PUS for Transport).

No evidence exists of complaints from Woking passengers about overcrowding on London services. They enjoy 19 Waterloo bound trains per hour at peak times (one every four minutes) and 13 off-peak.

## Finances

Some passengers feel that SWT's motive for the widespread deployment of 450 trains was not to deal with overcrowding, but to significantly increase profits.

Class 450s are about 20% cheaper per coach to lease than 444s. (source: Angel Trains).

## Passenger counts

In December 2006, SWT promised to conduct a passenger count with a view to reversing its "rolling stock cascade", designed to deal with overcrowding.

SWT has declined to make the figures available for reasons of "commercial sensitivity".



Class 450 train

## Health and safety

In December 2006, SWT promised to conduct a health and safety review of Class 450 seating.

This report, the Class 450 Ergonomic Assessment study (Interfleet Technology Ltd) was released in August 2007. Only a limited summary was made available to passengers, none of whom were consulted during its compilation.

In a written answer to Mike Hancock MP (Lib Dem Portsmouth South), Tom Harris (PUS for Transport) described the report as "independent", although it was commissioned and funded by SWT.

While the report helps to defend SWT against medical litigation, it does not address the comfort/personal space issue. However, it does recognise that "there are some issues with seat width, and based on the available anthropometric data that when all seats are occupied...59% of the population will exceed their seating envelope with their elbows". The seating is only suitable for children and slightly built adults. The report also states: "The seat back tilt is 9.9 degrees and therefore falls just outside the recommended best practice..."

The report does not address the lack of legroom, particularly in the window seats where passengers are forced to place a foot on the heater panel, thus twisting the spine and encouraging an unnatural slouch position. This compromises the accepted sitting position with feet placed shoulder-width apart. Passengers on inside seats overspill into the centre aisle, blocking safe passage through the train.

Many passengers prefer to stand or sit on the floor, leaving the centre of the three seats unoccupied, negating the supposed advantages of additional capacity.

## Conclusions

Overcrowding is not an issue on the Portsmouth main line. Only 7% of weekday services are busy.

450 class trains are not fit for purpose on long-distance routes and do not achieve customer satisfaction.



Class 444 train

## Recommendations

- The Waterloo-Portsmouth line should be restored to summer 2006 levels with suitable main line rolling stock with 2+2 seating, occasional tables, adequate legroom and some luggage/cycle space.
- In future, passenger consultation should receive higher DfT priority.

## Appendix - passenger survey

This survey was organised by Portsmouth City Council and supported by Railfuture (Wessex), Haslemere Rail Users' Group and volunteer passengers from Portsmouth, Haslemere and intermediate stations.

With SWT approval, the following services were covered:

### Wednesday 3 March

- 0519 Portsmouth Harbour to London Waterloo (444)
- 0615 Portsmouth Harbour to Waterloo (444)
- 0713 Portsmouth Harbour to Waterloo (450)

### Thursday 4 March

- 0630 Haslemere to Waterloo (450)
- 0642 Portsmouth Harbour to London Waterloo (444)

The following helped conduct the survey on stations and on trains: J Holland, C Burns, Cllr L Stagg, B Cook, A Barlow, A Shaw, D Habershon, A Godwin, L Hopkins, M Odell, N Williams, M Odell, G Sochovsky, S Kingsbury, T Burton, E Anstee, G David, C Leroy-Smith, D Millard, A Gee, H Drummond.

The survey was led and authorised by Cllr Lynne Stagg, Cabinet Member for Traffic and Transportation, Portsmouth City Council.

The original completed forms are available for scrutiny and the report will be published on the Portsmouth City Council website [www.portsmouth.gov.uk](http://www.portsmouth.gov.uk).

## Results

Passengers were asked to respond to six questions:

1. Are you a regular long-distance rail user (50 minutes or more) on the Portsmouth to London Waterloo main line? Yes/No
2. Station at which boarded and destination
3. Different types of train are currently used on the Portsmouth line – white and blue. If a regular traveler, do you try and plan your journey to utilise one or the other? Yes/No
4. If you answered yes to Q3, which type of train do you prefer? White/Blue
5. Are you frequently unable to find a seat on this route? Yes/No
6. Do you consider that blue trains provide you with an opportunity to find a seat at busy times? Yes/No

Departure station	1 yes	1 no	1 n/a	3 yes	3 no	3 n/a
Portsmouth Harbour	44	8	4	30	25	1
Portsmouth & Southsea	20	3	3	19	6	1
Fratton	74	7	11	53	37	2
Hilsea						
Bedhampton						
Havant	189	16	25	178	45	7
Rowlands Castle	1			1		
Petersfield	129	7	20	134	20	2
Liss	18	3	2	21	2	
Liphook	42	2	3	42	5	
Haslemere	266	8	14	211	77	
<b>Totals:</b>	783	54	82	689	217	13
<b>Percentage:</b>	<b>85.20</b>	<b>5.88</b>	8.92	<b>74.97</b>	<b>23.61</b>	1.41
<b>Percentage excluding n/a:</b>	93.55	6.45		76.05	23.95	

	4 W	4 B	4 n/a	5 yes	5 no	5 n/a	6 yes	6 no	6 n/a	Sample
	27	3	26	7	45	4	5	44	7	56
	19		7	5	20	1	14	9	3	26
	51	2	39	19	71	2	7	75	10	92
										0
										0
	177	1	52	46	175	9	23	188	19	230
	1				1			1		1
	133	1	22	45	109	2	20	129	7	156
	21		2	4	18	1	1	20	2	23
	42		5	9	38		8	38	1	47
	208	3	77	99	176	13	39	231	18	288
	679	10	230	234	653	32	117	735	67	919
	<b>73.88</b>	<b>1.09</b>	25.03	<b>25.46</b>	<b>71.06</b>	3.48	<b>12.73</b>	<b>79.98</b>	7.29	
	98.55	1.45		26.38	73.62		13.73	86.27		



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