

SWT'S CASE FOR CLASS 450s ON LONG DISTANCE SERVICES
PASSENGER COMMENT

(Extracted from SWT Manager's online web chat – 16 March 2011).

1. Class 450 trains are modern, reliable, air-conditioned rolling stock.

Comment: Undisputed, but deemed unsuitable for use on long distance journeys by the manufacturer, the Rail Passenger Council, SWT's own publicity literature and passengers.

2. Our customer feedback shows that getting a seat is high on the list of priorities for our passengers.

Comment: Goes without saying.

3. These trains, when run as 12 cars provide 142 additional seats per journey compared to a 10-car Class 444 train.

Comment: True but passenger feedback shows conclusively that Class 450 seats are unacceptable on long distance journeys (Sources: No450 Campaign, Portsmouth City Council survey, House of Commons debate – Mar 2011). 59% of the population do not fit in the seats (Source: SWT Ergonomic Assessment – Aug 2007)

4. It's also clear from our passenger loading statistics that these trains are well used by customers.

Comment: Passengers have no option but to use the rolling stock provided.

5. Our latest passenger counts - taken directly from the trains' board counting equipment, continue to show a justification for using a combination of 450s and 444s on this route.

Comment: The accuracy of electronic counting is questionable. Passenger conducted surveys consistently indicate a large number of available seats on all journeys (minimum 170 on peak services). Class 450s are currently used on lightly used services, which is deemed unnecessary.

6. We continue to believe that the current mix of Class 450 and Class 444 trains on the Portsmouth line represents the most efficient use of our resources and provides the optimum balance between capacity and reliability for the route and the South West Trains network as a whole.

Comment: Passengers give a higher priority to personal comfort than efficient use of resources. There is a distinct difference between passenger requirements on long distance routes and suburban journeys which needs to be acknowledged and acted upon.

7. It is vital that we balance the interests of different communities along the line and it is important to remember that the seats on Class 450 trains provide vital capacity for passengers closer to London.

Comment: Communities north of Guildford are amply served by outer suburban and suburban services and do not need access to long distance services. Indeed many Weymouth and Exeter services do not even stop at Woking which is served by 19 tph at peaks (one every 4 minutes).

8. In addition, it is worth noting that similar seating layouts are used on trains elsewhere on the UK rail network, for journeys of comparable distances.

Comment: Portsmouth is unique. All other south coast destinations have at least one mainline service per hour with 2+2 seating, tables and armrests in Standard. Other services do have 3+2 seating but the minimum requirement is available. The only exceptions are C2C (Shoeburyness with Class 357, here scarcely relevant), Clacton-on-Sea and Walton-on-the-Naze with Classes 321 and 360. Class 360 is a version of Class 450, while Class 321 is ex-BR and although 3+2, is entirely comfortable.