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Rail passengers unhappy about value

By Mark Odell

Fewer than half of rail passengers believe they get value for money despite overall satisfaction levels hitting record highs, according to the passenger watchdog.

The findings will fuel growing public anger about the relentless rise in rail fares that is adding to the squeeze on household budgets.

Only 47 per cent of respondents in the National Passenger Survey, conducted by Passenger Focus, the watchdog, said they found the price of their ticket provided value for money. Although that was an increase of one percentage point on the same time last year, Anthony Smith, chief executive of Passenger Focus, said it showed that “more work needs to be done”.

The survey is the most extensive of its kind and is conducted every autumn and spring. Despite the disquiet over fares, it found that overall satisfaction levels hit a high of 85 per cent, up one point on last year’s autumn survey.

Passenger Focus said the autumn survey normally produces better scores than the one conducted in spring because the previous year’s fare rises have “faded in the memory”.

The study looks at a range of performance measures, from punctuality to overcrowding, and assesses individual operators and performance by route. It found that Greater Anglia and South West Trains had the lowest number of customers who thought they got value for money, with just 37 per cent saying they were satisfied.

London and the southeast commuter services produced the lowest ratings overall in almost every category.

More passengers were happy with punctuality than for any other category, with 83 per cent saying they were satisfied, but only 44 per cent thought train companies dealt well with delays.

Heathrow Connect, the stopping service between London Paddington and Heathrow airport, had the best overall satisfaction score, of 94 per cent, out of the 23 train companies surveyed. Northern Rail, which operates services across the north of England, had the lowest, at 80 per cent.

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