

THURROCK RAIL USERS' GROUP ('TRUG')

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***** PRESS RELEASE *****

TELEVISIONS ON TRAINS – WELCOME INFORMATION, OR ANNOYING ADVERTISING TO CAPTIVE AUDIENCE?

It looks increasingly likely that over the next few years most trains across the UK may be fitted with TV screens and speakers, to broadcast advertising-funded material non-stop to every carriage. As a money-spinner for train operators, this is already spreading across local trains in the West Midlands, and is imminent for “c2c”, operating the London, Tilbury and Southend network. Here, commuters are up in arms about the stress, annoyances, erosion of choice, and theft of “time for themselves”.

c2c has announced plans to install the televisions and loudspeakers in every carriage. Stating that, after punctuality, customers' next priority is “information”, it claims this channel will provide better information, such as advice of disruptions.. However, TRUG fears that this channel may be a Trojan horse to inflict a barrage of advertising, and “offering” journey-critical information only to those who sit through the TV broadcasts.

TRUG has been bombarded with protests that this would vandalise passengers' own time, to read, doze, study, or think. Research by the Strategic Rail Authority* finds time is spent, on 64 in 100 journeys, on 'reading for leisure' alone; on 54% of journeys, MOST time is spent on 'quiet-requiring' activities, while the TVs would impede or be ignored by 'phone and iPod users, window gazers, and those wishing to chat – on c2c this adds 26%, totalling 80% on activities incompatible with in-train TV.

c2c claim “most customers support the TVs, and the SRA and Rail Passengers' Committee are all in favour of it”. But the 'research' wasn't done on the c2c routes; and this “support” is on condition that enough TV-free space is available. Yet, flying in the face of the SRA findings, TV-free zones comprise only 23% of the seats on the c2c prototype; as the advertising agency's website cynically states, “...enabling advertisers to reach a substantial, commercially attractive and *captive audience*”.

Most correspondents are already fed up with unabated use of mobile 'phones and stereos, notwithstanding that railway byelaws* have always outlawed their use on trains [see below]; for many, imposition of yet another, permanent, 'noise' will be the final straw – leading to desertion to the roads, or worse.

In a pioneering campaign, TRUG seeks commitments from c2c, firstly to consult properly **before** contracts are signed; and secondly that each train's TV-free accommodation will include sufficient 'proper' quiet coaches, as found elsewhere in the UK, to cater at last for those preferring a peaceful journey. Use of 'phones and stereos would become permitted in the rest of the train, in contrast to the current, blind-eye-condoned, free-for-all. We see no other way for all parties – 'phone/iPod users, readers and dozers, and c2c itself – to gain, or at least not to lose. The same SRA survey sought preferences amongst 16 improvements to benefit on-train time; for c2c, “Quiet coaches provided” came behind only “More space” and “Better personal security”. We consider that this speaks for itself. So we challenge c2c to substantiate the only excuse so far offered against this “win-win”, namely alleged “safety concerns”, which “might arise” as passengers seek preferred portions of the train – apparently not a problem elsewhere in the UK, to our knowledge.

TRUG agrees with c2c regarding the importance of travel information; however, c2c is asked to consider other options to improve this on trains, rather than to settle for just a tie-in with an advertising channel. We all support “improving the travel experience” – but sometimes one man’s meat is another’s poison, and we struggle to convince c2c that, unless **all** its customers’ wishes are genuinely respected, this equipment may do far more harm than good..

Anyone who wishes to offer support to TRUG in any of their efforts with regard to this issue and any other rail matters are invited to contact us, preferably via our email trug@btopenworld.com, or else to our PO Box: 299, Grays RM17 6XQ. Membership is free.

***** END *****

Notes to Editor:

SRA research – this is the National Passenger Survey – Wave 11. Figures quoted here derive mainly from the c2c-only figures, not necessarily the national averages.

“Captive audience” – visit www.360onboard.com, and search for “captive”. The full result, on 1st Feb 05, was “...(360 Onboard), using satellite and wireless technologies. The TNX system will enable advertisers to reach a substantial, commercially attractive and captive audience and provides the opportunity of a region-specific, or even route-specific, media window.”.

Byelaws – Specifically (7.(1)(ii)); visit www.sra.gov.uk/pubs2/stratpolplan/sra_byelaws/railway_byelaws; the introduction to the purpose of the byelaws states that “Some practices can be generally unpleasant, or can be dangerous to yourselves and others. To make travelling more comfortable and safer, unacceptable behaviour is banned on the railways. Other activities, such as smoking and music have limits imposed on them so that the majority of railway users can travel in comfort.”. Such byelaws have existed since the earliest days of railways, and were updated and endorsed by the Transport Act 2000. The text of relevant parts of 7. is:

“(1) Except with written permission from an Operator no person on the railway shall, to the annoyance of any person: (i) sing; or (ii) use any instrument, article or equipment for the production or reproduction of sound. (2) Except with written permission from an Operator no person on the railway shall: (i) display anything for the purpose of advertising or publicity, or distribute anything; or (ii) sell or expose or offer anything for sale; or (iii) tout for, or solicit money, reward, custom or employment of any kind.”

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