

THURROCK RAIL USERS' GROUP

From: Steven Willingale
Committee Member
166 The Gore
Basildon
Essex SS14 2DA

Telephone: 01268 475454 (Home)
0207 709 2237 (Work)

Website: www.c2c-offline.co.uk

Email: trug@btopenworld.com

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

TRUG visit to Central Trains to see the 360onboard television service in action

A group of c2c rail passengers met with senior executives of London Lines, the parent group of c2c within National Express, and three representatives of 360 Onboard yesterday in Birmingham. They were invited as a result of the protest action by the Pitsea passengers and pressure from Thurrock Rail Users' Group for an open dialogue about the installation of televisions on c2c's fleet. The purpose of the visit was to hear from the companies their plans and details of how the system will work, followed by a twenty minute journey to see the system fully operational on one of Central Trains' units.

The passengers listened to the plans and raised a number of objections that they had received from across the nation. It was ascertained from 360 Onboard that the amount of advertising would be as much as 18 minutes per hour with a further 2 minutes per hour available to the Train Operator. The rest of the content would be based around ITN News and weather which would be updated several times a day. The group were surprised to hear that no advertisers were currently signed up to advertise on the system. A feature of the system would be the ability to relay real time information relating to travel problems so that passengers will be able to rearrange their journeys when necessary - however, this aspect of the system is still under development.

Consideration was also being given to enhancing the system, so that the wireless communication network installed to upload the television content to the trains, could potentially be used to download on train CCTV footage to the train control centre, in the hope that this might further deter vandalism and anti-social behaviour.

Following the presentations, which sadly told us little that we did not already know, a senior manager from Central Trains joined the meeting to discuss the responses received from his passengers following the installation of the system which began in 2003. He stated that the reaction from the passengers was good but conceded that the passenger base and demographics of his rail line were totally different from those on c2c. The group was then invited to travel on a short journey from Birmingham to Longbridge at the beginning at the evening peak period.

The train upon which we travelled was a Class 323 which has the same number of screens and speakers as the c2c class 357s but the style of the train was significant in that the trains were roomier and less cramped. The TVs were placed much higher in these carriages than they would be on a more modern fleet, such as c2c's. This meant that there were far fewer reflections of the screens on the windows and they seemed to be less intrusive than those planned for the London, Tilbury and Southend line. It was noticed that the audio could still be heard in the quiet zones despite their being, because of the layout of the carriage, better shielded than on the c2c fleet. It was also noted that any passenger sitting beneath one of the speakers would find them irritating because the sound was muffled and the audio was only slightly above personal stereo leakage that we endure each day on our trains. The only clearly audible sound was the 360 jingle. It was also noticeable that the audio/visual was out of sync.

Unfortunately, it appears that no compromise is likely to be on the table with respect to provision of complete quiet carriages, or to any increase in the proportion of the train without speakers or screens to be made available, in response to customers' preferences. The only hope that was offered was that regular feedback would be sought from passengers once the system was operational. Regrettably, the passengers returned home with little more information than was already known. The visit was useful, however, from the point of view from seeing the TV's in situ and to realise that there were very significant differences between the installations in the two fleets.

Ends

Please feel free to contact Steven Willingale on 020 709 2237 (work) 01268 475454 (home), or if unavailable Adrian Brown on 020 7941 4049 or Pauline Cridland on 01375 370095, if you require any further details or clarification on this Press Release.

Notes to editors

1) TNCI UK Ltd, the parent company of 360onboard, went into Administration on 22nd February 2005. See http://yahoo.brand.edgar-online.com/fetchFilingFrameset.aspx?FilingID=34_95398&Type=HTML for details

2) The one Central Train passenger who spoke to the party was opposed to the system. This would support the overwhelmingly negative response from in excess of 250 contacts made to TRUG on this topic in recent weeks.

3) Photos showing the difference in layouts can be found at <http://www.c2c-offline.co.uk/news/class323.htm> & <http://www.c2c-offline.co.uk/news/tvpics.htm>