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Dear Anthony

Informed Traveller – T12

Thank you for your recent letter to us regarding timetable changes post T-12. We agree this is an important issue and as such, has been discussed at the Western Route Supervisory Board where Transport Focus is a vital member. Nina Howe has helped us in formulating a recovery plan to get us back to Informed Traveller status as quickly as possible.

Nina has a copy of our recovery plan which is comprehensive and we believe demonstrates the strength of activity and resource we are both putting in to improve the situation. It also shows the alignment of the Alliance and our determination to deliver for our customers.

You are right to note that there have been issues. Most notably with the very late notice of the additional weekend work in October. The additional weekend of work was needed to test the new overhead electrification equipment between Maidenhead and Reading. This was in preparation for the introduction of new electrified services between Didcot Parkway and London Paddington in January 2018 with GWR. Under normal circumstances this additional work would have gone into the normal planning process, however on this occasion the benefits of getting the work done outweighed the negative impact.

Commissioning of this part of the line will mean GWR can roll out Class 387 trains, cascading Turbo diesel trains to the West. This is a very delicately balanced series of train moves that will mean thousands of extra seats for the London Thames Valley, Bristol and the South West. While the late notice did cause inconvenience, not to have gone ahead would have had a far greater impact to passengers in the new year.

We had to pull together a revised plan at very short notice. This meant that we were not able to institute our usual comprehensive information for customers and stakeholders. However, staff from GWR and Network Rail worked additional hours and did as much as they could to minimise inconvenience and to get as much information and support to customers. This was of course made more difficult as timetables were already available and tickets already purchased.



We used traditional media, direct email, social media, station and on-board train posters and leaflets and on-board and station announcements to draw customers attention to the changes. This included offering customers a full refund if they chose not to travel or flexibility to travel on another day.

Compensation for delay against the original timetable was not automatically offered. As you know we are now making goodwill payments to customers who purchased tickets ahead of the timetable change. This allows us to target those who are delayed against the timetable they expected. For the future we will consider on a case by case basis where goodwill should be offered for late notice possessions. We can then make sure that this is clearly communicated to ensure consistency when managing claims.

For future improvement work, we will also be liaising closely with other online retail outlets to help them improve their contact with our customers. Much of the customer confusion on 14 & 15 October was where customers purchased through other online retail outlets and may not have seen the email warnings sent. We agree that changes to the published timetable must be communicated to passengers and we will work to improve this on our channels, and with partners, in the future.

We are also looking at how we manage the balance of encouraging more customers to travel and promoting cheaper fares, against the inconvenience of later timetable changes.

This is a particular challenge given that we will be offering customers the opportunity to book train tickets up to 6 months in advance. While this is not possible for all journeys, we will be introducing it for weekday services before 21:30 shortly. This will enable thousands more passengers to access discounted tickets further in advance. Something our customers and stakeholders have wanted for some time. This will enable thousands more passengers to access discounted tickets further in advance.

We cannot offer a six month horizon for weekend or late evening timetables while the timetable is subject to regular change, but we don't want customers to miss out on discounted tickets. We don't therefore want to suspend marketing opportunities such as the Christmas mailing or indeed the forthcoming January Sale.

We were careful in the Christmas mailing to note that timetables are subject to change, and this is the route we want to follow while we work on returning to firm timetables at T-12. This will mean we can offer customers the chance to buy lower priced tickets, and we can encourage new customers to the railway, to take advantage of the extra capacity from the new trains and the investment in infrastructure upgrades. That has to be balanced against providing them with a service that meets expectations, and that means making sure they are aware of the potential for changes.

We are therefore looking at how we offer advice, encouraging customers to recheck journeys at T-4 and also offering direct contact if there are changes to customers whose emails or mobile details we have. This would be replicated through staff offering verbal



advice at booking offices, but as the majority of advance sales are now online or by mobile we will have opportunities to directly contact customers.

We want to get this right and we will be trialling some options. We would welcome Nina to come to speak with our joint teams about their proposals and to work with us to make sure that we are getting the information right as well as offering the best value fares as quickly as possible.

On information, you are right there have been some odd routings thrown up on the website. This is something that we are addressing and we will be working with our providers to avoid in future. We will also make sure that we are doing more of the sense checking.

You also raise the issue of charging for cross London travel for journeys starting at Marylebone or Waterloo. This is a problem. Ticket sales systems are not able to detect the difference in the diversionary route and someone who simply wants to travel through Paddington and on to another London station. It is something we are looking at, but a solution has not yet been found.

Getting back to a T12 position as quickly as possible is our joint goal. That has to be set alongside the need to complete a major programme of improvement work through 2018. Work that will allow us to offer customers the greatest timetable change for a generation.

We will do all we can to minimise the inconvenience, to maximise information flow and to promote our full ticket range. Your help, and Nina's involvement on the Supervisory Board will be invaluable in that and we would be very happy for us to include the T-12 recovery plan progress in our next quarterly catch up.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Mark Hopwood'.

Mark Hopwood
Managing Director
GWR

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Mike Gallop'.

Mike Gallop
Deputy to Western Route Managing Director
Network Rail