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Dear Anthony

Informed Traveller

Thank you again for your letter of 28 November highlighting concerns about the impact of short-notice changes to rail timetables on passengers. In my response to you of 8 December I agreed that this was an important issue and that we would come back to you with a plan for how we intend to improve industry performance. We have also seen the recent letter from Mark Hopwood and Mike Gallop to you on the specific issues on Western Route/GWR, and that Nina Howe has worked with them in developing a recovery plan to get back to Informed Traveller status as quickly as possible.

The partnership railway is working together with a long-term plan to improve rail services for customers and communities but it will mean some services are disrupted. A record £160m is being invested this Christmas to improve services but timetables and fares should be locked down twelve weeks in advance and if they are not, it should be made clear to people. Usually that is the case but it hasn't happened as well as it could this Christmas and we are sorry for the frustration this will have caused some customers.

We agree that there is a need for a wider review of compliance with the T-12 Informed Traveller process and that this should address the suggested scope set out in your letter. In practice, we think this means three areas of work:

1. Understanding the problem. We will review current industry performance around the development of planned engineering work and consequent timetable changes. This will build on our approach through the customer heartbeat to identify priorities and draw on both the research you have already carried out and ongoing industry work to manage late timetable change. As part of this we will review industry capability in terms of staff numbers, training and skills to plan engineering work and timetables. We will also look at other industries in terms of their approach and process as this is not an issue specific to rail.

2. Improving the engineering planning and timetabling process. We will identify practical measures – potentially covering people, processes and incentives - to improve industry performance within train operators and Network Rail (within both the System Operator and the routes).
3. Improving communication with passengers. We will identify how inaccurate timetable data can be better managed so that passengers make the right travel decisions. This will also include reviewing how passengers who have bought tickets are notified about short notice changes to timetable changes.

There are already some very good examples of good customer engagement. For example, a number of TOCs and third parties offer an alert service to customers to let them know when the cheaper tickets are available. We also promote engineering works, be that through the National Rail channels or through our open data policy by providing data feeds to developers and 3rd party retailers. That said we recognise that we could improve both the reach and quality of this information to make it clearer to customers.

We expect this project to be steered by the National Task Force (NTF) – the RDG forum which brings together passenger and freight operators, Network Rail, the Office of Rail and Road and the Department for Transport (Pete Wilkinson is their nominated representative) - to improve train service delivery.

In terms of timing, I envisage NTF agreeing a project plan at the next meeting on 17 January and some early analysis of current industry performance completed by the end of January. I anticipate the remainder of the work being completed by the end of April 2018 to ensure there is sufficient opportunity to implement fully any changes in industry processes in time for the summer 2018 and Christmas 2018 holiday periods. This leaves a challenge for Easter 2018 and we will work through RDG to focus TOCs on delivering improved compliance for that holiday period although our review will not be complete.

I would very much welcome Transport Focus' involvement in this project so would be grateful if you could nominate someone from your organisation – perhaps Guy Dangerfield who has worked with NTF in the past - to be our primary point of contact.

I am copying this to Peter Wilkinson and Dan Moore at DfT, to Stephanie Tobyn at ORR and to Gary Cooper, Jac Starr and John Thomas here.

Yours sincerely,



Paul Plummer
Chief Executive