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Your reference: AS/2019/066

12 November 2019

Dear Anthony

December Timetable Changes

Thank you for your letter of 23 October. We are delighted to see Transport Focus recognition for the huge improvements that the new timetable delivers for our customers and for the communities we serve.

Passengers have been incredibly patient during the largest modernisation of the railway since it was built over 175 years ago. And we are now ready to fully realise the improvements in infrastructure and trains that this investment has brought

15 December will be the biggest Western timetable change since 1976; with 75% of GWR's services changing times and MTR taking over a substantial number of services in the Thames Valley. It will mean more trains and more seats for passengers across the region. This is generational change and will mean that we not only deliver for the customers of today, but that we are ready and able to cater for the customers of tomorrow.

It has been very important to us that Transport Focus, through Nina Howe, has played a key role on the Western Supervisory Board. She has helped to shape the timetable and worked alongside us as we develop our implementation readiness plans. We have been very open with her, and indeed with our wider stakeholders, that a change of this magnitude will mean that there are challenges but we absolutely accept we have to manage those effectively.

A key message from your letter is that Transport Focus want to see recent improvements in train service performance protected. We share that aspiration and it may be useful to understand why performance has improved over the past twelve months.

A significant part of the improvement has come from real improvements to reliability of key areas of the railway;

An excellent partnership has developed between Network Rail and all operators on the route to improve day-to-day operational delivery and there are many more activities underway currently to build on this.

The infrastructure is more reliable, particularly so on the key Reading to Paddington corridor, and this reflects the work done by Network Rail.

Rolling stock fleets have been more reliable and continue to improve and we have seen a substantial decrease in traincrew issues.

There has also been a substantial decrease in scheduled and unscheduled engineering work on the network and we know this had a direct and an indirect impact on the punctuality and reliability of the train service.

However, we do recognise that a number of GWR services in our high speed services sector and, to a lesser extent, in the Thames Valley, have benefitted from using high performance trains in schedules designed for rolling stock with inferior performance characteristics. As you are probably aware, the impact of this is that around 40% of GWR trains are arriving early, not simply at their destination but at stations en route.

This is already starting to cause some complaints from customers who claim we are “padding” the timetable and that journeys involve a lot of waiting around at stations en-route. Customers really don’t want to sit on trains waiting for the timetable departure time, they want us to use that time, which has come through very significant track and train investment to reduce journey time, and to add more services. Just as importantly, our ability to attract future passengers relies on us improving our offer in terms of journey time.

Indeed, the business case for the multi-billion-pound of government investment requires delivery of these benefits to grow the revenue and allow the taxpayer to realise the benefits of their investment through reduced subsidy to rail businesses and through improving the competitiveness of the UK economy in the regions we serve.

Another key concern of passengers over the last decade on GWR has been capacity. We now have the trains and the infrastructure to properly address capacity. Shorter journeys mean we can improve the utilization of rolling stock, which means we can run more trains, which means more seats, and that is essential to rail growth.

A key fundamental of the GWR and TfL Rail/Crossrail timetables is a substantial increase in frequency and we recognize more trains on the network will make it harder to deliver the on time performance we all want and we are very alive to that challenge and have plans to address it.

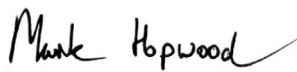
However, customers of the future will need these extra services and we are going to deliver them. We do not underestimate the difficulty in doing so and we have spent a lot of time checking, rechecking, rehearsing and training to make sure things go as well as they possibly can.

Attached to this letter are comprehensive answers to the questions you asked. We welcome the challenge and understand the concern due to previous, high-profile

failures.

We understand that you want to be sure that we are doing all we can to ensure smooth implementation for what you rightly describe as huge improvements, but we do hope that you will feel able to join us in explaining to customers that to deliver this type of generational change there will be a period of adjustment.

Best wishes



Mark Hopwood
Managing Director
Great Western Railway



Mike Gallop
Western Route Director
Network Rail



Steve Murphy
Managing Director
MTR Elizabeth Line

Enc. Appendix 1 – Answers to questions posed

Appendix 1

Answers to questions posed

- a) Will we take prompt action to recover a dip in performance?

Yes, we will. We will all continue to work as hard as we can for a punctual, predictable and reliable service, and we will do so as quickly as we can. As part of our preparations for 15th December 2019 we have performance modelled the timetable both using the Thames Valley Signalling Simulator and used a third party piece of timetable modelling software (Treno). We have taken the outputs from modelling, a cross industry piece of work and used outputs to inform additional measures we take to underpin good train performance; a good example is observed and modelled train run times in the new train timings to be utilised which drove controlled changes to the final version of the timetable for December, to help support reliable operation.

- b) Will elements of station operations such as coupling/decoupling be rehearsed before 15 December?

Yes, this is already happening

- c) Will we rehearse the operation of a single platform for HEX ahead of 15 December?

Yes, this is already happening, we have already tested the single platform operations on two occasions to good effect. It is worth noting here, that we all agree that single platform operation for HEX is not ideal, but it is a very much better solution for customers than TfL Rail services terminating at Ealing Broadway for lack of platform space in London Paddington as they are unable to use the Central London section.

- d) Will there be sufficient crew and trains, are rosters sorted, including weekends and what is the position on MTR Drivers?

Yes, we have enough trains and crew. Work on rosters started some three months earlier than usual because we have learnt the lesson from other parts of the industry.

The position on Sundays is an issue, but it is no more of a problem in the new timetable than it is in the existing timetable. In fact, it is better going forward because we now have an agreement in place that means all our new drivers, and all our new customer service hosts have Sundays in their contracts for the first time.

The new timetable does not change the risk we face on Sundays but the changes GWR have made to drivers' terms and conditions will. GWR are recruiting over 300 more drivers currently, with around 50% in training, who will all be on new contracts. This is not something that will be resolved by December. It is not however an issue caused by the new timetable, and we have a long term solution in place.

MTR Elizabeth Line's driver training programme has progressed smoothly to the extent that sufficient drivers are now trained to fully resource the December 2019 roster. We select and train our drivers to the highest standard in the industry, but at the same time recognizing that our drivers and indeed all our staff are continuing to build experience.

In Chris Gibb's recent review, he rightly pointed out that given the scale of the timetable enhancement in December, the excellent frontline staff of all companies on the route will need to support each other and be well supported by their management teams, particularly during disruption.

In this regard, Network Rail and all Train Operators on the route have an excellent working relationship, fostered by the very strong partnership Nina will have observed and is part of the Western Supervisory Board. That said, the leadership of all organisations do have to deliver against your completely fair point that any performance reduction needs to be swiftly reversed. We have all worked far too hard to allow the excellent punctuality and customer satisfaction improvements over the last year to be reduced. Rather we need to be seeking higher punctuality and customer satisfaction at the same time as improving our frequencies.

- e) Will there be recovery plans in place ready for the first "major disruption" that occurs after the timetable has been implemented – and have we got plan in place for customer information?

Yes, there will be plans in place. We are drafting new contingency plans for each service. We have demonstrated that we work very well across our industry partners (which of course extends beyond the three of us) and we will continue that approach. We don't envision a major failure, but of course these can happen, and it is very possible that something completely unconnected with the new timetable could lead to significant disruption. Plans will be in place before 15 December that reflect the changes and that will ensure we recovery as quickly as possible.

As part of our implementation we have regular Town Hall meetings that are cross industry and cross function, these look at every aspect of implementation, and customer information is high on the agenda. We also have colleague briefings and recently took the timetable on tour to depots, stations and offices throughout the network to make sure that every member of staff knows what is happening and are ready to step in and help.

We will have additional managers on platforms during the early phases to help customers adjust to the new timings, and to offer assistance and support to customers and colleagues where there are hiccups.

- f) Will infrastructure maintenance regimes by addressed by Dec 15

Changes to maintenance regimes are in progress, particularly on the key Paddington to Old Oak Common section, also known as the Paddington throat, and will be in place for 15 December.

For the last period (period 7) the Western route beat its train delay target by 33%, meaning year to date we are 46% better than this time last year, and 24% better than the target for the 19/20 year.

There has been a concerted focus in our maintenance units across the region to deliver a reliable railway in readiness for December 2019. Of the four areas responsible for maintenance of our railway; Swindon, Reading and Bristol delivery units came in at least 35% under their minutes delay target. The most improved maintenance delivery unit is the Reading (Thames Valley) Area.

There are a combination of factors for these positive changes, ranging from solid plans to deliver maintenance by individual asset, through to the right people with the right skills to lead and deliver that work, and the cessation of upgrade work allowing maintenance teams to focus on looking after new or refurbished assets in a stable state.

The positive results set-out above do not cause our teams to be complacent and the absolute focus remains on delivering the railway well each day.