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By email

4 September 2020

AS/2020/118

Dear Susie

Informed Traveller T-12

Thank you for your letter of 31 July 2020 in which you respond to my request for a robust integrated plan to re-achieve consistent, sustainable compliance with Informed Traveller T-12 at the earliest practicable date.

While recognising the huge challenge Covid-19 has presented, I believe that the industry's proposal to take until January 2022 to re-achieve T-12 is in neither passengers' nor the industry's interests. Will not efforts to attract business back to the railway be undermined if it is incapable of publishing an accurate timetable more than a week, perhaps two, ahead?

The need for passengers to plan ahead has not suddenly gone away as a result of Covid-19. The need for flexibility to add in the remaining suspended services and the desire to build the timetable back better cannot be at the expense of passengers being able to plan journeys. One person's flexibility is another's chopping and changing. Passengers absolutely want a timetable that can be operated punctually, but most would find it extraordinary to understand that they can have it only after 15 months of late finalisation of timetables and consequent uncertainty.

In your letter you say that ensuring customers get the information they want, when and how they want it, is the vision at the heart of your customer information strategy. I can only say that a 15-month recovery plan for Informed Traveller seems a long way away from that vision.

You say that each operator clearly maps out at what point passengers can make a reservation for their services. First, we are not persuaded that this is the case – some operators have not even changed the standard 12 weeks advice. Second, it shows a misunderstanding of the purpose of T-12. It is not only about making reservations. It is about allowing existing and potential passengers to plan their *lives* – not even just their railway journeys. It is much more fundamental than reservations: it is can I or can't I get there. It is the railway's shop window. Third, the suggestion that this is not applicable to operators like c2c and Northern is wrong. It matters so passengers can plan and, in any case, Northern offers Advance tickets for many journeys.

You seem to gloss over the price implications of the current week/two week booking window. On any route where Advance tickets go on sale later than they otherwise would have done, passengers are financially disadvantaged. Take London to Winchester, where on Saturday 12 September there are Advance tickets available from £13.50, but the following Saturday, when the timetable is not yet published, the price is three times higher at £39.20.

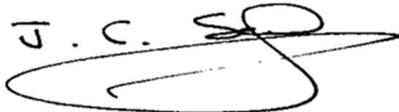
In summary, if the industry is serious about winning back business after the Covid-19 lockdown, restoration of Informed Traveller T-12 needs to be dramatically accelerated. Otherwise, passengers without choice suffer uncertainty while paying higher prices and those with a choice will drive or fly.

Please would you:

- review the acceptability of taking 15 months to recover T-12 (and five months to achieve even T-3), given the impact on passengers and the commercial impact of being unable to market the railway effectively
- ensure that it is crystal clear on train company websites the date to which the timetable in public-facing systems is accurate, alongside the date on which reservations open and so Advance tickets purchased where applicable. This could also be drawn together in one place on an expanded version of the existing National Rail Enquiries webpage https://www.nationalrail.co.uk/times/fares/ticket_types/44703.aspx
- reintroduce, and publicise appropriately, a price promise similar to that given in the aftermath of the 2018 Informed Traveller problems. Namely, that if you buy a 'walk up' ticket for a train on which you subsequently found a cheaper Advance single you will be refunded the difference.
- review the decision to reintroduce an administration fee for changing an Advance ticket. With reservations open for such a short window ahead, a passenger may have to change their ticket more than once before the date they want is available, incurring a £10 fee each time. Can the normal rules apply when the Informed Traveller situation is so far from normal?

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

A. J. C. 

Anthony Smith
Chief executive

Encl.

cc Andrew Haines, Network Rail
Paul McMahon, Network Rail System Operator
Paul Plummer, Rail Delivery Group
Peter Wilkinson, Department for Transport

Appendix

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Dep. From	Dur. Chg.	Arr. To	Status	
Departs at 13:05 London Waterloo [WAT] <small>Platform -</small>	50m 0 change(s) view details	Arrives 14:04 Winchester [WIN] <small>Platform 2</small>	✓	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> £18.50 Buy Now </div> <div style="font-size: 8px; margin-top: 5px;"> Advance Other tickets >> </div> <div style="background-color: #e0e0e0; padding: 2px; font-size: 8px; margin-top: 5px;"> 🚆 Ticket valid for this service only </div>
Buy from South Western Railway				
Departs at 13:09 London Waterloo [WAT] <small>Platform -</small>	1h 09m 0 change(s) view details	Arrives 14:18 Winchester [WIN] <small>Platform 2</small>	✓	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> £34.20 Buy Now </div> <div style="font-size: 8px; margin-top: 5px;"> Off Peak Other tickets >> </div> <div style="background-color: #e0e0e0; padding: 2px; font-size: 8px; margin-top: 5px;"> 🚆 Other services you can travel on </div>
Buy from South Western Railway				
Departs at 13:35 London Waterloo [WAT] <small>Platform -</small>	57m 0 change(s) view details	Arrives 14:32 Winchester [WIN] <small>Platform 2</small>	✓	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> £18.50 Buy Now </div> <div style="font-size: 8px; margin-top: 5px;"> Advance Other tickets >> </div> <div style="background-color: #e0e0e0; padding: 2px; font-size: 8px; margin-top: 5px;"> 🚆 Ticket valid for this service only </div>
Buy from South Western Railway				
Departs at 13:39 London Waterloo [WAT] <small>Platform -</small>	1h 09m 0 change(s) view details	Arrives 14:48 Winchester [WIN] <small>Platform 2</small>	✓	<div style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; font-size: 8px; margin-bottom: 5px;">CHEAPEST FARE</div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> £13.50 Buy Now </div> <div style="font-size: 8px; margin-top: 5px;"> Advance Other tickets >> </div> <div style="background-color: #e0e0e0; padding: 2px; font-size: 8px; margin-top: 5px;"> 🚆 Ticket valid for this service only </div>
Buy from South Western Railway				
Departs at 14:05 London Waterloo [WAT] <small>Platform -</small>	59m 0 change(s) view details	Arrives 15:04 Winchester [WIN] <small>Platform 2</small>	✓	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> £16.00 Buy Now </div> <div style="font-size: 8px; margin-top: 5px;"> Advance Other tickets >> </div> <div style="background-color: #e0e0e0; padding: 2px; font-size: 8px; margin-top: 5px;"> 🚆 Ticket valid for this service only </div>
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Dep. From	Dur. Chg.	Arr. To	Status	
Departs at 12:48 London Paddington [PAD] <small>Platform 8</small>	1h 30m 2 change(s) view details	Arrives 14:18 Winchester [WIN] <small>Platform 2</small>		Buy from South Western Railway
				£39.20 Buy Now Anytime Other tickets Other services you can travel on
Departs at 13:07 London Paddington [PAD] <small>Platform 10</small>	1h 18m 1 change(s) view details	Arrives 14:25 Winchester [WIN] <small>Platform 2</small>		Buy from South Western Railway
				£39.20 Buy Now Anytime Other tickets Other services you can travel on
Departs at 13:48 London Paddington [PAD] <small>Platform 8</small>	1h 10m 1 change(s) view details	Arrives 14:58 Winchester [WIN] <small>Platform 2</small>		Buy from South Western Railway
				£39.20 Buy Now Anytime Other tickets Other services you can travel on
Departs at 14:07 London Paddington [PAD] <small>Platform 10</small>	1h 19m 1 change(s) view details	Arrives 15:26 Winchester [WIN] <small>Platform 2</small>		Buy from South Western Railway
				£39.20 Buy Now Anytime Other tickets Other services you can travel on
Departs at 14:48 London Paddington [PAD]	1h 30m 2 change(s) view details	Arrives 16:18 Winchester [WIN]		Buy from South Western Railway
				£39.20 Buy Now Anytime Other tickets Other services you can travel on