



Great Western Railway December 2019 Timetable Change Survey

October 2020

Survey background

Great Western Railway (GWR) timetable change

- In December 2019 GWR introduced the biggest timetable change on the Great Western Railway network since 1976. Around three quarters of journey times changed.
- The new timetable provided new services and changed older ones as part of the improvements.
- We were keen to understand levels of awareness and understanding about the changes among GWR passengers on our Transport User Panel and hear about their experiences navigating the new timetable during the early days of the transition.

How we collected feedback

- Early in December 2019 Transport Focus invited 1146 members of our Transport User Panel, who had previously indicated that they regularly use GWR train services, to complete a questionnaire about their understanding of the coming timetable changes. This survey closed in the middle of December before the timetable changes were operational. By this time 441 panellists had completed the questionnaire.
- Between the 18 December 2019 and February 2020, Transport Focus collected feedback on the impact of the amended timetable on those using GWR train services through a survey hosted on our website. Relevant passengers were directed to complete this survey through updates on social media. Panellists, who had previously been sent an invitation to complete the initial survey, were emailed a link to the second questionnaire directly.
- Around 200 passengers using GWR trains services between the end of December 2019 and the end of February 2020 provided feedback on their experiences. This report provides details on what passengers told us.

Headline findings: Before the timetable change

87 per cent said that they had heard at least something about the changes that were coming

- 56 per cent were confident enough to say that they have a good idea of what they were
- 13 per cent were not aware.

Awareness was high irrespective of journey purpose, although it was markedly higher amongst commuters:

- 97 per cent of commuters said that they were aware of the changes, with 76 per cent saying that they had a good idea of what the changes would be
- 84 per cent of business and leisure travellers were aware to some degree.

The majority of people had heard about the changes though information provided at stations (89 per cent of commuters, 76 per cent business travellers and 70 per cent leisure travellers). Half heard through information provided on the GWR website, the highest being business travellers (62 per cent). Hearing through email and through information provided on trains were the next prevalent, followed by word of mouth and social media.

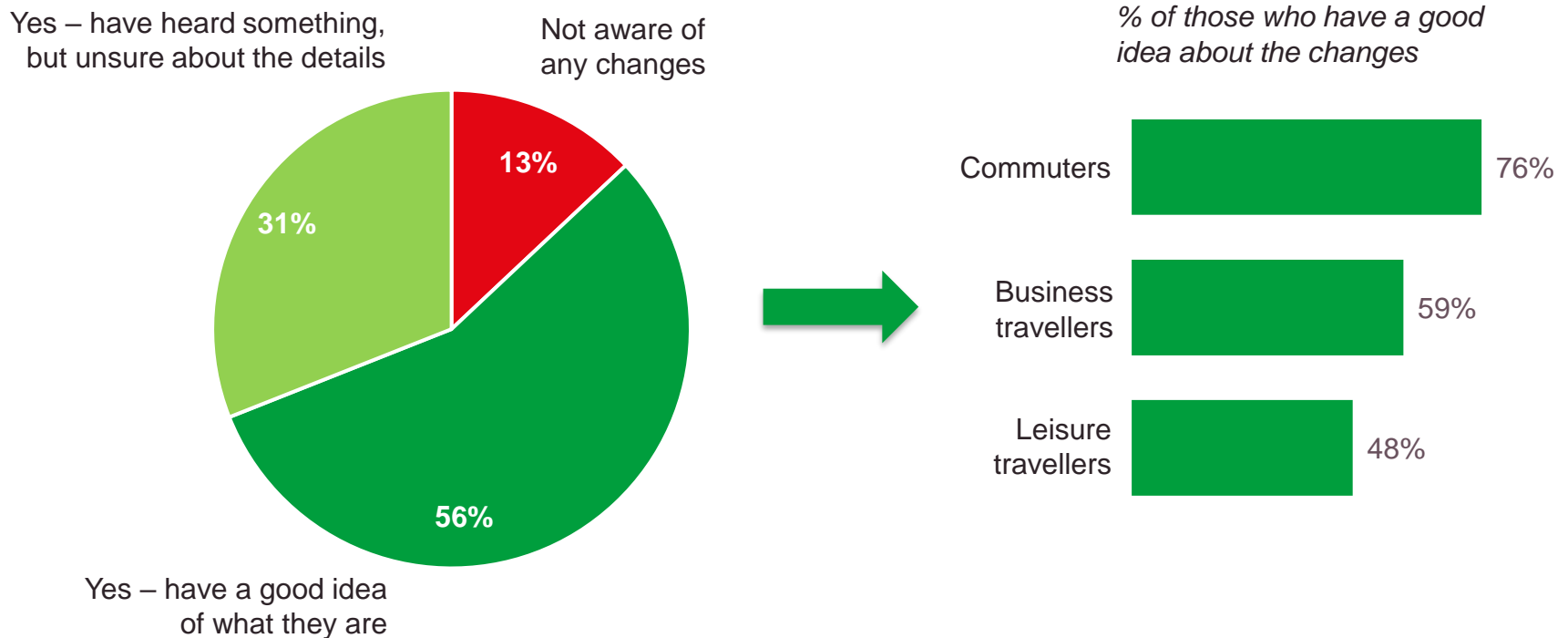
Among those aware of the changes, 60 per cent thought that they would impact on the journeys that they make at least to some extent.

- 15 per cent thought that they would be affected 'a great deal', with 45 per cent responding that they thought they would be affected to some extent
- 32 per cent said that they would not be affected very much or not at all
- 54 per cent of leisure travellers said they would be affected at least to some extent, compared with 64 per cent of business travellers and 68 per cent of commuters.

47 per cent of those with at least some awareness of the changes said that they understood the thinking behind the changes and a similar proportion said that they support the changes. Interestingly people who said that they are more likely to be affected were a little more positive overall than those who thought they were less likely to be affected (55 per cent versus 46 per cent).

Levels of awareness were high, particularly amongst commuters, suggesting GWR's information campaign was effective

Thinking about Great Western train services, are you aware of any changes which are planned for the coming months?



*Base: 441 panellists using GWR services at least once every six months.
Those travelling to work or education (99), for business (69), for personal or leisure reasons (273).*

Passengers were largely well informed, although a few claimed not to know or referred to other issues such as price increases

“Faster and more frequent services to London with 3 off peak services from Bristol to Paddington, changes in stopping patterns and some non stop services. Journey speeded up by taking advantage of the superior acceleration of the IETs.”

“I believe there are to be quite major timetable changes.”

“The whole timetable is changing; it will effect almost every service.”

“There is a completely new timetable for the network due soon.”

“Prices going up in new year 2%ish.”

“GWR are revamping their timetable with the biggest change in their history. There will be more trains, but with many stopping at less stations to make journeys to main line station such as Paddington quicker. The timings of trains will also be changing radically so people will have to be aware that their normal train may go earlier or later.”

“I don't know any details.”

Many passengers were able to show a high level of understanding about the impact of the changes – both positive and negative

“As I always travel off peak it will just be a possible change of time. More trains to Pewsey will be useful.”

“I think the train I normally take to Swindon is not stopping there anymore. I expect there is an alternative but I think I have to get an earlier train and wait at Swindon otherwise it seems that I will arrive late. This changes everything from childcare routines to other commuting choices.”

“A major change to the timetable which will result in fewer trains for my Bristol Parkway to Swindon commute so I’m unhappy about that.”

“I will need to check times instead of knowing them.”

“More plusses than minuses.”

“I have just checked. Because of congestion between Reading to London in the morning peak, I travel on a slower train (I cannot bear standing!) - this train time is moving by quite a lot, so I will need to rethink my journey. However, I see there are a few more trains at evening peak time from Reading to Reading West, which will make my home trip better.”

“Timetable changes. I normally get the 08.24 from Ivybridge to Exeter which is an off peak service and has been for many years. This service will no longer be running but replaced with an 08.00 service which will now be a 'Peak' service train thereby increasing the ticket price considerably.”

“I commute from Reading west to London and take the 6.33 train or sometimes the 6.21, both of which will no longer exist - will have to take the 6.11 in order to still get to Stratford for 8am as the 6.38 will be slightly too late.”

There seemed to be a high level of understanding of the rationale for the changes

“Take advantage of IETs with their better acceleration (when under electric power) and braking, shorter stops at stations as well. Some cascading of trains will see more comfortable stock on some routes.”

“Making the best of the investment in new trains and electrification.”

“Regularisation of and speeding up, with improved capacity on services should all improve the travellers lot, attract more passengers and achieve improved utilisation of stock.”

“Use improved performance of new trains on London services and cascade rolling stock for regional services.”

“To streamline the services when they are needed most, keeping the people of the South and West where they need to be and when. Allowing more people to use the trains, actually get a seat during busier times and still provide a service for local people to get from A to B as well as the commuters.”

“Transfer to Crossrail is a prelude to the opening of Crossrail in 2021. Faster and more frequent services arises from government's desire to produce a significant upgrade to long-distance services to Bristol, South Wales and West of England following investment by government in electrification of the lines to Newbury and Bristol, and by GWR in leasing new bi-mode electric trains.”

The transfer of services to Crossrail was not universally popular

"The parts that affect me are the TFL services between Paddington & Reading which are taking over some GWR services. Yet again Reading & Paddington seem to take priority over stations west of Reading. Didcot seems to be losing a number of services, yet we keep being told it's an improvement".

"The trains I use for the middle section of my journey will be retimed. However, as far as I can see this does not improve my journey time. I will just have to watch out not to get on a TFL train with few seats and no toilets".

"I will have to catch more tfl trains that are not as suitable for me. Already, I'm having to stand longer on my return route from Ealing Broadway as some tfl trains have been phased in".

"Tfl purple trains replace green emus - tube type seats no power sockets not good".

"The first off-peak service from Cookham to Paddington will now be later and slower. Other fast service from Maidenhead are dropped. The service will be worse".

"The 'tubes', on the Elizabeth line will be operated by TFL...and **THEY WILL NOT HAVE LAVATORIES**. This will put me off totally from using them. Very short sighted...and terrible for overseas visitors who don't know/have kids/ the elderly with 'creaking prostates'.... Whoever came up with this very poor decision making should be fired for idiocy. Less fast trains to Paddington".

"I will be able to travel to Reading on TFL trains using my Freedom pass".

"The train I usually catch is cancelled and many of the services I use will now be serviced by TfL trains with far fewer facilities".

Headline Findings: Post timetable change

- An overwhelming majority of people were aware of the timetable change before they travelled. Panellists referred to a range of information channels including, station and on-board announcements, websites, apps, emails and pocket timetables.
- Following the introduction of the new timetable comments on the impact of the timetable change were inevitably more journey specific. Many of the issues reflected those raised before the launch of the timetable and the issues we were seeing on the ground.
- Many respondents commented on the pluses and minuses that they perceived from the timetable change on their normal journey. Some of the negative issues that came up included:
 - train services running earlier or later than previously, breaking / lengthening connections or daily routines
 - dislike of the new Elizabeth Line trains
 - specific issues arising from changes to routes, for example Didcot to Paddington and Didcot to Oxford services
 - some mentioned changes in formations and/or frequencies and subsequent crowding, particularly on Didcot to Oxford services and GWR services from Maidenhead
 - higher fares as a result of off peak services moving into the peak were not welcomed by passengers.
- Many respondents commented on the delays that they had experienced in the first few days of the timetable being operational. A surprising number seemed able to distinguish between infrastructure issues and the new timetable
- Many perceived GWR to be coping well with the timetable change and commented on the additional staff support at stations.
- In terms of what was done well and what could have been better, many commented that the advance warning of the changes had been good. Some would have liked to have seen greater consultation and more detail on specific services changes in addition to the high level warnings.

Passengers praised the effectiveness of the information campaign and support on the ground

“The effort to keep people informed over the last few weeks has been amazing. No complaints at all.”

“Passengers have been inundated with information on the timetable change and the change of operator on West Drayton rush hour trains. You would have to have been asleep if you didn't know it was the bigger change since 1976.”

“The timetable has been available for some time. Printed copies were available at the end of November”.

“Knew times changing so looked it up online when buying my ticket”.

“The information was accurate and staff seemed to be on the ball with everything”.

“Everything appears to be in place with information freely available from departure screens and staff “.

“The Station Advertising, The internet, on my GWR internet site, News channels, if anyone didn't know they must be blind or deaf, good bit of work done by you (GWR).”

“Huge amount of information has been provided across multiple channels. All very helpful and accurate.”

“A lot of staff about on the platforms. From my experience I'd say they made a good job of it.”

“....there was a luggage assistant on the train which was a very helpful and as far as I am aware new addition to the staff. He made sure that luggage was appropriately stored and helped people get stuff down from the overhead areas.”

“GWR have done a good job. Plenty of posters, and email or two plus a letter to me.”

Issues raised included disruption, negative impacts from the changes, and a desire to have seen greater consultation and detailed information

"A bad start from the Government's Network Rail with a signalling problem at Maidenhead on Monday and defective train at Slough today. Both impacted on GWR and TfL services. The TfL trains that have replaced GWR's from West Drayton during the rush hours have about 100 less seats and to an "Underground" layout - definitely a retrograde step."

"Great Western have been warning of the timetable changes for some time now, which is good. It could have been better dealt with by incorporating a consultation period and letting regular travellers make comments. I would have liked the opportunity to query why several services no longer stop at all stations on our branch line."

"Regular commute from Didcot Parkway to Oxford. Trains run as expected / timetabled, but the timetable has got significantly worse since Dec. Peak time trains to Oxford are now less frequent, slower, and with less capacity than before (2 cars instead of 3)."

"Both my train into Oxford (07:34) and back to Didcot (17:07) are 2 carriages despite being rush hour services. This means they are always very cramped with people standing. The trains are also old and usually dirty/smelly. Trains do usually run to time."

"There were loads of friendly staff available. I didn't really need help. The big thing I observed was that while there was tonnes of things saying the trains were changing- not many things said what the changes were. I get the same trains from the same platforms pretty much every day. Just put a sign on my platform with some before and after shots of the train times. Like roadworks. Big yellow sign that you drive past that tells you when the road will be closed."

"They could have actually consulted passengers before making the new timetable. By the time passengers found out about it, it was too late for amendments. They have missed opportunities to make improvements some passengers would have wanted. Some changes that have been made are to the detriment of some passengers. Neither of these groups were given the chance to input or be consulted about the changes."