

Transport Focus, Albany House,
86 Petty France, London SW1H 9EA

Anthony.Smith@transportfocus.org.uk
0300 123 2147
www.transportfocus.org.uk

By email

Phil Whittingham
Managing Director
Avanti West Coast
North Wing Offices
Euston Station
London, NW1 2HS

Ref AS/2022/180

23 August 2022

Dear Phil

Reduced Timetable

I am writing to express concern about the passenger experience since the introduction of the reduced timetable on Sunday 14 August.

We recognise the challenges facing Avanti West Coast since mid-July in delivering the full timetable. This has resulted in multiple short-notice cancellations, in particular at the weekends, causing frustration and inconvenience for passengers.

We further recognise the difficult decision reached by implementing a reduced timetable across the Avanti network. The stated aims of the reduced timetable, include:

- ensure reliable service delivered, so passengers can travel with greater certainty
- timetable aims to balance capacity with connectivity alongside other operators on parallel routes by maintaining a service across most of the Avanti network
- work with Network Rail and other operators to review loadings, resources, adapt and align plans

However, observing the initial delivery of the reduced timetable the above aims are not being met consistently. By not doing so, passenger frustration and inconvenience is exacerbated, leading to passenger detriment.

It is striking that passengers have suffered because the changes have not gone well. It has not stopped last minute cancellations, so passengers are still facing uncertainty and left inconvenienced.

It is also concerning that on a daily basis some services travelling between London and Manchester are full and standing, resulting in the Train Manager making the sensible decision to declassify the train.

At this difficult time for passengers, I would expect to see clear empathy and support from Avanti for your customers. For example could the website provide a set of simple clear messages on the front page to help passengers navigate this complex situation?

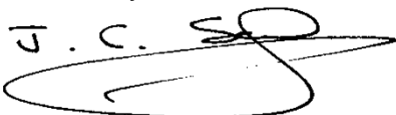
I should be grateful if you consider the following points Transport Focus has identified since the introduction of the reduced timetable with a view to improving delivery of the service offered:

- delivering a punctual and reliable (reduced) timetable on a consistent and daily basis
- adapt and align plans with passenger capacity constraints to provide more trains per hour between Manchester and London
- proactively alleviate crowding on services by relaxing peak restrictions and declassifying
- confirmation of reduced timetable in booking systems providing clarity of communication
- addressing confusing and contradictory information on timetables and ticket sales (see enclosed example)
- manage seat reservations for passengers rebooking from services taken out of the timetable and where reservations are duplicated
- continued availability of affordable book in advance ticket types, where this has not been possible (currently) consideration of retrospective compensation

In addition, it would be helpful in due course to understand what plans you have for restoring services. We would welcome such a plan to consider how restoration of services will be communicated in advance to passengers. This would allow informed choices about travel plans.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

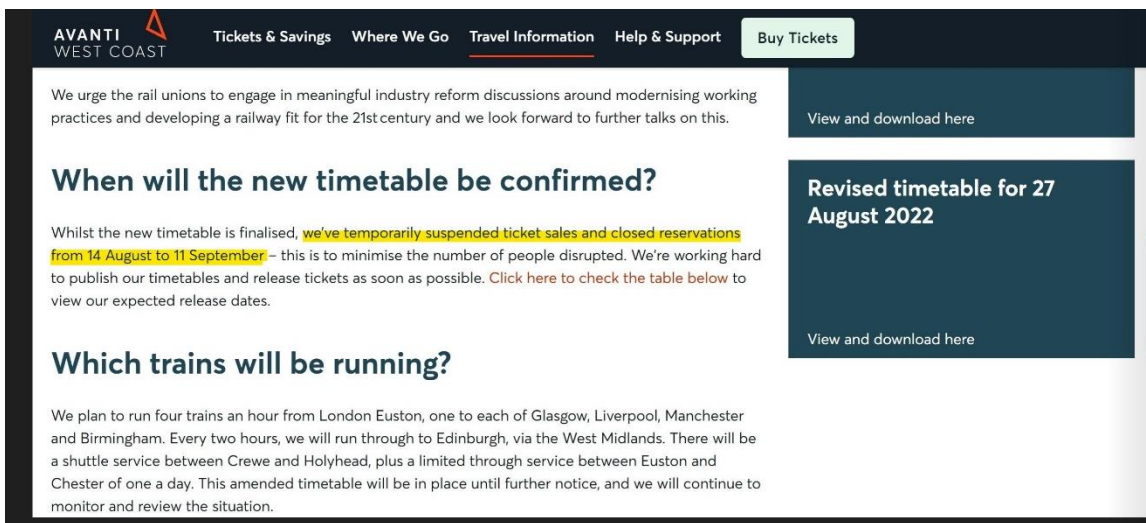
A. J. C. 

Anthony Smith
Chief executive

Copy: Richard Braham, Head of Stakeholders & Public Affairs, Avanti
 Georgina Ehrmann, Head of Development & Planning, Avanti
 Steve Montgomery, Managing Director, First Rail

Encs - Contradictory and confusing information on timetables and ticket sales

Wording on the Avanti West Coast website – stating that ticket sales and reservations are suspended from 14 August – 11 September.



The screenshot shows the Avanti West Coast website with a navigation bar including 'Tickets & Savings', 'Where We Go', 'Travel Information', 'Help & Support', and a 'Buy Tickets' button. The main content area features a message: 'We urge the rail unions to engage in meaningful industry reform discussions around modernising working practices and developing a railway fit for the 21st century and we look forward to further talks on this.' Below this is a section titled 'When will the new timetable be confirmed?' with text stating: 'Whilst the new timetable is finalised, we've temporarily suspended ticket sales and closed reservations from 14 August to 11 September – this is to minimise the number of people disrupted. We're working hard to publish our timetables and release tickets as soon as possible. Click here to check the table below to view our expected release dates.' A second section is titled 'Which trains will be running?' with text: 'We plan to run four trains an hour from London Euston, one to each of Glasgow, Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham. Every two hours, we will run through to Edinburgh, via the West Midlands. There will be a shuttle service between Crewe and Holyhead, plus a limited through service between Euston and Chester of one a day. This amended timetable will be in place until further notice, and we will continue to monitor and review the situation.' On the right side of the page, there are two call-to-action boxes: 'View and download here' and 'Revised timetable for 27 August 2022' with another 'View and download here' link.

This is then contradicted by a table below this message showing that tickets are available to buy for some dates within the 14 Aug-11 Sept period.

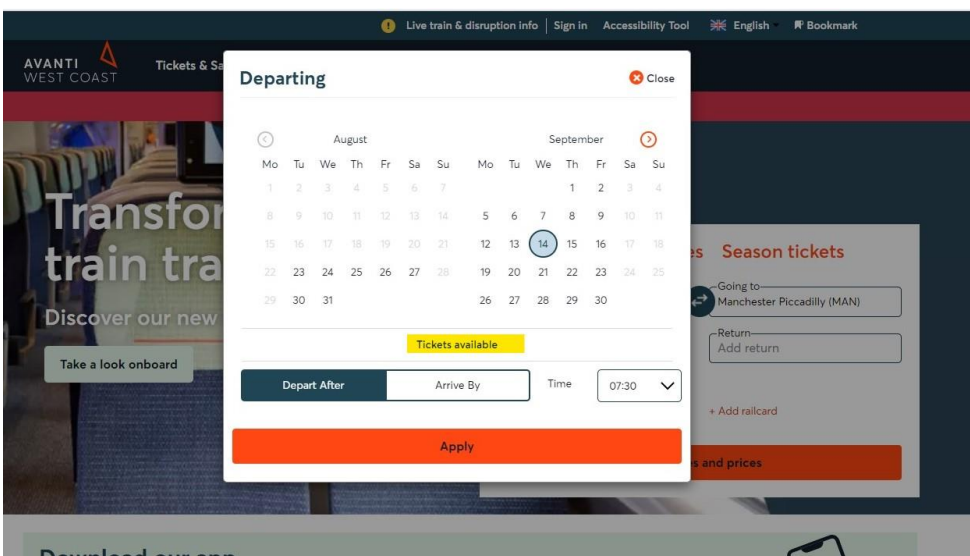


Travel date	Timetable in journey planner?	Tickets available to purchase?
Mon 22 - Fri 26 August	Yes - search online here or download a copy here	Yes - buy tickets here
Sat 27 August	Yes - search online here or download a copy here	Yes - buy tickets here Planned Engineering works
Sun 28 - Mon 29 August	No - please check back soon	No - please check back soon
Tues 30 Aug - Fri 2 Sept	No - please check back soon	No - please check back soon
Sat 3 - Sun 4 Sept	No - please check back soon	No - please check back soon
Mon 5 - Fri 9 Sept	Yes - search online here	Yes - buy tickets here
Sat 10 - Sun 11 Sept	No - please check back soon	No - please check back soon
12 - Fri 16 Sept	No - please check back soon	No - please check back soon

This table also omits 19 September – 23 September entirely.

Journey planners then give different information to what is in the table above. A journey search for dates showing in the table as ‘no timetable’ or ‘no tickets’ offers both times and tickets.

For example: 14 September is shown as ‘tickets available’ on the journey search calendar.



And the following times and prices are shown

Leaving from
London Euston (EUS)

Going to
Manchester Piccadilly (MAN)

Journey type
Single

Adult
1

Child
0

[Edit journey](#)

Show only: Avanti trains Direct trains

Out: Wed, 14 Sep 2022

London Euston (EUS) to Manchester Piccadilly (MAN) [Edit journey](#)

[See earlier trains](#)

Operator	Departure → Arrival	Duration, Changes	Price	
AVANTI WEST COAST	07:56 → 10:05	2h 9m, Direct	£136.30	Select ticket type
AVANTI WEST COAST	08:20 → 10:27	2h 7m, Direct	£109.70	Select ticket type
AVANTI WEST COAST	08:40 → 10:46	2h 6m, Direct	£32.00	CHEAPEST FASTEST Close

<p><input checked="" type="radio"/> Advance Single</p> <p>£32.00</p> <p>Limited availability at this price</p>	<p><input type="radio"/> Standard Premium</p> <p>£57.00</p> <p>Bigger seats, all with a table Plus more</p> <p>Limited availability at this price</p>	<p><input type="radio"/> First Class</p> <p>£107.50</p> <p>Complimentary food & drink Plus more</p> <p>Limited availability at this price</p>
<p><input checked="" type="radio"/> Early Bird Anytime Single</p> <p>£147.80</p>		

[See More Fare Types](#)

AVANTI WEST COAST	08:56 → 11:05	2h 9m, Direct	£35.20	Select ticket type
AVANTI WEST COAST	09:20 → 11:27	2h 7m, Direct	£39.40	Select ticket type

Total price

£ 32.00

1 Adult

Advance Single - Standard

Outbound Wed, 14 Sep 2022

London Euston (EUS)
Manchester Piccadilly (MAN)

08:40 → 10:46

2h 6m, Direct [Ticket info](#)

AVANTI WEST COAST **£32.00**

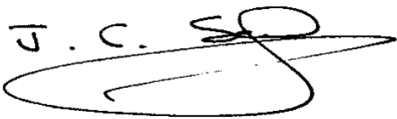
Continue

- Avanti West Coast only
- Non-Refundable

It is imperative that clear, consistent information is provided – and that information provided on websites is kept up to date.

All screenshots taken on 23 August 2022.

Yours sincerely

A. J. C. 

Anthony Smith
Chief Executive