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By email mark.hopwood@gwr.com

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Dear Mark

Short-formations and capacity issues

I am writing to raise concerns about the passenger experience as a result of short formations and capacity issues.

Passengers on both high speed and west services have had to deal with the consequences of short-formed trains leading to overcrowding and in some cases cancelled reservations for far too long. We are aware that GWR is pressing Hitachi to improve fleet availability, but there continue to be large numbers of shortened trains. For example, on 10 October 2023 it appeared there were a number of South Wales-London services that have been reduced from nine carriages to five. Similarly, most days see multiple short forming on the South Wales-South Coast route and the local lines in the west country. Details on the performance page of the GWR website suggest that London-South Wales, London-Cotswolds, and South Wales-South Coast are most affected by short-formations. Please would you assure me about the measures you are taking to improve fleet availability and reduce short-formations?

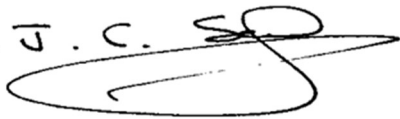
Beyond the everyday experiences of passengers, more granular data has been hard to find in the public domain. It would be helpful to regularly receive information on short formations so we can understand the scale of the issue. I would therefore ask that in future we receive information, by period and route, showing the percentage of booked nine and 10 car services that ran as 5 cars, and for the diesel fleet the percentage of services that were formed of less than the booked number of coaches.

We are aware that timetable changes are planned for this December intended to relieve overcrowding. This is clearly welcome but does raise a number of questions. Retaining Castle Class rolling stock is positive, but it appears that Cardiff to Penzance passengers will in future need to change trains at Plymouth – which will cause considerable inconvenience for some. Has GWR consulted passengers on this change?

The rise in passenger demand is hugely positive, but if it is to be sustained it is vital that people's travel experiences are good ones. It really is crucial that GWR resolves its rolling stock issues. My colleague Nina Howe is continuing to work with your team about this, but I felt it appropriate to raise with you personally given its impact on the passenger experience.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

A. J. C. 

Anthony Smith
Chief Executive