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Dear Anthony,

Thank you for your letter of 8 November regarding capacity and shortforms on the GWR network.

I agree we have some challenges to address in this area although it is important to be clear on the difference between services which are correctly formed by plan but where customers may like to see more capacity and those where we are unable to provide the correct allocation of carriages.

You will know that, last year, as part of our National Rail Contract Annual Business Plan negotiation with the Department for Transport, we have had to make significant cost savings to meet the financial challenge they have set.

Our aim has been to try to make reductions without impacting services. That has come in part from reducing our fleet in order to make savings in lease costs. This included, to date, about ten Castle Class units (some of our biggest contributors in terms of cost and carbon), and all nineteen of the planned Class 769 fleet which would have freed up a number of diesel units for operation in the West. In addition, three Class 387 EMUs from the Thames Valley left the fleet for the GTR Great Northern business.

As a consequence, we are using more of our IETs on regional services (eg Cardiff-Taunton) in lieu of Castle Class units. This has meant that from May 2023, we now plan to run more of our services with 5-car IETs, where they may have previously run as 9 or 10-car units. Our teams carefully looked at passenger data to ensure where possible this was done on less busy diagrams, but inevitably services are busier as a result. I have included as an appendix the list of services that are now scheduled to run with fewer carriages – this also includes a number of our Class 387 services in the Thames Valley too.

Reducing the size of our fleet was not an easy decision to make, however it does mean that we were able to avoid wholesale timetable reductions, which would also impact capacity

and give customers less flexibility. That said, as you know, we have also made difficult timetable decisions in recent years, for example no longer running to Brighton and reducing the number of direct services we operate to Hereford and Bedwyn. This again allowed us to protect our busiest services. Through our annual business planning process (ABP) we are working with the DfT on future fleet provision, particularly in the West where resilience is particularly stretched.

We continue to monitor demand and where we can, and this is naturally limited, we have made changes to make sure that we have the best fit for our remaining fleet. For instance, 1A70 from Plymouth to London (a key Kennet Valley direct service) now runs as a 9-car instead of the 5-car. This did of course mean we had to rebalance a service elsewhere, as we have all available stock in service.

Having noted that we now have more planned five car services in our timetable, you are also right to note that we are seeing too many short formations among our planned nine and ten car IET services. This is something that we are working to resolve with Hitachi. As well as IETs stopped for normal routine maintenance, we are consistently seeing as many as 3 additional trains stopped for damage caused whilst in-service, ranging from striking debris, animal strikes and very regrettably fatalities. While the vast majority of these IETs are returned to operation within 2-3 days it is the consistent loss that is causing significant issues.

As the IETs are in fixed formation the entire train is lost until all repairs are complete which can then cause misbalance in the fleet. This is something that the team and I are focused on improving, I now have a weekly meeting with Hitachi's senior team, and together we are putting the following mitigations in place:

- Reviewing repair procedures to enable quicker return of units
- Exchanging welded components for bolted components, which means quicker repairs
- Material review for long lead items and those being utilised more often
- Specialist damage repair teams (mobile to triage quicker)
- Categorising repairs so we have better visibility of return dates which will allow us to identify the best plan to mitigate short formations

Our IETs remain significantly more reliable than the HSTs, but Hitachi know that more improvement is needed. As well as our plans above, we are also using an independent consultant to review their maintenance plan, in order to develop a better plan avoiding too many trains being unavailable at the same time.

On our directly managed GWR fleet, we have also seen a higher number of units unavailable than usual because of external factors such as animal strikes, fatalities and other collision damage. We've also had units stopped for longer than we would like as we await parts with a very long lead-in time (worsened by the global supply chain challenges). We are seeing improvement and again our teams do all they can to send out a train in the right formation, particularly when we know it's being used on a service with large numbers of school/college students, for example. However, the fleet of diesel trains ranges from 38 to 30 years old and the challenges of maintaining such a fleet will only grow as time goes on. I have started work to try and make the case for replacing these trains with brand new rolling stock and the initial reaction from partners in the industry and government has been encouraging.

More positively, we have also been able to mitigate the reduction in fleet size by gaining agreement from the Department for Transport to extend the lease on our remaining Castle Class trains. This means that we do not have to release further IETs to cover for their loss – we do still need to make some changes, and that will mean changes to direct services between Cardiff and Penzance – but retaining these extra trains for longer is a significant win for protecting capacity. I should note that we included the changes to the direct trains in our Local Transport Forums for Wales, Central and Devon and Cornwall. These trains are generally used for short distance journeys, rather than long distance through routes, and there was no opposition to the plans at the meetings.

The day-to-day challenges are further exacerbated by the performance challenge we're seeing at the moment, primarily driven by Network Rail infrastructure issues – especially in the Thames Valley, affecting our long-distance services to and from London. This is all too frequently leading to sets being in the wrong location for maintenance or for the next day's working, which contributes to a number of shortforms each day.

I know you will be aware that Network Rail Wales & Western are now on the highest level of the ORR's performance escalator and is regrettably the worst performing Network Rail region in country. This is not only having a detrimental impact on performance and reliability but directly impacts our ability to deliver the right services in the right formation. While we are seeing too many shortforms, I think it is important to note that this is still a small percentage of our overall plan. As you can see from the tables below 95.25% of trains travelled in the correct booked formation between periods 01-07, with 99.21% meeting the minimum declared capacity against our regulatory target.

Our Train Service Delivery and Performance team would also be happy to meet Nina and talk through the data if she would like, and I am happy to set that up on a quarterly basis so we can monitor progress together.

I do not want to give you the impression that there are any easy fixes to the position we find ourselves in. There is no spare rolling stock available in the short term, and we need to manage within the available fleet.

That said, we are looking at how we can increase our fleet in future and talking to the DfT about how this can be funded.

Thank you again for writing and I hope this helps to explain the current situation.

Yours sincerely



Mark Hopwood CBE
Managing Director

Summary of formations 2023/24 P01-P07

Rsp Period	LTP train count	CSF (Services assessed against)	Declared Std Seats	Actual Std Seats vs Declared	No. Services SF vs Declared	AsF	Declared Seat Deficiency	Booked Std Seats	Actual Std Seats vs Booked	No. Services SF Vs Booked	AsF Booked	Booked Seat Deficiency
24/01	44,237	40,137	7,817,301	7,729,414	197	0.42%	1.12%	10,621,722	10,050,164	3254	2.73%	1.24%
24/02	43,015	36,949	7,174,557	7,107,840	303	0.35%	0.93%	9,761,447	9,376,451	2901	2.58%	3.94%
24/03	43,792	36,293	6,977,140	6,928,444	251	0.27%	0.70%	9,519,011	9,066,877	3035	2.50%	4.75%
24/04	43,766	38,738	7,469,673	7,417,128	262	0.28%	0.70%	10,142,276	9,732,128	3244	2.69%	4.04%
24/05	43,752	38,640	7,433,017	7,368,803	364	0.35%	0.86%	10,130,180	9,615,890	3798	3.24%	5.08%
24/06	43,779	37,664	7,260,291	7,219,970	239	0.23%	0.56%	9,849,693	9,437,109	3652	3.12%	4.19%
24/07	43,752	38,049	7,357,360	7,310,693	269	0.26%	0.63%	9,949,955	9,373,308	4053	3.08%	3.49%
Total	306,093	266,470	51,489,339	51,082,292	2085	0.31%	0.79%	69,974,284	66,651,927	23934	2.85%	4.75%

Table 1: Summary of GWR formations vs the declared and booked formation by period for 2023/24_P01 to P07.

SG	CSF (Services assessed against)	Declared Std Seats	Actual Std Seats vs Declared	No. Services SF vs Declared	AsF	Declared Seat Deficiency	Booked Std Seats	Actual Std Seats vs Booked	No. Services SF Vs Booked	AsF Booked	Booked Seat Deficiency
EF01	10,863	4,196,957	4,126,798	245	1.12%	1.67%	6,161,036	5,834,215	1113	3.65%	5.30%
EF02	9,914	3,610,743	3,548,575	256	1.09%	1.72%	5,362,061	5,081,604	1662	4.60%	5.23%
EF03	11,842	3,799,690	3,643,746	346	3.31%	4.70%	4,373,319	3,910,915	1385	5.67%	13.57%
EF04	8,341	3,069,296	3,036,651	115	0.68%	1.06%	4,549,322	4,443,764	822	2.02%	2.32%
EF05	29,683	7,131,988	7,088,502	271	0.30%	0.61%	10,461,653	10,024,296	1499	2.14%	4.18%
EF07	27,561	4,929,885	4,922,533	92	0.11%	0.15%	5,622,527	5,450,299	1436	1.73%	3.06%
EF08	52,765	8,495,165	8,495,165	0	0.00%	0.00%	8,904,013	8,586,584	1160	0.78%	3.57%
EF09	12,151	2,047,019	2,046,084	11	0.03%	0.05%	3,027,047	2,983,645	426	1.06%	1.43%
EF10	29,284	4,374,418	4,359,962	197	0.19%	0.33%	6,934,755	6,500,386	5104	5.41%	6.26%
EF11	24,245	3,073,184	3,067,412	151	0.13%	0.19%	4,907,147	4,492,900	4832	6.75%	8.44%
EF12	34,432	4,661,782	4,658,930	23	0.03%	0.06%	6,022,135	5,972,117	457	0.51%	0.83%
EF13	15,389	2,099,212	2,087,934	166	0.28%	0.54%	3,649,269	3,371,202	3038	5.58%	7.62%
Total	266,470	51,489,339	51,082,292	2085	0.31%	0.79%	69,974,284	66,651,927	23934	2.85%	4.75%

Table 2: Summary of GWR formations vs the declared and booked formation by service group for 2023/24_P01 to P07.

Under GWR's National Rail Contract short formation are assessed against **declared formation** rather than booked formation (information shown in journey planners). The declared formation is defined in the Train Formation Capacity Plan (TFCP)- agreed with the DfT for each major timetable change. The declared formation is the minimum formation that will provide enough capacity for the forecasted passenger loading from industry systems. This is sometimes small than the booked formation.

Short formations are only assessed against services that ran their booked route as per the TFCP, services subject to STP timetable changes or TOS part cancellations are excluded; the measure also excludes any long formations (assumes service ran with declared formation).

For completeness the tables above also show GWR short formation figures when assessed vs the booked formation. When assessed against the booked formation the number of short forms is higher, this emphasises the optimisation work our control team is doing, to ensure when short forming is required, where possible, it is done on our less busy services.

It should be noted that Nuneham viaduct closure had a large impact on short formation figures on EF03 in Period 1 and 2

List of service groups:

EF01	London-Bristol
EF02	London-South Wales
EF03	London-Cotswolds
EF04	London-West of England
EF05	Thames Valley
EF07	Reading- Oxford Suburban
EF08	Thames Valley Branches
EF09	North Downs
EF10	Bristol Suburban
EF11	Devon
EF12	Plymouth & Cornwall
EF13	South Wales-South Coast

Appendix – planned train formation changes (no of carriages) from December 2022 to December 2023

Headcode	Time	Origin	Dec-22	May-23	Sep-23	Dec-23
1A09DA	06:55:00	Taunton-Padd	5	9	9	9
1A70DA	04:54:00	Plymouth-Padd	10	5	10	10
1A77DA	08:35:00	Plymouth-Padd	10	5	5	5
1A85DA	13:43:00	Exeter St Davids-Padd	10	5	5	5
1B23DA	16:18:00	London Paddington-Swa	10	5	5	5
1B38DQ	22:48:00	London Paddington-Swa	10	5	5	5
1C00DA	05:23:00	London Paddington-Swa	10	5	5	5
1C36DA	22:02:00	London Paddington-Ply/Exd	10	5	5	5
1C77DA	10:35:00	London Paddington-Exd	10	5	5	5
1C91DA	17:36:00	London Paddington-Pgn	9	5	10	9
1C98DA	21:04:00	London Paddington-Ply	5	10	10	10
1D48DA	00:31	London Paddington-Oxf	4	4	4	5
1D76DA	17:20:00	London Paddington-Did	8	12	12	12
1D77DA	17:53:00	London Paddington-Did	8	12	12	12
1D78DA	18:57:30	Reading-Didcot	8	4	8	8
1H02DA	04:53:00	Bristol Temple Meads-Padd	10	5	5	5
1K12DA	12:07:00	London Paddington-Newbury	8	4	4	4
1K13DA	10:26:00	Newbury-Padd	8	4	4	4
1K14DA	13:05:00	London Paddington-Newbury	8	8	8	4
1K15DA	11:54:00	Newbury-Padd	8	8	8	4
1K18DA	15:06:00	London Paddington-Newbury	8	4	4	4
1K19DA	13:54:00	Newbury-Padd	8	4	4	4
1K20DA	16:13:00	London Paddington-Newbury	8	8	8	4
1K21DA	14:20:00	Newbury-Padd	8	8	8	4
1K25DA	16:34:00	Newbury-Padd	8	4	4	4
1K27DA	17:55:00	Newbury-Padd	8	8	8	4
1K31DA	18:18:00	Newbury-Padd	8	8	8	4
1L30DA	17:23:00	Swansea-Padd	10	5	5	5
1P15DA	07:42:00	Oxford/Didcot-Padd	5	8	8	8
1P47DA	23:05:00	Oxford-Padd	2	2	2	5
1P75DB	06:48:00	Reading-Padd	8	12	12	12
1P77DA	06:48:00	Didcot Parkway-Padd	8	12	12	12
1P81DA	07:44:00	Didcot Parkway-Padd	8	8	8	12
1P92DA	06:20:00	Reading-Padd	12	8	8	8
2D50DB	05:50:00	Reading-Didcot	8	12	12	12
2K40DB	11:12:00	Reading-Newbury	8	8	8	4
2L88DB	22:24:00	Didcot Parkway-Reading	8	4	4	4
2N10DB	06:56:00	London Paddington-Didcot	8	4	4	4
2N12DB	07:26:00	London Paddington-Didcot	8	12	12	12
2N14DB	07:56:00	London Paddington-Didcot	8	4	4	4

2N16DB	08:22:00	London Paddington-Didcot	8	12	12	12
2N18DB	09:08:00	London Paddington-Didcot	8	8	8	4
2N24DB	10:27:00	London Paddington-Didcot	8	4	4	4
2N26DB	10:57:00	London Paddington-Didcot	8	4	4	4
2N30DB	11:57:00	London Paddington-Didcot	8	4	4	4
2N36DB	13:27:00	London Paddington-Didcot	8	4	4	4
2N38DB	13:57:00	London Paddington-Didcot	8	4	4	4
2N42DB	14:57:00	London Paddington-Didcot	8	4	4	4
2N62DC	19:54:00	London Paddington-Didcot	8	4	4	8
2N66DC	20:55:00	London Paddington-Didcot	8	4	4	4
2P11DB	04:35:00	Reading-Padd	8	4	4	4
2P31DB	08:38:00	Didcot Parkway-Padd	8	4	4	4
2P34DB	09:14:00	Didcot Parkway-Padd	8	4	4	4
2P36DB	09:40:00	Didcot Parkway-Padd	8	4	4	4
2P40DB	10:35:00	Didcot Parkway-Padd	8	4	4	4
2P46DB	12:08:00	Didcot Parkway-Padd	8	4	4	4
2P48DB	12:38:00	Didcot Parkway-Padd	8	4	4	4
2P52DB	13:37:00	Didcot Parkway-Padd	8	4	4	4
2P58DB	15:08:00	Didcot Parkway-Padd	8	4	4	4
2P60DB	15:38:00	Didcot Parkway-Padd	8	12	12	12
2P65DB	16:38:00	Didcot Parkway-Padd	8	4	4	4
2P65DB	17:11:00	Reading-Padd	4	12	12	12
2P74DZ	19:12:00	Reading-Padd	8	4	4	4
2P78DB	19:35:00	Didcot Parkway-Padd	8	4	8	8