

Annual Customer and Stakeholder Report 2023/24




Great
Western
Railway

List of Contributors

Marcus Jones, Route Director, Western, Network Rail
Lord Richard Faulkner of Worcester, Chair GWR Advisory Board (can this be reflected on his page too)
Nina Howe, Senior Stakeholder Manager, Transport Focus
David Northey, Chair of Travel Watch South West
Dan Norris, West of England Mayor
Cllr Andrea Davis, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment and Transport, Devon County Council
Cllr Rob Stewart, Leader of Swansea Council
Lewis Brencher, Director of Communications and Engagement, Transport for Wales
Daniel Edwards, Business Lead and Director at Heathrow Express

Throughout this report you will find images such as those below with click through buttons that will take you to short films, more information or additional reports.





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1.0 Mark Hopwood, Managing Director, GWR

While there is no doubt that 2023/24 had its challenges, it has also been another year of growth with more customers returning to rail and with a number of our joint projects coming to fruition. Projects like Newbury where this year we opened business units at the station, or Dawlish where Network Rail opened a new lift and footbridge.

We also opened three new stations. Reading Green Park on the Basingstoke line, Marsh Barton in Exeter and Portway Park and Ride in Bristol. None of these stations would have been possible without the support of local Councils, Network Rail and the Department for Transport (DfT). New stations are rare, they don't happen as a matter of course, and I am very proud that we have such strong relationships across all our regions, that we can deliver not one, not two, but three in a single year.

It isn't just investment in station projects where we made a difference last year, we were also able to improve our timetable, adding 65 additional direct services a week between Carmarthen and London Paddington.

Our new Projects Director Barry Milsom has been working with Hitachi, who maintain and provide our Intercity Express Trains, to reduce short formations and we have been working closely with the DfT to identify and if possible secure additional trains to strengthen our local and regional fleets. At the time of writing this is something we have yet to finally conclude, but I am hopeful of good news soon.

We have also been working very closely with Marcus Jones and his team at Network Rail (NR) Western as they introduce and develop their performance

plan improvements. Marcus has provided a full update for this report, and we will continue to support him and indeed all the NR teams on our patch to improve performance and reliability. We know how important this is and we are determined to reduce delays and to keep people moving.

Those of you who attended our Community Rail and Stakeholder Conference in Swindon in June will know that Lord Peter Hendy was our keynote speaker. At the time none of us were to know that just a few weeks later Lord Hendy would be appointed as Minister for Rail in the new Government. We will of course continue to work closely with him, with his team and with all our stakeholders as the new rail bills pass through Parliament. We fully support closer collaboration across track and train and we will work together with the DfT to ensure a seamless, smooth transition to Great British Railways.

As I said at the Conference, change is coming, but whatever that change brings, we remain committed to an open, honest relationships with you, our stakeholders and partners. We will continue to involve you, to listen to you and to work together with you for the good of our customers, our colleagues and indeed the communities we serve across our entire network.

Do please keep in touch and thank you for another year of continued support and help.

Mark Hopwood

Mark Hopwood CBE
Managing Director



2.0 Marcus Jones, Route Director, Western, Network Rail

Network Rail is nothing without our customers – the passengers and businesses that we serve. And recently we haven't been giving you the service you expect and deserve. But things are improving and my whole team are confident we can turn the tide.

In the last 12 months we've experienced some big challenges – from performance issues to being investigated by our regulator, the Office of Rail and Road (ORR), it's been a baptism of fire. Despite the challenges, we have begun to see some signs of improvements in performance and this is thanks to the hard work of our people.

Last year, I explained our plans to improve performance across our route. As we reach the end of our first phase of work, I want to update you on how we are progressing.

Back in November, the ORR launched an investigation into the Wales & Western region as a result of poor performance. We've already made significant progress and we have a detailed and resourced plan in place to address the causes of deteriorating performance. We evaluated 18 months of data to identify key areas needing intervention when formulating the improvement plan and we have and continue to engage openly and transparently with the ORR throughout their investigation.

We have been working incredibly hard to improve the passenger experience, however this doesn't mean it's been plain sailing. Unfortunately, we experienced one of our worst incidents on the Western route last December.



Damage to overhead electric cables in the Ladbroke Grove area of west London at around 6.30pm on 7th December severely affected the Elizabeth line, GWR and Heathrow Express trains to and from Paddington station. Hundreds of passengers were stranded, including our Chief Executive, Andrew Haines, giving him firsthand knowledge of what our passengers experienced.

Until the extent of the damage to overhead lines could be determined, no further information was shared with drivers or passengers other than to remain on the trains and await further instructions. In some cases, it took up to three or four hours to evacuate passengers from Elizabeth line trains. This was due to the complexity of where trains were stranded, and the volume of passengers and trains affected, but it is unacceptable. We failed our passengers that evening.



We undertook a cross-industry review and lessons were learnt on a number of things including how much information given to passengers, consideration of appropriate measures to support customers during significant disruption, and the options for expediting the safe evacuation of customers from trains stopped outside stations.

Improvement

There's no denying that the Thames Valley is a critical corridor for our region. Delays in this area can have an impact throughout the region - to South Wales and the South West, as well to Anglia through the Elizabeth line. Our performance recovery plan is 18 months long and divided into three phases:

1. Stabilise: Address the root cause of train delay and begin emergency works to prevent train performance getting worse.
2. Improve: Start to improve train performance with targeted infrastructure and maintenance works, based on analysis.
3. Sustain: Create a solid foundation for the future where we can offer our customers a safe and reliable train service every day.



During this stabilising period, the total delay minutes have started to fall due to better management of incidents and recovery, meaning fewer trains and passengers are being impacted. This has also meant that we have reduced our maintenance backlog – built up during the pandemic and industrial action – giving our maintenance teams additional resource to build resilience into the system.

Crucially, we have extended the amount of time we are able to undertake maintenance work every night, enabling more work to be completed. Thanks to passengers' patience and train operator acceptance our maintenance teams were able to use this additional time to deliver 25% extra output, making a huge difference to both our teams and passengers.

Another area we are looking to improve is reliability of our overhead power cables. We have increased inspections of overhead power cables and brought in an external company to provide additional capacity. We have also secured funding to replace the older overhead power cable system from the 1970s with the more reliable and robust system, used during Great Western Electrification. Work has already begun to install the new stanchions that hold up the overhead power cables.

As we reach the second phase of our plan, we will start bringing renewal works forward. For example, the points at Southall were due to be renewed in 2027, but this work will now take place later this year. We have identified 19 track sites and a number of critical junctions which require attention, and we will also start tackling these later this year.

While there is no overnight fix, we are confident that with these plans, we will provide a better and more reliable railway.



3.0 Lord Richard Faulkner, Chair of GWR Advisory Board

The railways of Britain have a long tradition of demonstrating their strengths through advertising, and those of us fortunate enough to be part of today's GWR take pride in recent campaigns featuring Enid Blyton's Famous Five characters. The ads bring to life the four key benefits of train travel – speed, sustainability, comfort and socialising – in an amusing way and celebrate the experience of train travel and the ways it is better than travelling by car.

They succeed brilliantly in reigniting the passion and excitement of rail travel around GWR's beautiful destinations in the Southwest, South Wales, the Cotswolds and the rural counties of Oxfordshire, Worcestershire and Gloucestershire in the post-Covid world and have undoubtedly contributed to the growth in leisure traffic that we have seen in the past year.

My message this year is an unashamedly positive one. Yes, we have suffered more than our fair share of disruptions caused by strikes, extreme weather, failing infrastructure, anti-social behaviour and occasionally human tragedy. We have also been affected by political uncertainty which has made life difficult – some would say impossible – for our hard-working colleagues who have kept our trains running and done their best to look after our customers. We want more and more people to use the railways. If we want our industry to flourish, and if we want to show that the railways are the alternative to private cars, then we must not be afraid to shout about our many successes at least as loudly as those who wish to denigrate our railways.

I am again delighted to list just a few of the many great things GWR has achieved over the past year, and which we have been so pleased to hear about as members of the Advisory Board and in many cases participated in:

- Opening three new stations at Reading Green Park, Marsh Barton, and Portway Park & Ride
- Launching 65 additional services each week to Carmarthen, half-hourly services to Gatwick Airport, and additional weekend services to manage the growing weekend leisure market
- Pay-as-you-go ticketing launched in Cornwall
- Okehampton station named Small Station of the Year at the National Rail Awards

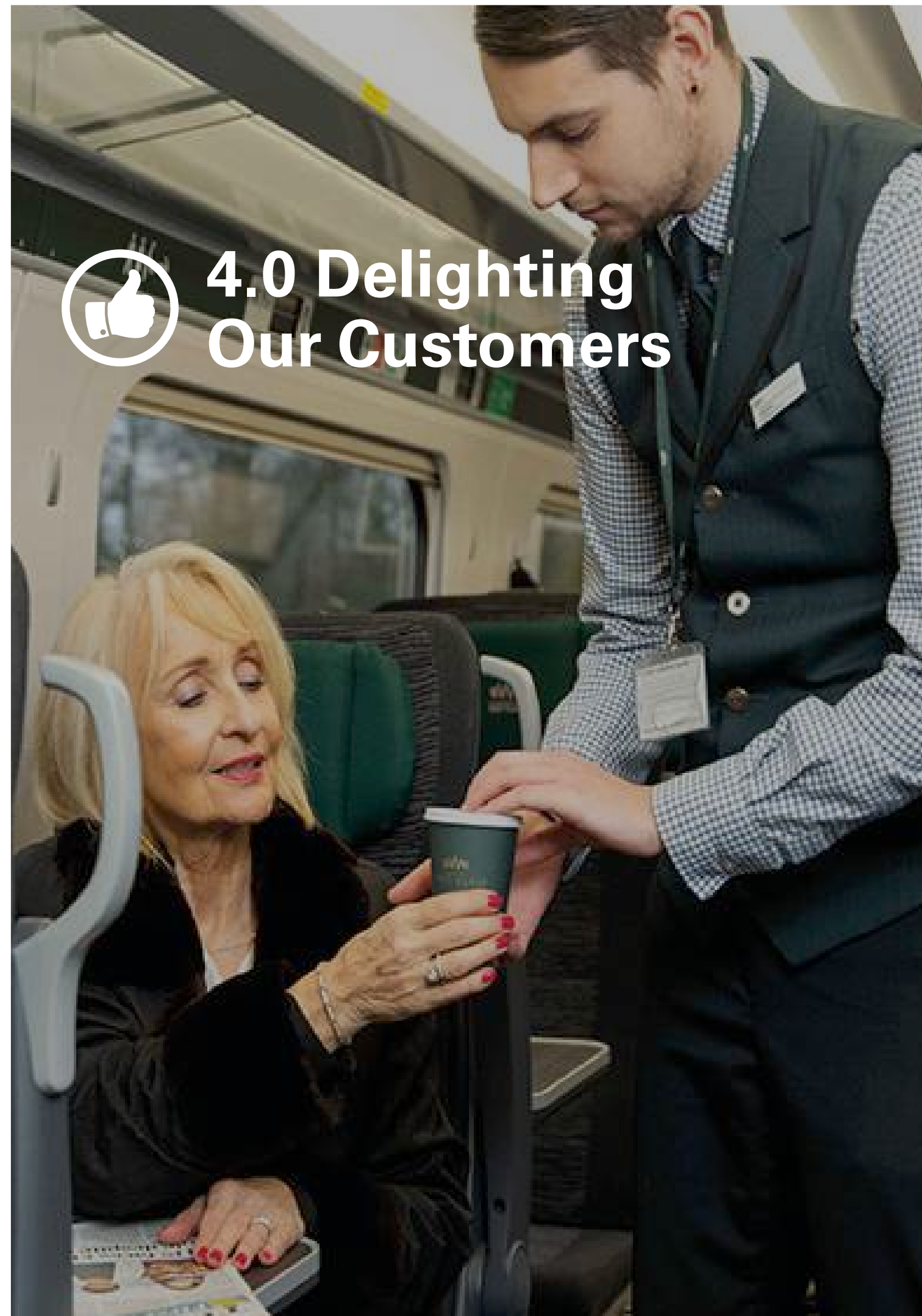
There have been a number of train naming ceremonies where individuals and institutions which contribute to the nation or the local community are recognised. The most high profile was the honouring of HRH The Princess Royal (a regular user of GWR trains on the South Cotswold line) at a ceremony on 2 May, but there were many others, such as the Royal National Lifeboat Institution. I got particular satisfaction from the naming of Intercity Express Train 8000281 Sir Peter Parker (the former chairman of British Rail), and Oliver Lovell (founding chairman of the Cotswold Line Promotion Group – I have been the group's president for over 20 years). They both had an immeasurable impact on the North Cotswold line, and the ceremony last November marked a wonderful day.

GWR does so much more than run trains. It holds the annual stakeholder and community rail conference, is an active and usually successful participant in the Rail Business Awards and holds an annual networking dinner for its strategic partners.

It is inevitable following the election of a new government in July 2024 that significant change will come to the railways over the next year. I am confident that GWR, its colleagues, the communities it supports and serves, and critical friends like the Advisory Board will continue to ensure that it is at the forefront of rail in Great Britain – ready to connect us all for generations to come.



4.0 Delighting Our Customers



4.1 The Princess Royal’s lifetime of dedicated service

In May, we named one of our Intercity Express Train 800024 after HRH The Princess Royal in recognition of her support for more than 300 charities, organisations and military regiments in the UK and overseas at London Paddington.

We were delighted to host representatives from amongst those organisations and Her Royal Highness and her husband Vice Admiral Sir Tim Laurence, a member of the GWR Advisory Board.

After the unveiling, HRH The Princess Royal was introduced to guests including the former Secretary of State for Transport, Mark Harper, former Prime Minister Theresa May and Transport for London Commissioner Andrew Lord.

Mark Hopwood CBE said: “Naming trains has been a tradition on the railway, and especially on the Great Western Railway, since the earliest days of train travel. We are proud to continue this tradition, recognising and celebrating inspirational individuals who have shaped the communities and the nation.


“Her Royal Highness has made a significant contribution to so many important charities, events and public services so it gives me great pride to celebrate this through one of the greatest traditions on our railways.”

Transport Secretary, Rt Hon Mark Harper

Her Royal Highness has dedicated a large part of her working life to official engagements and visits and we are delighted to recognise this immense contribution by carrying her name on the side of this Intercity Express Train.”

The then Transport Secretary, Rt Hon Mark Harper, said: “Her Royal Highness has made a significant contribution to so many important charities, events and public services so it gives me great pride to celebrate this through one of the greatest traditions on our railways.”

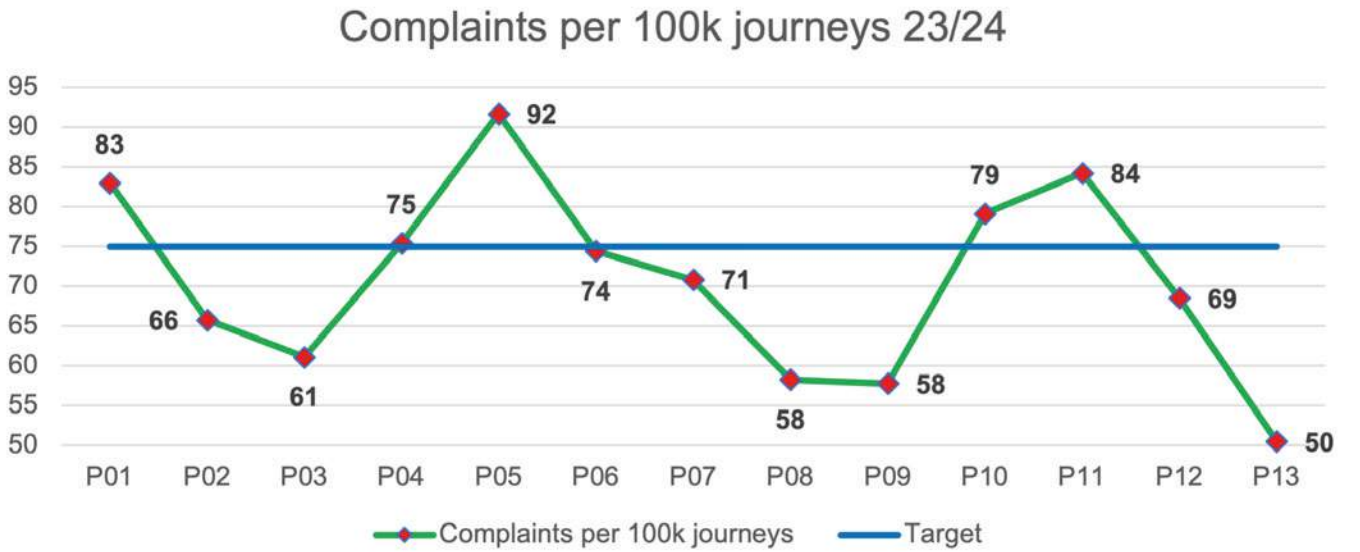


 Watch the train naming ceremony

4.2 What our Customers Said

Complaints

We received an average of 70.5 complaints through the year for every 100,000 customer journeys undertaken, a slight increase from the previous year (68.3). The main drivers for complaints were punctuality, crowded service & problems with seat reservations. Our average response time to respond to a complaint was just under 8 days.

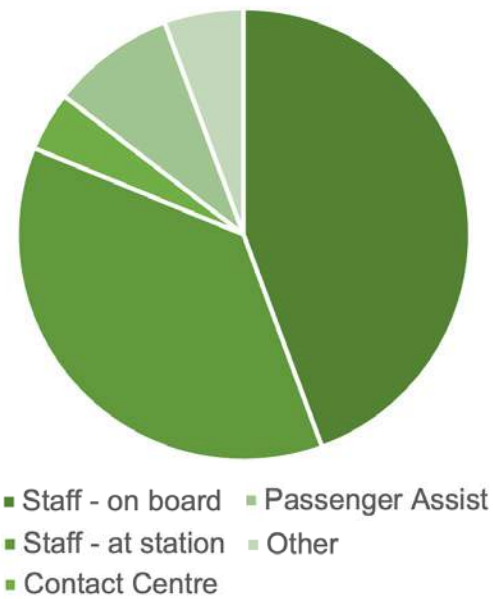


Praise

We saw a consistent volume of customers contact us to provide praise for some aspect of their journey, primarily being focussed on GWR colleagues working on board our services, and at our stations.

“So often one hears about terrible customer service, yet little about exceptional service and that is exactly what we experienced on Thursday when travelling from Liskeard to St Ives. We take this opportunity of thanking all the staff on duty with special mention of the wonderful gentlemen at St Erth station who were so helpful they made our holiday day out memorable along with the beautifully presented station. Who would have thought a train journey would have created such a lasting happy memory, and one we recommend. Such professional staff and responsive customer service are a credit to GWR and we convey our thanks to all.”

Praise contacts 2023/24



Customer Satisfaction Scores

Continued pressure on household income, industrial action and issues with infrastructure, not to mention some of the worst storms the country has seen, all served to challenge our ability to provide a reliable and consistent service to customers. Our frontline teams went above and beyond to support customers through these trying times, and we managed to sustain an Overall Satisfaction score between 88% and 90%. Customers particularly showed their appreciation of customer service being provided at station and on board with scores of 91% and 94% satisfaction respectively.

Our research and analysis has again reaffirmed performance as our customers' primary yardstick in evaluating the service we provide. The graphic here lays out the key elements of our service that we know we must deliver consistently for customers. This analysis gives clarity of focus, guiding our Customer Experience planning and delivery.

In the chart below, the orange line shows the prevailing punctuality (T-3) metric across the year and how the forces mentioned above impacted that, with the grey line being the Overall Customer Satisfaction score.

Amanda Burns, our Sales and Marketing Director, said "As many other public services will testify the weather has played a key role in our ability to deliver for our customers during 2023. The summer heat followed by the very wet and stormy weather of late 2023 and in to 2024 has been a challenge. This is not an excuse! These events have demonstrated to us not only the emotional impact to customers when our service is not up to the standard expected, but how in a changing world we need to look at our core abilities and those of our partners to deliver a reliable and consistent service. Our consistent Customer Satisfaction scores are strong evidence that our efforts are not going unnoticed.

We must still do better however, and the forward planning we have done during the year gives me great optimism that things will improve. We must stay focused on our customers' needs; the way they use rail and how we can support our communities over the coming year as we rebuild the business to excel for them."

Overall Experience Satisfaction 2023/24 against Punctuality T-3

	P24 01	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13
GWR CSat (%)	89	89	89	90	90	90	90	90	90	89	89	89	88
Punctuality T-3 (%)	80.7	79.6	76.6	77.9	76.2	75.7	78.4	73.2	80.5	84.4	78.1	79.2	77.2

Delay Repay

2023/24 presented a challenging environment for Delay Repay claims, particularly, during December and January when weather-related infrastructure problems led to delayed journeys. This resulted in just under 1.5 million delay compensation claims being received through the year, a 92% increase from the previous year. Despite the increase in claims, response times (highlighted by the red line in the graph above) remained excellent throughout the year, ending the year at an average of 2.2 days.

Delay Repay claim volume + response time 2023/24

Period	DR claim volume	Average response time
P01	85,183	2.21
P02	66,953	2.26
P03	90,284	2.19
P04	87,494	2.09
P05	104,113	2.10
P06	120,950	2.43
P07	83,464	2.23
P08	116,717	2.08
P09	163,005	2.21
P10	170,980	3.02
P11	115,447	2.60
P12	107,459	1.96
P13	132,466	1.45

Ticket office opening hours

GWR's performance against its agreed Ticket Office opening hours is measured using a Moving Annual Average score. This score shows the percentage of time open against the planned opening hours. For the period of time in question (April 2023-March 2024), GWR's ticket offices were open for 86.3% of the planned opening hours. The year in question saw some particular challenges with five consecutive financial periods adversely affected by Industrial Action from trade union members. The days affected by this action saw a reduced train service that would have necessitated earlier closure of some ticket offices.

4.3 Chippenham station now fully accessible

Chippenham station is now fully accessible following the completion of a £1m scheme which has brought a lift into use on the northern side of the railway.

The project, jointly delivered by GWR and Network Rail on behalf of Wiltshire Council, means Chippenham now boasts three lifts and step-free access to platforms from both sides of the railway.

A staircase on the northern side of the station has also been turned to allow a safer entrance and exit for anyone using the public right of way.

The former MP for Chippenham, Michelle Donelan, said: “The completion of this £1 million accessibility scheme at Chippenham station is fantastic news for residents and visitors alike, meaning all members of our community, including those with mobility challenges, can easily access the station and enjoy the convenience of step-free access. It reflects our joint commitment to ensuring that our transport infrastructure is inclusive and accessible for all. I would like to express my gratitude to everyone involved in making this project a success.”

GWR Business Assurance Director, Joe Graham, said: “We’re delighted this next phase in our planned improvements for Chippenham station is now complete and customers can benefit from a fully-accessible station. Chippenham is a very important station for travel to Bristol, London and across Wiltshire on our TransWilts line to Westbury and beyond, and we are delighted to have been able to work with Wiltshire Council, the Local Enterprise Partnership and Network Rail to deliver these improvements. We know that working together means we can deliver more and we are committed to a cooperative, collaborative approach with the communities we serve.”

Wiltshire Council Member for Transport, Cllr Caroline Thomas, said: “We are really pleased these improvements have been completed as it means the station is now fully accessible. This latest investment complements the £1.98 million package of transport measures previously completed by the council to improve pedestrian and cyclist access to Chippenham station. “The works have been delivered in line with our



Business Plan priorities, and our aspiration to have well-connected communities that enable local communities to live, work and socialise locally, which this and further improvements at the station fully supports.”

Swindon and Wiltshire LEP Chief Executive, Paddy Bradley MBE, said: “Chippenham station is a valuable asset for the town and surrounding area, enabling travel to all parts of the UK. Improved access will help attract more users and assist with the economic development of our region. This project will make Chippenham station a more accessible and welcoming place for residents, workers and visitors and help to boost the local economy.”

Network Rail’s sponsor for the project, Alina Wolfe Murray, said: “It’s fantastic to see that Chippenham station is now fully accessible from both sides, with the new orientation of the footbridge stairs providing safer pedestrian access and an improved walking route for the public over the railway line. This is a brilliant example of partnership working across multiple organisations to improve access to the railway for our passengers and I’d like to thank everyone involved for their hard work in making this happen.

4.4 Accessibility at our stations

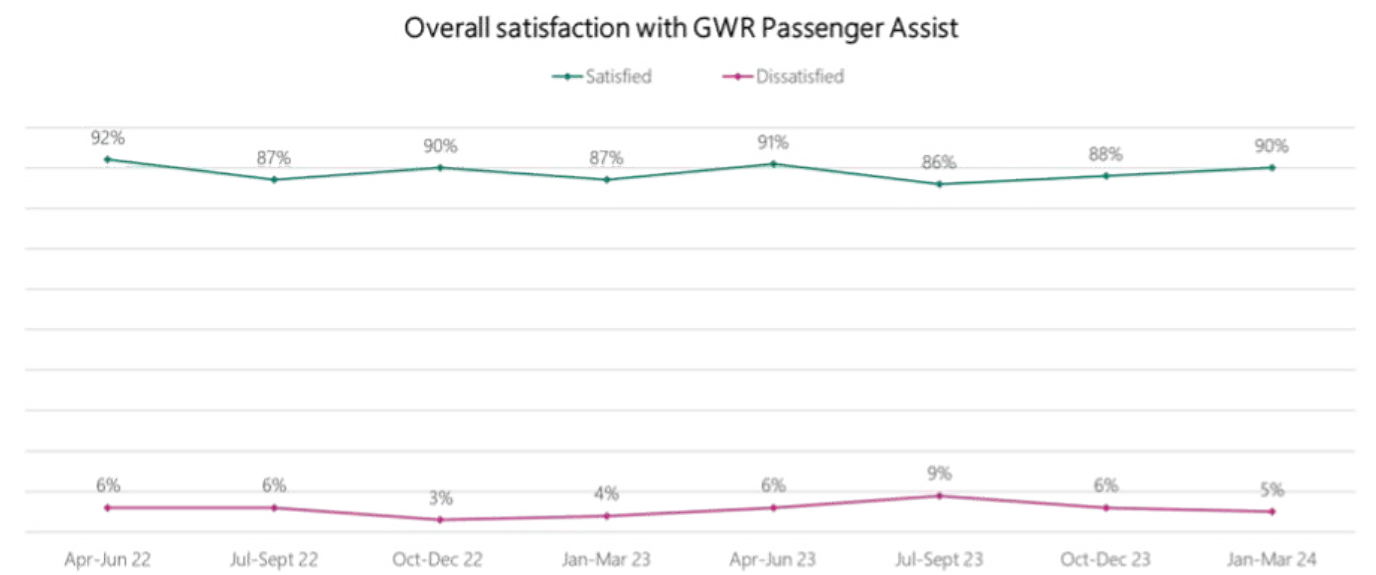
During the course of the year Network Rail opened new lift bridges at Chippenham (see full story at 4.3) and at Dawlish stations. As a result at Dawlish we have seen a doubling in requests for assistance with more disabled people now able to travel by rail.

We continue to progress schemes, in partnership with Network Rail, to deliver improved accessibility across our stations. At Tilehurst, Network Rail continues to progress the £4 million project to make all platforms fully accessible, while we look forward to finalising plans to open the new Access for All bridge at Theale later in 2024. Farnborough North will also see installation of a new liftbridge, providing a safer crossing for pedestrians while at Dorking Deepdene, Network Rail continue work to refurbish the existing staircases. Work also progresses at Maidenhead where the relocation of the lifts, and new staircase, will improve passenger flow and provide a more comfortable station environment.

Network Rail lift schemes at stations served by GWR are also underway or in development at St Erth, Llanelli, Torquay, Weston-super-mare and Cheltenham.

Passenger Assistance
At GWR we proudly provide assistance for our disabled and older customers to enable travel across the network. This year we saw a rapid rise in Passenger Assist numbers, with 251,237 requests between April 23 and Mar 24. This is up approximately 25% from the previous year and includes 77,675 customers who required assistance on the day and had not booked ahead.

We monitor our Passenger Assist service closely, how it is received by our customers and are continuously looking to improve the service we offer. The below chart highlights how our customers rate the service closely, checking how it is.



4.5 Fares and products

Pay-as-you-go touch smartcard



In November, we teamed up with Cornwall Council to launch the pay-as-you-go touch smartcard, rolling payments and tickets into one and guaranteeing the best daily fares.

The introduction of the new card, only the second pay-as-you-go scheme on the GWR network (the first being in the Bristol area), coincides with Network Rail’s multi-million-pound investment programme in Cornwall, replacing signalling equipment with brand-new, modern technology, and puts the county at the forefront of new digital fares technology.

The scheme, based on all the journey combinations available, works out the best (cheapest) day fare combination to charge the customer. A weekly capping feature further ensures the customer would not pay anything more than a weekly fare based on the journeys travelled. The scheme accepts all Railcards and provides customers added benefit by applying appropriate Railcard discounts to their travel.

Plans to extend to the rest of Cornwall through to Plymouth were included in Cornwall Council’s successful bid as part of the Mid-Cornwall Metro and will follow as part of that programme.



Register for your Cornwall card now



Leave Friday or Saturday. Return Monday.

London Paddington to Bristol Temple Meads

only £79 return

Book now

Terms apply

GWR Great Western Railway

Leave Friday or Saturday. Return Monday.

London Paddington to Cardiff Central

only £99 return

Book now

Terms apply

GWR Great Western Railway

Leave Friday or Saturday. Return Monday.

London Paddington to Bath Spa

only £79 return

Book now

Terms apply

GWR Great Western Railway

Long Weekender

We have continued to promote our Long Weekender ticket, which offers flexible and good-value travel for weekend breaks, where customers are able to make their return journey on a Monday.

This product was developed primarily to reduce crowding on Sunday services by diverting customers to Mondays where more capacity is available; allowing customers to make their return during the morning peak on a Monday at a much-reduced price. Our analysis shows that the product has been successful at stimulating the market for weekend trips, which has the wider benefit of supporting the local economies of the destination locations. Given the success of the ticket, its scope has been expanded to cover weekend trips across the majority of our routes from Summer 2024.

UK first as Devon & Cornwall Railcard goes digital

Further collaboration with Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership has helped us deliver an industry first Regional Railcard digitally via the Devon & Cornwall Railcard.

Residents in Devon and Cornwall, aged 16 or over, can now purchase the railcard online, download it to their phone and use it to save up to a 1/3 on standard class rail fares.

Devon County Council Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment & Transport, Cllr Andrea Davis, said: “To be able to travel at such low cost across

Devon and Cornwall, accessing our beautiful towns, cities and coastal areas while enjoying the wonderful landscapes as we sit back and relax is something we want to share more widely with our residents. Now it’s available digitally, it makes it so much more convenient. “Whether it is attending football matches, visiting friends, joining meetings, taking my dog out and even just going out on a train for the pleasure of it, my Devon and Cornwall Railcard is invaluable and pays for itself many times over. Even better is two people can travel on one card, so take a friend along.”

Since its introduction in June 2023, GWR has seen incremental 28% growth in customers buying the Railcard showcasing the benefits of digitisation.



CLLR ANDREA DAVIS, PENINSULAR TRANSPORT HELPS LAUNCH THE NEW DIGITAL RAILCARD WITH RICHARD BURNINGHAM OF DEVON AND CORNWALL RAIL PARTNERSHIP AND DAVID WHITEWAY, GWR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT MANAGER WEST

4.6 Social media

Over the last year our social media content had been seen by over 92 million people.

As well as sharing campaigns, we also love to share the best pictures that people take of our trains and destinations. These have been seen by half a million people.

We received 549k messages from customers. A 14% increase on the year before.

@GWRHelp Seat reservations on the 16.35 from Paddington to Plymouth were turned on once the train was already so full that the corridors were already full of people standing. Nobody can move. Very confrontational. PLEASE stop doing this.

100% agree with you. Also it's not easy with all the strikes going on, but a massive thank you to all the staff @GWRHelp @CrossCountryUK and @chilernrailway who are trying their best to help despite it being a strike all day. You are truly appreciated.

@GWRHelp thank you to the amazing unflappably happy and kind staff at Reading and on the train to Bath this evening. You all made the delays bearable, especially Lizzy.

45k of the messages received were about train performance and 5k were about crowding on board.

14k of the messages received were about industrial action, that's more than 1k a month!

We received almost 5k messages about our staff and these are largely positive.



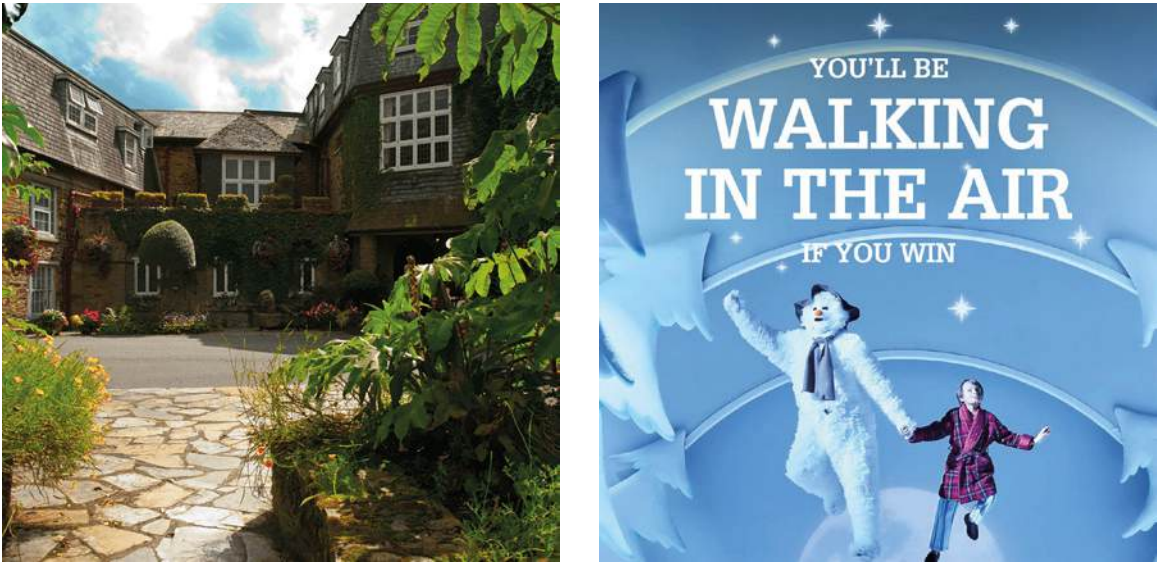
@elena_hopeless_wanderer

@lizzie.eats.explores

@fidarby

We have worked more closely with content creators this year, and they have been sharing lots of GWR journey adventures with their audiences. We also used content creators to help promote our Summer Pullman menu.

Throughout the year we have run a number of competitions and giveaways, giving away both GWR experience and working with partners across the network on collaborations, including a stay at the Budock Vean Hotel in Cornwall.



Our social media audience has grown by 30k people in a year, which means our messages are reaching further and we are helping more customers.

4.7 Marketing

This year our marketing generated a stronger return through well-established brand and tactical leisure activity. During moments of industrial action, the marketing strategy continued to focus on brand building and incremental revenue to support business growth for the long term. In June Famous Five returned to stimulate summer travel, with support of sales driving activity with product campaigns such as Long Weekender and Railcard.

'Five Get There First'

GWR were thrilled to finally launch the latest instalment of our Famous Five story in June 2023; 'Five Get There First'. The ad tells the story of the Five and their Aunt

Fanny and Uncle Quentin, embarking on trip to the seaside; the Famous Five opt to head there by GWR train, Fanny and Quentin by car. The adults have a terrible journey with traffic delays, followed by farm vehicles spilling mud onto the windscreen. Their steering wheel comes loose in the chaos, and they career their way through the streets of a quiet seaside town, eventually reuniting with the Famous Five on the beach, who have been

there for quite some time after their pleasant, peaceful and speedy journey with GWR! The campaign launched on TV, Broadcaster Video-On-Demand (including ITVX, All4 and Sky Online), outdoor, press and digital display ads. The campaign reached over 15m people and was given a 4.7 star rating by ITV/System1 in their report 'The Greenprint' into how advertising can step up to the climate challenge.

Access 'The Greenprint' Report

The financial year ended with a strong spring leisure campaign, using existing Five Get There First creative that was supported by a more tactical price-led layer of activity. This successfully contributed to an improved level of price perception amongst our target audience of travelling with GWR, as well as the value proposition of no booking fees when booking direct with GWR, saving over 50% when you book in advance, and saving a third on fares with a railcard.

Digitisation

To encourage more direct bookings with GWR, we implemented a campaign that promoted the ease and benefit of using the GWR app to book train travel. We identified key audiences who each held different attitudes towards digital ticketing and catered our messaging towards each one. From no booking fees, to finding available space on the train and Delay Repay notifications, we helped customers discover an 'Easier Way to Travel' with the GWR app.



The Great GWR Getaway Sale

We launched another 'Great GWR Getaway Sale' in January 2024 to encourage more leisure travel in a traditionally quieter period of the year. The campaign again performed incredibly well. Paid advertising saw almost 4m impressions served in social, 2.2m impressions in outdoor and over 34m impacts in traditional radio.

Regional Marketing

Over the last year, Regional Marketing activity has been building on the Brand and Campaign activity to generate excitement to travel, encouraging an increase in journeys through more local, regional route promotions. By running a seasonal "What's On" campaign calendar across the GWR regions, we promoted our great value fares and offers, working with tourism partners to highlight our unique destinations, events and attractions to customers. We also marketed the opening of three new stations at Reading Green Park, Marsh Barton (Exeter) and Portway Park & Ride (Bristol).



Marketing activity also supported GWR's products, including pay-as-you-go, Night Riviera Sleeper, connected train and bus services, Heathrow Express, Gatwick and the North Downs line, plus Devon & Cornwall Railcard to name a few.

Customer Relationship Marketing

We continue our commitment to Customer Relationship Marketing (CRM), with a primary focus on expanding our database. Our recent efforts have centred around essential support for customers throughout their journey, complemented by service communications from pre and post departure support and guidance during strikes and cancellations. These strategic activities underscore our dedication to enhancing customer relationships and achieving sustainable growth.




4.8 Stakeholder Audit

We are grateful to all those stakeholders and partners who took part in this year’s annual stakeholder audit conducted independently by Savanta. The following section includes excerpts from the report along with comparisons with previous audits.

The proportion of stakeholders who rate their overall experience of GWR as good or very good is 74%, the same level seen in 2023. Experience with GWR was fairly consistent across the regions GWR operates in.

Stakeholders praise GWR running despite the constraints they operate under, and praise their communication with customers and how they support the communities it serves

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Performed well under constraints

"Despite the financial constraints imposed by the government and the damage done to the business by strikes in 2023, GWR has shown itself to be resilient and potentially popular." **(Peer)**

"Doing whatever you can within your remit to improve services, support new stations or routes and enhance the overall travel experience thus growing passenger volumes." **(Rail Group)**


"Maintaining service levels against a challenging political background for rail." **(P&C)**



Good communication

"Communicates well with its users and very relieved ticket offices are remaining open. Has an appreciation of the requirements of communities – electric trains cannot come soon enough!" **(P&C)**

"We have had excellent and open engagement with GWR who have been able to fund and support our work as we continue to grow the Wellbeing Walks Programme across the borough." **(P&C)**



Supporting local communities

"GWR is committed to engagement with communities and listening to their concerns and aspirations. Its track record in service development, building on opportunities for growth, stability and reliability sets it apart from other TOCs." **(Councillor)**

"Supporting local charities like Cornwall Pride really helps us to deliver the services we offer across the county." **(P&C)**

"GWR has a visible focus on local communities - the rebranding from First group, has allowed a visible change from the past." **(Business)**

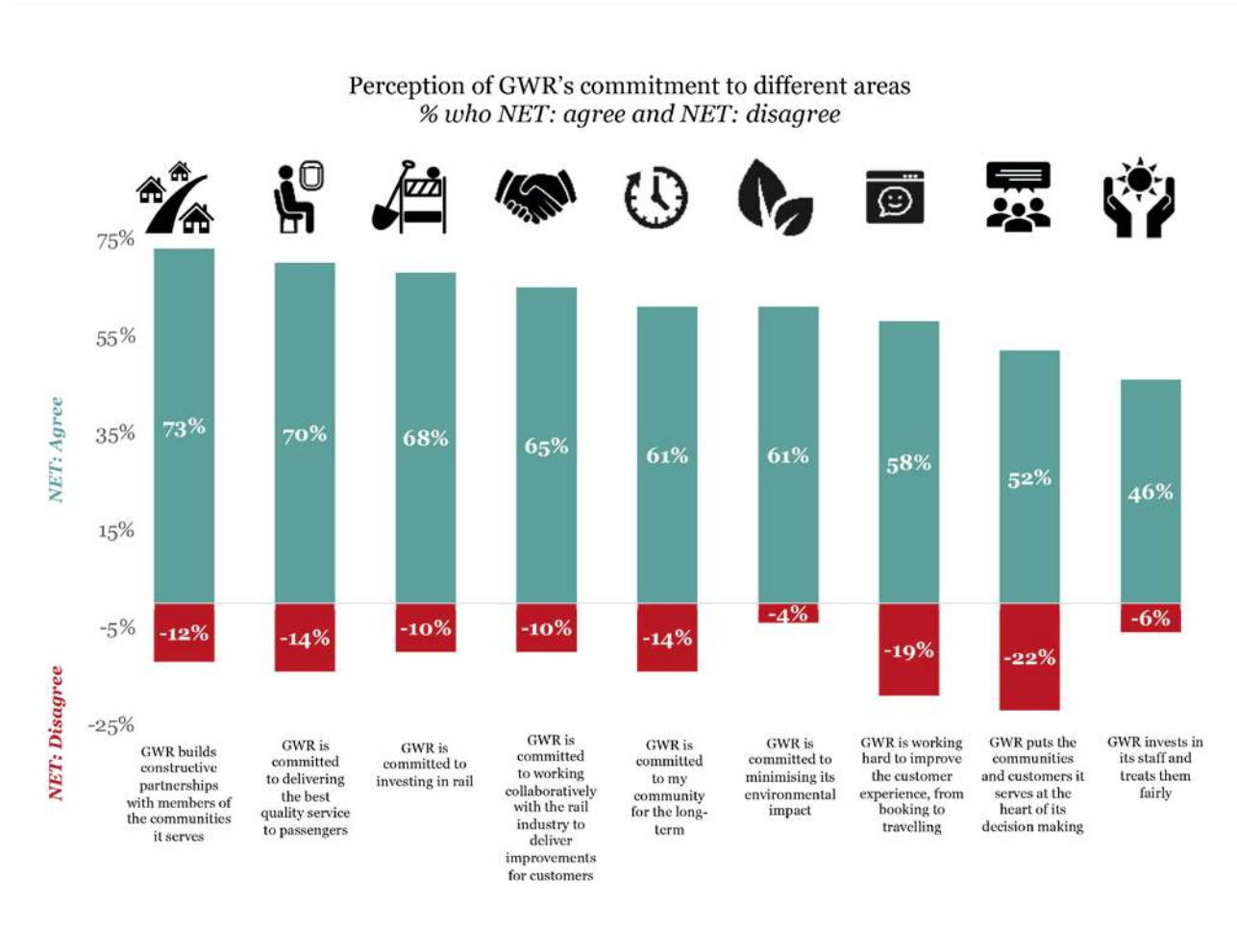
Nearly nine in ten (87%) stakeholders say they are either fairly or very satisfied with the safety of services, the same as last year. Three quarters or more also say they are satisfied with the cleanliness and comfort of services (75%) and the information provision about general rail services (76%).

Satisfaction with information provision during periods of disruption has increased again this wave with three quarters of stakeholders satisfied (73%), up six percentage points on last year.

However, satisfaction with the overall customer experience/satisfaction has fallen for the second year in a row by 11 percentage points, now at 53%.

Over two-thirds still agree that GWR is committed to building constructive partnerships with members of the communities it serves (73%), delivering a best quality service to customers (70%) and investing in rail improvements (68%) .

Similar to last year, stakeholders are least likely to agree that GWR invests in its staff and treats them fairly (46%), though this is up 10 percentage points on last year.



4.9 Service Quality

During the year, we started measurement of a number of aspects of our service relating to the standards of stations, trains and customer service under a new Service Quality Regime (SQR). Recognising that while a safe, punctual and reliable railway remains our customers’ first priority, they also have high expectations about other aspects of the service we offer too.

At stations, SQR covers the assessment of issues such as station ambience, presentation and assets (condition of the station buildings and facilities), cleanliness, information provision, ticketing and staffing. For our trains we assess the condition and ambience of the on board environment, overall presentation, cleanliness and information provision. Customer service assessments cover the helpfulness of our staff on board and at stations, as well as the quality and accuracy of online information and the interactions with our social media team. These are all areas which customers regard as important, and the assessments help us to deliver to a high standard and identify areas where we can make further improvements, evidenced by initiatives described elsewhere in this report.

In our first full year of the assessment process the

average results we achieved were station ambience 71.46%, station cleanliness 56.97%, station information 66.79%, station ticketing and staffing 82.7%, train ambience 88.76%, train cleanliness 87.25%, information on board 80.25%, staff helpfulness 82.67% and online information (including social media) 97.35%.

Using the data gained from the SQR audits, we commenced various workstreams to further enhance the experience for customers at our stations and on board our trains. We put added focus onto cleaning activities at both stations and on trains and commenced a programme of work to replace and renew seating and other assets at many stations across our network, with a much wider programme of activity at stations and for our train fleet planned to deliver improving results over the course of the next 12 months. We also delivered additional training to our on board teams to improve information provided, and the regularity of updates during disruption.

As we are still in the first phase of the new SQR process, we’re continuing to monitor how the results evolve over time and, even more importantly, look at how we consistently seek to maintain and then raise standards.

Wedding celebrations on a train at 125mph

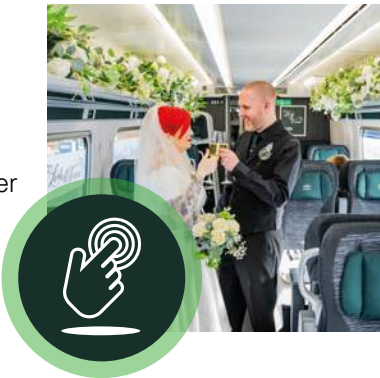
Leah Anderson and Vince Smith first met on board a GWR service from Wokingham to Reading as they travelled for their first date together. That date led to their first kiss, on the GWR train home, and eight years later the couple from Farncombe near Guildford tied the knot – also on board a GWR train service.

Leah explains: “We went for a coffee and then a pizza and just got on really, really well. On the way back, Vince was getting off at Wokingham. He went to leave and then ran back and kissed me. I knew from that first date we had something special.

“In those early days we travelled on the train all the time before Vince moved up to Farncombe. My dad worked on the railways for 51 years, so trains have always been a big part of my life.”

Embarking on a more profound journey than most, the ceremony took place on board before a drink’s reception while our specialist Pullman Dining crew prepared a three-course meal for the couple and their 14 guests. Amanda Burns, Sales and Marketing Director, said:

“When we heard of Leah and Vince’s story, we asked ourselves what more we could do to help them as they embark on this very special journey together. Rail and rail travel is often romanticised; offering a gateway to new adventures, so what better way to embrace this than by actually holding their wedding on board? It ticks all the right boxes.”



4.10 Dan Norris, West of England Mayor

Together with GWR and other partners, my West of England Mayoral Combined Authority is investing more than £360 million in new and improved stations and more frequent rail services – bringing rail travel within easy reach of more people than ever before.

Investment in rail is key to unlocking the growth potential of the region, connecting people to employment, linking business to business and bringing people and investment to our region.

New and improved stations

Bristol’s first new rail station in almost 100 years opened in August 2023 at Portway Park & Ride and will be joined later this autumn by another at Ashley Down. More are planned over the next five years and beyond including North Filton, Henbury and Saltford. That’s just the beginning of our journey though and I want to unlock the potential for further rail stations and these are being assessed.

Accessibility to rail is essential and my Combined Authority has been working with GWR to improve existing stations for passengers with better waiting facilities and clearer signage at eight locations. Work is progressing towards our aim to make all our rail stations step-free – including plans to introduce lifts at Lawrence Hill station.

We are revitalising Bristol Temple Meads as the gateway to the West of England and a station that Brunel would have been proud of. The construction of a new Eastern Entrance at Bristol Temple Meads is well under way, connecting the station with the new University of Bristol Enterprise Campus and Temple Quarter, a regenerating area set to deliver 10000 new homes and thousands of jobs.

More frequent services

We need to get more people travelling by train – that’s why I’ve committed funding to support more frequent services on popular local routes.

If you build it - they will come and thanks to an overall £11million+ investment, half-hourly services were introduced in May between Bristol, Gloucester and Westbury. In the first year these clocked up more than 3.4 million journeys, a year-on-year increase in passengers of 27%. It’s a similar story on the Severn Beach line with an increase of 35% in journeys compared to 2019, and I’m delighted that long-term funding has been secured connecting the west of our region to Bristol city centre.

Ambition

Working with partners, I want to deliver high-frequency, “turn up and go” services, making it more attractive to travel by train.

I always have our environment in mind, so I am also determined that our railways can continue to become greener – with further electrification of the network in the region, including between Bristol and Bath and Bristol Temple Meads to Bristol Parkway.

Together with GWR, Network Rail and other partners, we’ve made tremendous progress and will continue to strive for more. The new long-term rail vision for the region will be published shortly and seeks to build on recent successes to boost passenger numbers, increase freight carried by rail and support our region’s economic growth, allowing everyone in the region to share in our success.



5.0 Disciplined Operations

5.1 Performance

2023/24 was a challenging year for performance. The combined effects of increased traffic, higher fleet utilisation, asset reliability, industrial action and severe weather had a significant impact on our customers.



In response to a sustained decline in Thames Valley performance, Network Rail launched its recovery plan “Project Brunel” at the start of 2024 and with it brought a degree of stabilisation in performance in the latter periods of the year. We continue to support this programme of improvement work.

ASLEF (train drivers) industrial action and action short of strike (ASOS) continued over the course of the year. We were pleased to consistently deliver one of the highest levels of services of all UK train operators impacted by industrial action during ASOS days, but the industrial action did impact performance and reduced services.

Leisure travel continued to grow, and commuter travel continued to recover, particularly Tuesday to Thursday, with weekends continuing to see an upwards trajectory in passenger numbers.

Both delays and cancellations per incident saw an increase during the performance year. A lot of focus has been on ‘whole system’ response to recovering service

following large incidents, but also reviewing improvement plans to ensure progress is being made on mitigating root causes, as well as the spread of reactionary delay following an incident. Work continues on fleet strategy to deliver a reliable and available fleet. We have been working closely with alliance partners Hitachi Rail and Rolls-Royce to maximise daily provision of the high speed IET fleet, whilst we continue to look at options to provide increased fleet resilience in the West.

The capacity of our trains is an area our customers regularly feedback is very important to them and one we are actively working to improve.

Over the course of the year 76.81 % of services arrived within 3 mins of schedule (at all stations) and GWR cancelled 2.35% of services due to operator cause. Sustained good performance is critical to delivering customer satisfaction. There is always more to do, and we continue to work closely with Network Rail to keep driving down delays and service cancellations, delivering the service our customers expect.



5.2 Project Churchward

During the 2010s, the Building a Greater West Programme upgraded GWR's long-distance and commuter routes with electrification and the introduction of our Intercity Express Trains.

Our local and regional services in the Thames Valley, West and South-West routes continue to operate Class 150, 158 and 165/6 diesel multiple units which are among the oldest in GB rail, with Class 150s nearly 40 years old.

These units are, or will shortly become, life-expired. Age-related issues and obsolescence could prevent continued operation and these trains are likely to require expensive life-extension works. The complex mix of fleets also increases the cost of maintenance and operation and reduces flexibility during disruption. We are also committed to reducing carbon emissions.

Over the last two years, we have therefore been working with Network Rail and the Department for Transport to develop a strategy for train replacement based on the key principle of delivering better value for the taxpayer alongside significant customer and environmental benefits.

Our feasibility work will continue with the DfT and Network Rail and we will update on progress in future reports.



5.3 Nina Howe, Senior Stakeholder Manager, Transport Focus

There have been many positives this year, including the opening of new stations such as Reading Green Park and Portway Park and Ride. However, disruption, caused by a range of issues including persistent infrastructure failures, weather resilience issues, rolling stock shortages and strikes, have marked this out to be a challenging year for passengers and staff on the GWR network.

Our research consistently demonstrates that performance is of fundamental importance to passengers. It is the second highest priority for GWR passengers and plays a significant role in the perception of value for money (their primary priority) and their likelihood to travel more / at all.

So, it's unsurprising that passenger frustration has been reflected in our Rail User Survey where there has been a decline over the year in overall satisfaction, punctuality and reliability and value for money for GWR. This reflects the very real impact that disruption has on people's everyday lives such as arriving late for work or missing family commitments.



It will take a sustained whole industry effort to drive improvement and our work with GWR and Network Rail reassures us that they very much understand the impact poor performance has on their passengers. We are aware that there is a great deal of cross industry work going on to identify, manage and fix underlying infrastructure problems and we hope that passengers will start to experience greater reliability as a result of Network Rail's infrastructure performance recovery plan. In the meantime, it's vital that a laser like focus is brought to bear on key elements such as information and disruption management, in order to minimise the impact on passengers.

Our work with GWR and Network Rail is very much focused on both challenging and supporting this work and the issues that matter most to passengers. Driving up passenger satisfaction and improvements in the passenger experience during disruption are at the heart of our work as an organisation and central to our ongoing work in the region.



5.4 Poppies to Paddington

More than 200 poppy wreaths were carried to the capital at last year’s Poppies to Paddington operation. Five ‘Poppy’ trains – starting from Plymouth, Carmarthen, Taunton, Worcester Shrub Hill and Great Malvern – made their way to London ahead of the remembrance service at Paddington’s iconic war memorial.

To remember 70 years since the end of the Korean War, our Poppies to Paddington operation featured special support from a Royal Navy helicopter and a ‘Poppy Bus’.

Partnering with The Veterans Charity, the Royal Navy Air Station Culdrose deployed a Merlin Mk2 helicopter to carry poppy wreaths from its base to Plymouth, and Go South West provided its ‘Poppy Bus’ to collect wreaths from stations in Cornwall and carry them to Plymouth. This meant that Cornish communities could still be represented despite the mainline being closed for improvement work.

The Veterans Charity CEO, Danny Greeno, said: “We are very proud to have wonderful support from GWR for its Remembrance initiative, which is now in its fourth year. Poppies To Paddington was once again hugely poignant, paying respects to the fallen. Thanks to great support

from the military and railway communities, wreaths were able to complete their journey from across the South-West to Paddington to form the backdrop to the annual Remembrance service on Platform 1. Bringing communities, service personnel and Veterans together to remember in this special way is so important to ensure the sacrifices of the fallen are never forgotten. Our sincere thanks to everyone who is helping to make this happen, especially to GWR and RNAS Culdrose.”



5.5 Cllr Andrea Davis, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment and Transport, Devon County Council

I am so proud of what we have achieved for Devon residents and the wider South West through our collaborative efforts with GWR, the DfT and rail industry colleagues. Over the past 10 years, by working in partnership we have secured over £400m investment in our railways to make our ‘Devon Metro’ rail network aspirations become a reality.

By aligning our transport strategy with District Council growth plans, we’ve been opportunistic with funding - pooling developer contributions with local transport plan funding and leveraging Government funding to deliver new stations, transform our integrated public transport offer and ensure our railway remains resilient to extreme weather. The fruits of our collective labour has seen more people using the railway and impressive post pandemic local patronage recovery, bucking the national trend.

In the past 12 months, we’ve seen strong performance on our newly opened Marsh Barton station, proving attractive to commuters in the centre of one of Exeter’s largest employment areas as well as with leisure day-trippers exploring the outstanding Riverside Valley Park and Exe Estuary Trail. The work hasn’t stopped there as GWR, Network Rail, Devon County Council and West Devon Borough Council continue to embody the spirit of partnership with designs progressing rapidly for a 2nd new station at Okehampton. This builds on the huge success of the award-winning Dartmoor Line, better serving the wider rural catchment and intercepting journeys on the A30 from North Cornwall, Torridge and rural West Devon. The £15m scheme will also deliver new bus links and cycle routes to enable car-free, low carbon end-to-end journeys for local residents in the town.

Something I have been particularly delighted with has been our collective efforts with GWR and our bus operators to transform our integrated transport offer by creating ‘bus branchlines’ for some of our most remote communities. Kingsbridge, Tavistock, Ilfracombe, and Exmoor villages of Lynton and Lynmouth and Combe Martin now have regular bus services connecting into rail hubs at Totnes, Okehampton and Barnstaple. This has opened up a range of new travel opportunities for people of all ages for a wide range of journey purposes. The success of these initiatives has seen our partnership nominated for Collaboration of the Year at the upcoming National Transport Awards.

The strength of our relationship with GWR and the wider rail industry has enabled us to maintain momentum on this hugely successful story of rail investment in Devon, which is vitally important in supporting a growing population and meeting our future social, economic and environmental objectives for the County.





6.0 Great people

6.1 Becoming truly diverse and inclusive

Our vision is to create a truly diverse and inclusive business where our colleagues, customers and communities have a sense of belonging. With everyone feeling they can thrive and progress.

Everyone's journey to understanding and embracing inclusion is different, and the key is starting the conversations and gaining new insights from people from all backgrounds and communities.

Here are some things we supported and delivered as part of our journey.

GWR's Employee Networks

Last summer, GWR's REACH (Recognising Ethnicity And Cultural Heritage) network collaborated with Network Rail's Cultural Fusion and Severnside Community Rail Partnership to run an incredible Carnival Train from Bristol Temple Meads to London Paddington, in celebration of Notting Hill Carnival. Their hard work culminated in them winning 'Best Community Engagement Project' of the year at the 2024 Community Rail Awards.

GWR's Women in Rail Network delivered and inspired a great deal of activity for International Women's Day in March 2024 which included a menu of superb upskilling sessions for Women in Rail members, as well as our wider colleague population.



For the last two years, GWR's ASPECT network proudly marched in Bristol LGBTQ+ Pride, not only highlighting our commitment to inclusivity but also serving as a powerful symbol of unity, love and acceptance.

In the first week of December our Disability Working Group invited colleagues across our network to wear purple in support of International Day of Persons with Disabilities which was received with great enthusiasm!

And in rounding the year off, our Christian Rail Network held a beautifully festive and well attended 'Christmas Carols at Paddington' event, alongside the Great Western Railway Paddington Brass Band.



Community Partnerships for Employability

GWR also invested in new partnerships in the community with a focus on equity, diversity, and inclusion by supporting underserved groups to gain employability skills, to build their self-confidence and to support them in their future careers.

In London, we supported Fair Shot Café, a superb organisation which offers young adults with a learning disability and/or autism the chance to gain real-life work experience through a year-long hospitality programme - growing the next generation of skilled baristas and expert cafe assistants.

In Wales we collaborated with Llamau, Wales’s leading homelessness charity, which focuses on empowering and equipping vulnerable youth and women, many of whom have experienced domestic abuse. Llamau’s invaluable work will help their community groups to gain the skills necessary to live independent and purposeful lives.

In our Central region, we supported Babbasa who are inspiring and supporting underrepresented young people in Bristol to pursue their ambitions through skills training, professional mentoring, events and recruitment support services.



GWR ED&I MANAGERS VICKY JONES AND GEOFF SUTTON, WITH FAIR SHOT CAFE FOUNDER BIANCA TAVELLA AND ONE OF THEIR ENTHUSIASTIC TRAINEES

Following the theme of customer facing skills, we partnered with The Prince’s Trust to plan, recruit for and deliver an engaging ‘Get into Customer Service’ Programme in Bristol in February 2024, targeting individuals aged 18-30 who were unemployed.

9 young people with a passion for customer service, all from diverse backgrounds were invited onto a 2-week training programme, which provided participants with invaluable insights into the different areas of our business.

Our goal was to not only prepare them for potential roles within GWR but also equip them with transferable skills for their future endeavours’. Key components of the training included:

- Shadowing experiences with our operational teams at Bristol Temple Meads station, including Gateline staff, Customer Service Hosts, and Revenue Protection team members
- In-depth training sessions covering interview preparation, presentation skills, and personal branding workshops
- Certifications in Level 2 Food Hygiene and Emergency First Aid at Work (EFAW)

Our aim was to see all participants ‘graduate’ the programme with greatly improved self-confidence and self-worth, consequently improving their employability potential and job chances post-programme. Following the training, 6 young people from the cohort secured permanent roles with GWR and another seized the opportunity to apply for a GWR apprenticeship programme, paving the way for long-term career growth.

Finally, we partnered with Future First - a social mobility charity which works with schools to equip young people with skills and confidence to reach their potential, regardless of their socio-economic background. We are excited by the opportunity to engage directly with early talent from a diverse population, to encourage them to develop their potential regardless of their economic background and to directly improve outcomes for young people in the communities we serve.

With all of our partnerships, established and new – we are excited by the opportunity for all GWR colleagues to get involved in their local community.

6.2 More than a railway company

We set out to be an exemplary employer that values our people. We’ve maintained Investors in People Gold for 6 years, and they have increased their standards to attain the accreditation.

There are over 17000 instances of recognition through the year. Overall colleague engagement is 73% up 8%, wellbeing index has increased 8% to 70%, empowerment risen by 10% to 66%.

With a focus on increasing diversity, a third of our new starters are female and each year, 5.3% of colleagues identify as LGBTQ+, 7.4% of colleagues are from ethnic minority groups.

We have six employee led network groups that provide support to colleagues and promote workplace diversity as well as provide a safe space to share lived experiences.

There is a focus on wellbeing, support, fitness and wellness. We’ve a range of flexible work arrangements to support work life balance and diverse needs, as well as a series of inclusive policies that include Transgender and Menopause along with guidelines for race equality and inclusive language.

Recently we have achieved Silver Clear Assured and Disability Confident Employer accreditations recognising the work we have done to support talented colleagues and those with additional needs in the workplace.

Over the next few years our focus is to embed key workstreams in ways of working to sustain a culture of inclusion and diversity in GWR.

1	Our Leaders	Supporting our leaders at all levels to excel as confident ED&I champions, modelling inclusive behaviour in all that they do
2	Our People	Attracting, retaining and developing diverse talent, at all levels in our organisation
3	Our Culture	Building an inclusive & equitable culture that addresses barriers adversely impacting under-represented groups
4	Our Processes	Evolving our inclusive ways of working and increasing the effectiveness of our decision-making groups in delivering long lasting equitable change
5	Our Customers	Creating an inclusive environment where all customers feel valued and respected
6	Our Communities	Focusing outreach efforts and community engagement in support of under-represented and long-term unemployed groups

6.3 Industry First Apprentice Train

To celebrate National Apprenticeship Week in February, we ran the first ever Apprentice Train from Paddington to Cardiff.

It was operated and crewed solely by current and former apprentices, from drivers, revenue protection, control and dispatch, on board crew and signallers – over 20 apprentices made sure the service ran smoothly and promoted our apprenticeship scheme, the opportunities, benefits and our investment in people’s future careers to customers and the wider public.

The first of its kind in the industry, it was led by two apprentices and was a huge undertaking for the Aspire Apprentices Molly and Tom who had never project-managed an event like this before. They sought guidance from experienced colleagues from across the business to make it happen.

The apprentices in the task force used their skills and intuition and sought guidance when needed. They planned their time and activity with precise attention to detail and used their initiative so they were fully in control every step of the way. Any hurdle was turned into learning experience.

They worked collaboratively with colleagues in Network Rail and Transport for Wales, making an inclusive team that delivered a successful event which attracted significant coverage with more than 158k impressions across social media and featured on regional news outlets.

This event was an innovate way of showing our customers and stakeholders first-hand the incredible value that an apprenticeship in the rail industry provides, and it also served as an opportunity for the apprentices to develop their skills and create unique experiences for them, which will boost their future career opportunities.

The Apprentice Train showed that the future of the railway is in very capable hands.



6.4 Appointments made to Executive Team

With a substantial agenda ahead of us at GWR that sees the business addressing change and ensuring we deliver on our current commitments we need to consider our ability to manage this alongside our existing day to day commitments.

Over the coming years there will be several emerging workstreams to transform the railway so we are fit for a future that meets customer’s needs, connects our communities, is mindful of the impact on our environment and plays our part in a prosperous Britain.

These areas of work sit over several directorates in GWR and are in addition to the day-to-day concentrated effort on doing the basics brilliantly. To support this additional immediate work that is needed we are pleased to welcome back to GWR, Barry Milsom as Director of Projects and Rachel Geliamassi to the new role of Customer Services Director.

Barry will focus his efforts on working cross-functionally and externally with colleagues in Engineering, Performance/Train Service Delivery, Operations and Customer Service teams as well as Hitachi to ensure we have InterCity Express trains available to GWR in the right quantity, at the correct location, at the right time and in the appropriate formation with all the equipment customers need and expect on the train and for it to be working properly.



as well established relationships with colleagues in Network Rail, Heathrow Express, neighbouring train operators in our network and with Hitachi.

You may remember Barry was a member of GWR for many years before he headed to Avanti in Autumn 2022 as their Operations and Safety Director.

He has significant experience working in performance, operations and major projects, as well



Rachel is now responsible for leading the customer services teams across its stations and trains and ensuring GWR continues to provide the highest level of customer service to its passengers.

She brings more than 15 years’ experience in customer service and operations management in transport to her new role at GWR, having previously been managing director of Stagecoach’s operations across the west of England and Oxfordshire.

Mark Hopwood CBE, said: “We are thrilled to welcome Rachel to the GWR team. Her extensive experience in customer service and operations management across our region will be invaluable as we continue to improve our services and deliver the best possible experience for our passengers. Rachel’s understanding of our region, the destinations we serve and our key stakeholders will ensure we are in the best possible position to manage the significant opportunities ahead.”

Commenting on her appointment, Rachel said: “GWR is the jewel in the rail industry’s crown, and joining them after years in the bus industry marks a significant and exciting phase in my career. The core principles of customer service, sustainability and safe travel remain constant across both sectors and I am committed to bringing my expertise and passion for public transport to the rail industry, fostering a culture of excellence and innovation. I look forward to working with the team to deliver the best possible customer service to our passengers.”

The addition of this new role will allow Operations Director Richard Rowland greater focus on operational delivery, particularly with regard to Old Oak Common and HS2 changes, as well as a stronger focus in his role as deputy managing director.

6.5 Supporting Talented Colleagues

With a commitment to increasing our diversity so our colleagues better reflect our communities FirstGroup and Great Western Railway have a suite of development programmes that support women and ethnically diverse colleagues with their personal development and career paths.

There are five development programmes which ethnically diverse colleagues and women can apply:

Step Up and Reach Up:

These two 3 month programmes aim to build the capabilities and confidence of colleagues who have the aspiration to move into their first people management role in the next 12-18 months.

Step Forward and Reach Forward

These two 4 month programmes aim to build the capabilities and confidence of colleagues

who have experience of line management and have the aspiration to move into a 'Head of' or equivalent role within the next 1-2 years.

Senior Women's Development Programme

Participants identified via the talent management process - demonstrating high performance and high potential to move into larger and more complex leadership roles.



6.6 Improving how colleagues feel about working in GWR



Each year we ask colleagues to share their view about working in GWR. With 52% of colleagues sharing their views, we have an insight into trends on where we have improved and where we need to focus and areas of focus for the leadership teams in all areas of the business to support, continue and further improve.

The headline numbers show we are heading in the right direction and that managers and colleagues are doing some great things.

Engagement and empowerment scores are made up of sets of questions that give overall scores, and both are up from last year – engagement is up 8% to 73% and empowerment is up 10% to 66%. This tells us that more colleagues are proud to work for GWR, up 8% to 72%, more colleagues enjoy their job, up 6 % to 78% and think GWR is a great place to work is up 10% to 71%.

Looking at the overall sentiment in the survey, 12% more people used two positive words to describe how they feel, with committed and happy being the top two words used. We saw a reduction in 10% of people sharing negative emotions, with unappreciated and disconnected the most used words.

75% of colleagues feel able to be themselves, up from 62%, and 68% agreeing that we support your wellbeing, up from 63%.



With safety and security a high priority, 84% of you feel confident to raise safety concerns, up from 81%, and 75% think we take them seriously, up from 73%

Understanding the reasons behind decisions rose 6% to 47% this year. There is more work to do on making sure colleagues feel more confident of being listened to when they share ideas and having more time to chat to managers, of all levels, about the things going on and the background to the information and updates that are shared.

Compared to the rest of the rail and other transport industry these are positive scores, but slightly lower than wider benchmarking across the UK averages. So, we are doing well compared to our neighbours, but still have some work to do to match other industries in the UK.

All of this is set in the context of dealing with some tough challenges around potential rail reforms and pay disputes as well as overall performance of infrastructure, fleet and resourcing.

The overall trend is an improving picture and one where colleagues rate GWR highly. There is more work to do on balancing workloads, getting the optimum numbers in teams and doing better to show our appreciation for colleagues who are delivering the best they can for each other and our customers every day.

6.7 Heathrow Express



DANIEL EDWARDS,
BUSINESS LEAD AND DIRECTOR AT HEATHROW EXPRESS

I am pleased to announce that Heathrow Express, which celebrated 26 years of continuous operation in June, has confirmed that our Track Access Agreement will be secured until June 2028.

Heathrow Express is the largest Open Access Operator in terms of passenger numbers, carrying 16,000 customers per day. This agreement demonstrates the value of targeted private investment in the railways and ensures the continued delivery of a reliable and quality service for passengers’ first experience of the UK.

It also maintains the distinctive terms central to the renowned operational elements of the Heathrow Express service. These include the consistent 15-minute journey intervals, operating every 15 minutes from Platforms 6 and 7 at Paddington Station. Passengers can continue to rely on the swift and reliable connection between London Paddington and Heathrow Airport, ensuring a seamless airport travel experience.

Watch the YouTube video below to learn more about Heathrow Express’ community investment initiatives.



Learn more about
community investment

Heathrow Express Unveils New Train Livery Strengthening Community Investment Commitment

This year was also the launch of our new community-inspired train carriage, showcasing our strengthened partnership with The Paddington Partnership. Since 1998, when both The Paddington Partnership and Heathrow Express were founded, we have continued to work together, supporting key community investment projects in the Paddington area in London.

Heathrow Express is committed to supporting the areas around Paddington. Over the last 26 years, we have delivered a vast range of projects, improving the lives of local communities. Supporting schools, local residents, and key environmental initiatives, our team continues to work hard to support great causes, along with other organisations based around Westminster.

To highlight this enhanced commitment, we have redesigned one of our trains with a special livery, highlighting the joint partnership between our two organisations. To highlight our charity commitment, we have produced a video which features some of our passionate colleagues sharing their experiences in supporting local charities and initiatives while also inspiring others to make a difference.



6.7 Social values report

For the third consecutive year, GWR has commissioned consultants, Akerlof, to assess our social value using the Rail Safety and Standards Board (RSSB) Rail Social Value Tool (RSVT).

The tool measures the social value generated by our day-to-day operations, investments, and projects, allowing us to conduct a thorough analysis and report on the social value of our activities.

Having set out targeted strategies for improvement in our last social value report, we are pleased to provide an update on our progress to broaden and elevate the quality of our data reporting, as well as illustrate how we continue to enhance our impact on society, the environment, and the economy.

We equally recognise the importance of supporting the wider rail industry to continuously improve.

As such, we are proud to play an active role within the Rail Social Value Tool Steering Group, which serves as a crucial platform for cross-industry collaboration and information-sharing related to social sustainability. Through our participation, we aim to drive the use and ongoing development of the RSVT to ensure it remains a useful tool for measuring social value across the rail sector.

This Social Value Report is structured to provide a holistic overview of our activities across 11 of RSSB’s social impact areas. As demonstrated throughout this report, the activities undertaken by our business can have a hugely positive impact on individual people’s lives.





7.0 Keeping Our Communities Prospering

7.1 Meeting our commitment to sustainability



There is significant opportunity for the rail industry to contribute towards reducing the impact of climate change and achieving Net Zero by 2050. GWR is working with Network Rail and the Environment Agency to review the impact of extreme weather events and develop contingency and long-term risk management plans.

We continue to operate in accordance with the prestigious international standards for environmental and energy management, maintaining our ISO 14001:2015 and ISO 50001:2018 certifications across the business. The environmental and energy management system is allowing us to drive improvements in waste, water, and energy consumption and a successful external audit by Lloyds in early 2024 found our management system to be continuously improving and fully supporting the GWR sustainability agenda.

Measuring and managing our environmental impact is key to the success of our business.

We continue to run trains on electricity wherever possible and have finalised a first version of decarbonisation road map to support the Government's commitment to net zero and to phase out all diesel-only traction by 2040. In FY 2023-24 traction accounted for 96.5% of our total energy consumption and therefore our future fleet strategy (Project Churchward)

is fundamental to decarbonisation. Once our fleet strategy has been finalised, we will look to review and publish the roadmap to our stakeholders. Our investment in innovative technology for battery operated trains is very much in support of this objective.

In 2023/24 GWR achieved its non-hazardous recycling target with overall recycling figure at 77% which has increased from 64% over the last 2 years. We've worked closely with both suppliers and vendors to improve our recycling on site and will continue to examine how to best capture the recycling efforts across the network and how.

We continue to closely monitor water consumption across our portfolio, and are continuing to install water saving taps across our stations to reduce consumption and look for other opportunities across the network. Based on a similar project by FirstGroup, this could reduce total station water consumption by up to 30%. These reductions will have a significant impact on the carbon emissions associated with our water usage.

Working closely with rail industry partners including Rail Safety Standards Board and the Department for Transport we have developed noise and air quality management plans which set out opportunities to improve these impacts in the near and longer term.

**Waste data is difficult to capture and not exact.*

7.2 Innovative fast-charge battery trial now under way

Our specialist engineers have successfully tested the compatibility of the fast-charge technology with the Class 230 battery train on the Greenford branch line.

Mark Hopwood CBE said: “We want GWR to be at the forefront of the railway’s commitment to phase out diesel-only traction by 2040 and this demonstrates that we put our customers at the heart of everything we do.” “This is why we took on the challenge and are taking an industry-leading approach in not only battery train operation, but the development of the fast-charge system.” “It’s important to remember this work has never been done before. It’s designed to test the capability and viability of the fast-charge technology – and demonstrates Great Western Railway taking a bold and broad approach towards replacing diesel-only trains with greener units.”

“We want GWR to be at the forefront of the railway’s commitment to phase out diesel-only traction by 2040 and this demonstrates that we put our customers at the heart of everything we do.”

Mark Hopwood CBE said



Former Rail Minister Huw Merriman said: “We’re ambitious about making the railways even more sustainable and this trial, backed by Government funding, could pave the way for greener journeys for millions of passengers across the network. Rail is already the most environmentally friendly form of public transport and battery-powered technology will play an important role in further decarbonising it, helping us reach our net-zero target by 2050.”



Watch the fast charge battery trial



7.3 Community Rail

In tough financial times, with public spending feeling the pinch of inflation, it’s really important we highlight the true value of the tireless work done by community rail partnerships all over the network.



Access our Annual Community Report



Customer and Community Improvement Fund

In March 2023, we launched the second round of our Customer and Community Improvement Fund which supports projects connected to the railway and which address an area of social need.



Strawberry Line Cycle Project, a not-for-profit cycle hire scheme at Yatton station, used a grant of £13,150 to expand its fleet of bikes. This included purchasing a Velopius wheelchair accessible bike, fitted with a power pack to give riders greater ease and the ability to travel further.

In total we received over 420 bids totalling almost £11million which was significantly more than the CCI Fund budget, but we were delighted to be able to support 57 projects, investing £825,000 in our communities.

Captivating film archives open up nostalgic railway journeys into the past

Passengers across Somerset, Wiltshire and Dorset can now travel back in time as part of an archive film project by Windrose Rural Media Trust, inspired by a 1936 film called Great Western Approaches.

Windrose director Trevor Bailey said: “Long ago, the Great Western Railway saw the potential of film to promote its trains and the places they served. It has an extraordinary heritage and the modern GWR is proud to link past glories with today’s progress.”

Windrose used footage 1909 to the 1990s to craft short films relevant to 24 stations across seven routes. Each film explores local life as it used to be, allowing customers to travel into the past via a QR code link on posters displayed at stations, which can be scanned into phones while waiting for the train.



7.4 Community Rail and Stakeholder Conference 2024

In June, we hosted our annual Community Rail and Stakeholder conference at the STEAM museum in Swindon, the theme of the conference was Valuing our Partnerships.

We welcomed Lord Peter Hendy as our keynote speaker, at the time Chairman of Network Rail and now Rail Minister, and Councillor Andrea Davis, Chair of Peninsula Transport as well as speakers from GWR, Akerlof, Lifecycle UK and Community Rail partners from Oxfordshire and Devon and Cornwall.

We looked at the future of our railway and how we can work collaboratively with our partners to sustain our industry in the long term. David Harding, Head of Analysis and Economics at Network Rail spoke on the rail industry's finances and government subsidies and Rachel Geliamassi spoke passionately about how people are at the centre of success at GWR.

There were plenty of questions from the floor for our panellists including both Mark Hopwood and Marcus Jones who concluded the day with business updates from GWR and NR Western.



7.5 David Northey, Chair of Travel Watch South West

The Board of Directors and I have been busy during the last year with re-focusing on what we do as an organisation, supporting national and local campaigns, working with our members and groups to promote sustainable transport, whilst highlighting the inequalities in our transport system across the region, which stretches from Swindon, Wiltshire and Dorset, through Somerset, Devon and Cornwall, as well as the areas covered by the West of England Combined Authority and Gloucestershire.

This geographical area means that we cover a wide and diverse network of trains and buses and engaged with local operators such as Great Western Railway (GWR) both at board level and those who have day to day responsibilities such as Bus and Rail Integration. The relationship GWR has built with stakeholders is demonstrated by successes like bus rail integration work, which has taken a life of its own from grassroots concepts selected by local need. Working in partnership with GWR staff such as Luke Farley that we have seen closer ties between rail and bus services and penetrated the connectivity philosophy for the wider region. Okehampton and Barnstaple bus integration projects have opened up access to towns like Lynton & Lynmouth and Bude and have giving passengers greater trust in taking the train, knowing that the bus will be part of the journey offering. Consequently, there is an appetite from towns and communities left behind following railway closures for the same. This is a real opportunity to put them back on the map and Travel Watch South West look forward to working with Nicholas Reid, who has taken up the role of Transport Integration at GWR.

The role of Travel Watch South West over the last year saw us bring together many user groups and communities worried about the loss of the ticket offices as part of the plan to closed them down and reconfigure that offer being made at these stations. We were able to facilitate meetings whether on line or face to face to engage with worried communities. This enable us to empower and inform those who attended to write into and make sure

their voice was heard. There were real concerns from disability and elderly groups about what this would mean for them and the impact it would have on accessing rail as a form of transport. As a result of the engagement the timeline was extended, as it was clear that full diligence had not been taken; and resulted in over 600 thousand people responding, which forced a halt to the whole proceedings. It doesn't mean its gone away as we know that the way people purchase tickets is changing, although complex journeys and bookings still exist and speaking with someone who can help is invaluable.

With over 100 stakeholder groups Travel Watch South West engages and offers expert support to Community Groups including the Somerset Bus Partnership, Get Swindon Moving ,Transport Campaign Groups, Bus and Rail User Groups. We also work with train and bus organisations who support our region, including GWR, SWR and Cross Country Trains, First Bus, Stagecoach and independent operators to help give support and guidance on user requirements. I touched on bus rail integration and this is a hot topic with friends at SBP and we are working to develop plans across the County. Challenges with funding means that this can be difficult, although when working together as a partnership, as we have seen in Gloucestershire and Devon this can result in positive changes for passengers.

What is ahead of us, the Kings Speech and the new Government has identified some key changes to train and buses, with a bill to bring train operators back into public ownership, to introduce Great British Railways and to introduce bus franchises as seen in Manchester with the Bee Network. This means that there will be lots to consider and to help influence and support partners as these Bills proceed through Parliament.

Travel Watch South West will be hosting the 2025 European Passengers' Federation Conference in Swindon on June 13 & 14 and we look forward to seeing partners from across the UK being involved in this bicentenary year for passenger rail.

7.6 Do you hear what I hear?

Travellers on board the 1413 service from Bath Spa to London Paddington enjoyed a unique yuletide journey as the choir of 23 girls, aged 12 to 18 years old from Bath Abbey Girls' Choir, carolled their way through the carriages with some traditional Christmas songs ahead of a concert at Cordwainers Livery Company in the City.

A cappella renditions of classic carols such as Ding Dong Merrily on High, Hark! The Herald Angels Sing and Away in a Manger were performed on board the Intercity Express Train, with customers in every carriage showing their appreciation with a hearty round of applause.

“Working closely with the communities we serve is at the heart of what we do, and we would like to thank the choirs for providing such wonderful festive entertainment for our customers and colleagues throughout December.”

David Crome, Head of On Board Train Service

Our Head of On Board Train Service, David Crome, said: “It’s not every day we have a full choir performing on board our trains, and Bath Abbey Girls’ Choir has made this a very memorable Monday with their beautiful singing. Working closely with the communities we serve is at the heart of what we do, and we would like to thank the choirs for providing such wonderful festive entertainment for our customers and colleagues throughout December.”

Bath Abbey’s Director of Music, Huw Williams, said: “We are very proud to partner with GWR this December to help bring some Christmas cheer for its customers. The children have had so much fun performing on board its trains and at its stations this month, which has helped to raise funds for the choir. We are very grateful for GWR’s continued support in bringing visitors to Bath and to our events at the Abbey.”



Watch the choir bring Festive cheer



7.7 150 years of the Marlow Branch Line

We celebrated the 150th anniversary of the Marlow Branch Line with a special livery on one of our trains.

The design – a map of the branch line running along the River Thames – marks the day the line between Bourne End and Marlow first became operational and features on unit 165122.

Trains first ran on the line on 27 June 1873, linking Marlow to the Great Western mainline at Maidenhead and bringing more opportunity to connect the Buckinghamshire community to London and Cornwall.

The celebration saw us welcome members of several community groups, including the Marlow & District Railway Society and Marlow-Maidenhead Passengers’ Association, on board the newly-liveried train.

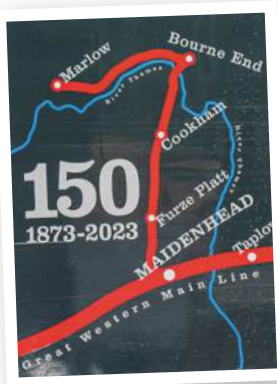
Guests disembarked at Bourne End station for speeches before enjoying an impressive cake in the design of the train’s new livery.

The former MP for Maidenhead and member of our Advisory Board Baroness Theresa May said: “This much-used connection has linked the community of Marlow to the GWR mainline and served my constituents in Cookham and Furze Platt for a century-and-a-half, and with it brought many economic benefits.”

“This is a remarkable milestone, serving as a testament to the enduring legacy of railway infrastructure.”

Joy Morrissey, Beaconsfield MP

Beaconsfield MP Joy Morrissey said: “It is heart-warming to see Great Western Railway’s Bourne End-Marlow line celebrate its 150th anniversary today. This is a remarkable milestone, serving as a testament to the enduring legacy of railway infrastructure. The Bourne End-Marlow line has played an integral role in the lives of my constituents, from facilitating connectivity and progress to fostering economic growth, and cementing a strong sense of community. It has remained steadfast in serving the needs of commuters, tourists and locals alike. Today’s 150th anniversary celebration goes beyond its status as a railway line; it represents a century-and-a-half of connecting communities. I’m confident in the line’s continued future, serving the community for many years to come with its unwavering commitment.”





8.0 Engine For Growth

8.1 Integrated Transport

Bus/Rail Integration



In partnership with Devon County Council and Stagecoach, our latest 'Rail Link' bus service was launched – the 301 between Barnstaple, Ilfracombe and Combe Martin. Two buses received dedicated liveries and timetables matched

with train services arriving at Barnstaple station. Since the relaunch, passenger numbers using the bus route to the station are almost four-times higher than before.

The new bus interchange at Taunton station was opened. To complement the scheme, the station received new wayfinding and a bus information screen to provide seamless interchange between rail and bus. The scheme also included additional cycle parking provision.



We worked closely with Wiltshire Council to support their launch of their 'Wiltshire Connect' demand responsive bus network. Our support included the branding of vehicles with 'Rail Link' livery, updating of station wayfinding/signage to promote the service at Bedwyn, Pewsey and Hungerford stations and the production of a marketing promotional video. Additionally, Wiltshire Council is leading on a scheme to provide new bus interchange facilities and cycle parking at Bedwyn, partly funded by the GWR Community Fund.



The 'Airport Flyer' bus from Weston-super-Mare was re-routed to serve Worle station from 11th June as a result of partnership working between GWR, Bristol Airport and First West of England. GWR has supported with the introduction of through ticketing from any rail station to Bristol Airport routed via Weston-super-Mare or Worle stations. We have also developed an extensive marketing campaign to support growth on the route. Initial indications showed healthy growth, with the usual post-summer 'slump' in numbers not happening. Just under 6,000 passengers used the service in August 2023, rising to just over 7,000 in both September and October 2023.



We continued to support the Government's £2 bus fare initial through refreshing our marketing campaign at stations and on our social media platforms.

In partnership with Devon County Council, we installed new bus shelters to serve passengers at Exeter Central and Crediton stations.

- We continued to support the development and promotion of existing 'Rail Link' bus routes. The first scheme (Totnes to Salcombe), which was launched in Summer 2021, has seen sustained passenger growth; The monthly average passenger numbers have increased on the route by 138% between 2021 and 2024.
- Roll out of 'QR code posters' giving bus departure information and directions to bus stops at stations where screens are not provided.



The 2023 GWR Community Rail and Stakeholder Conference had a theme of Integrated Transport, bringing together stakeholders and telling the story of our work so far. The event included stands, presentations and a display of ‘rail link’ buses outside the venue.



We continued our programme of branding bus shelters with highly visible customer information, highlighting the stop as an interchange with rail. Locations benefitting from this approach included Exeter Central, Crediton, Evesham, Carmarthen (in partnership with Transport for Wales), Worle, Castle Cary, Highbridge & Burnham and Cheltenham Spa.



We enjoyed close partnerships with Town Councils and Community Groups delivering a range of ‘quick win’ improvements, including:

- Burnham-on-Sea town council: Bus information poster boards at the station, wayfinding signs between the rail station and bus stops and bus shelter wraps on Church Street which also highlight the town’s railway heritage.
- We have completed design and approvals work to build better bus interchange facilities at Totnes, Tiverton Parkway and Cheltenham Spa stations in 24/25.
- We supported the West of England Combined Authority in trialling their demand responsive bus service ‘WESTlink’ at Keynsham station.
- Completion of development of wayfinding schemes in Cornwall Council area, linking Falmouth, Saltash, Penzance, Lostwithiel, Newquay and Camborne railway stations with key interchange areas including buses and ferry terminals. These will be delivered on the ground in 24/25 FY.



Saltash Town Council: Holding an Integrated Transport Forum with stakeholders from across Devon & Cornwall – highlighting best practice, celebrating our collective successes and planning for the year ahead.



Cycle/Rail Integration

We have worked with Beryl Bikes to ensure the provision of hire docks at stations across Plymouth & Cornwall, including St Austell, Truro, Saltash and Plymouth. This has been accompanied by a marketing partnership which has seen GWR-branded hire bikes being delivered in the Plymouth hire area.

Severnside Community Rail Partnership: Improvements to wayfinding signage at stations across the area, audited and suggested by the CRP. We also held monthly working parties to plan improvements. We worked together to promote community-led cycle hire at Avonmouth station including the installation of promotional banners. We also supported the CRP to support an intern who conducted a project to identify and report on Integrated Transport opportunities in the region.

New cycle parking delivered at Liskeard and Moreton-in-Marsh stations.



Integrated Marketing

Marketing partnership developed with various operators to promote the use of GWR rail services in partnership with other modes of transport, including:

- First South: Promoting GWR/SWR train journeys to Weymouth and then a day on the Portland Coaster open-top bus.
- Beryl Bikes: Bikes branded in GWR livery to promote the use of Beryl Bikes to and from GWR stations in the Plymouth area.
- Bristol Airport: Promoting access to the airport by GWR train to Bristol Temple Meads, Weston-super-Mare or Worle and onward 'Airport Flyer' bus.
- Visit Somerset: Destination-led marketing incorporating messaging about the combined use of public transport in Somerset, in particular GWR and Buses of Somerset.
- South West Coast Path: Promoting one-way walks along the path using bus/rail to access either end.



We completed delivery of our information & marketing partnership with the Thames Path National Trail, which included a marketing campaign and improvements to wayfinding signs between rail station and the path at Henley-on-Thames and Marlow.



- Wayfinding improvements at various stations including Taunton, Swindon, Bristol Parkway, Weston-super-Mare and Crediton.



We were delighted to accept several awards during the year, recognising GWR's work to further Integrated Transport:

- National Rail Awards 2023: Small Station of the Year – Okehampton, with particular note to the station's bus links and integration.
- National Transport Awards 2023: Best Alliance/Collaboration of the Year – Cornwall Council, GWR and Bus Operators for the 'Transport for Cornwall' network.
- Rail Business Awards 2024: Excellence in Accessibility & Integrated Transport



8.2 East Region



Reading West Station

In March 2024, we opened a modern new station building at Reading West Railway Station. The transformation of the station in Oxford Road includes new ticket gates, new lighting and CCTV cameras to significantly improve safety and security of the local community and travelling public and opened to the public on Tuesday 19 March.

Reading Borough Council worked with Network Rail and GWR to deliver the £5million project and Cllr John Ennis, Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport, said: "Local residents who use Reading West station will notice a big improvement following this major upgrade. They will be able to enjoy much better facilities, such as a ticket office and toilets, with the opening of the modern new station building on Oxford Road and improved access from Tilehurst Road.

Alison Webster, Chief Executive Officer of Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership, said: "Local commuter stations, such as Reading West, are critical in providing access to major employment and commercial centres. Berkshire LEP is delighted to have invested £3.1 million of the Government's Local Growth Fund to support improvements at Reading West."

More services on the North Downs Line from Reading

Two trains an hour now operate to/from the airport Monday to Saturday, extending the service which currently terminates at Redhill, making a half-hourly direct service and reflecting the airport's welcome recovery in passenger numbers.

Services have also been slightly retimed to even out the timetable and now provide regular "clockface" departure times.

GWR Station Manager for the North Downs line, Andrew Gallagher, said: "We are really pleased to be able to further improve the services we offer to and from the airport. Supporting the local economy, investing in the railway and enabling more people to make sustainable transport choices is really important to us, and this is another step forward for customers of the North Downs Line."

The new trains began operation from Monday 11 December.

Phase 2 of the developments at Oxford Station

While at time of going to press, we await further detail on the completion date for the scheme. We continue to work closely with Network Rail to support them in mitigating the impact on customers during construction. Once completed, the new Western entrance will provide welcome additional capacity for a station which is testament to the significant increase in demand for rail services within the local area.

We also look forward to the introduction of East West Rail services at Oxford, using the new platform currently under construction adjacent to platform 4.



Newbury Station

The multi-million-pound redevelopment of Newbury station is now complete with three business growth units offering new employment opportunities for the town.

The Engine Shed Business Growth Units will help support Newbury’s economic development and form part of a wider transformation of the station which has included new customer facilities, new ticket gates, a multi-storey car park, cycle hubs and improved pedestrian access.

We worked closely with West Berkshire Council (WBC), Berkshire LEP, Network Rail and Grainger PLC to provide the enhanced customer experience.

Grainger PLC also delivered a new 160-space multi-storey public car park with electric car charging points; a new access road; and a new pedestrian access to the town centre.

Councillor Billy Drummond, Vice Chairman of West Berkshire Council, said: “The joint investment and vision for the Market Street development demonstrates the confidence we all have in Newbury’s vibrant economy. The redevelopment has pleasantly enhanced the area with new amenities, improved access to Newbury town centre and new housing. This visionary initiative has played a pivotal role in the Newbury Vision 2026, and we look forward to welcoming more residents, businesses and visitors to Newbury.”

Berkshire LEP Chief Executive, Alison Webster, said: “Berkshire LEP is delighted to see the completion of the Newbury Station redevelopment project. As a strategic partner the LEP has invested £6.7 million of government Local Growth Fund towards the total project costs of £19 million. We know that the improvements already provide an improved passenger experience and will encourage further sustainable access to the station as well as support local businesses and provide employment opportunities through the new business growth units.”



New projects

We are pleased to have received funding from the Department for Transport to enhance the retail space at Twyford station, a much-loved station with services to London Paddington, Reading and the Henley Branch Line. The project will allow for improved seating, a lighter, brighter ticket hall, new, modern ticket desks, and a new retail unit. We look forward to progressing these designs, working closely with local partners, to create a welcoming entrance at Twyford station. The station itself has seen significant growth from the introduction of the Elizabeth Line and improved connectivity to central London, and this much needed investment will improve the overall look and feel of the main station building.

New Regional Development Manager, Eleanor Wills

In March 2024, we welcomed Eleanor Wills as the Regional Development Manager for the East. Eleanor joins us with a wealth of industry experience, having previously worked at the Department for Transport, where she led on the strategy and funding of individual major projects and was part of the team designing the post-pandemic industry reforms. Eleanor has also worked at KPMG, including supporting the Great British Railways Transition Team to take forward new industry business planning and innovative partnerships policy.

Eleanor’s appointment further strengthens our regional focus. Her expertise will enable us to continue responding to evolving national priorities such as the greater devolution of transport services and increased local influence, as highlighted in this year’s King’s Speech. Additionally, Eleanor will also be working to ensure we can deliver a new strategy for regional growth in partnership with our stakeholders.

Eleanor expressed her enthusiasm: “Having worked across the industry, this is a unique opportunity to address changing customer needs and enhance our services at Great Western Railway. Our customers are a key guiding mind, and we aim to ensure that the schemes we invest in support broader strategic priorities for communities across the East of the network and beyond. I am excited to collaborate closely with local authorities, key partner organisations, businesses, and transport authorities to advance our joint priorities for the future.”





8.3 Hannah Godfrey, Senior Surface Access Manager, London Gatwick

At London Gatwick we are incredibly proud of our excellent rail connectivity, with fast and frequent services to stations across London and the South East. This accessibility contributes to a rail mode share of nearly 40%, and we aspire to increase this to 50%.

The Reading to Gatwick service is one of the most valuable routes, providing vital east to west connectivity from the airport and into Surrey, Hampshire, Berkshire and onward connections to the West, Wales and South West. We work collaboratively and in partnership with Great Western Railway to maximise this critical connection, which benefits not only our passengers and staff, but the communities living along the North Downs Line.

In 2023, London Gatwick contributed £200,000 from our Sustainable Transport Fund to GWR, to support the doubling of the service from Gatwick to Reading to two trains per hour. The funding contributed to the additional operating costs, and to a marketing campaign to promote the line via posters in stations and on social media. The promotion continued with the publication of a video, showcasing the ease of the passenger journey from train to plane.

The partnership with GWR forms a key part of our strategic goals for sustainability, our Decade of Change programme, which aims for 60% of passenger and staff journeys to the airport to be made by public transport, zero and ultra-low emission modes by 2030. GWR understands and shares our aspirations for sustainable, integrated transport and mode shift and this alignment underpins the collaborative approach we take to achieve our mutual goals.

The engagement we receive across GWR's business is exceptional, from dinner at the House of Lords, to drop-in events, stakeholder conferences and regular catch-ups with key members of the team. GWR's participation in our own annual Transport Forum and quarterly Transport Forum Steering Group is also hugely valued by the airport team and our broader stakeholders.

Turning to the future, we are consistently encouraged by GWR's innovative, customer-centric and forward-thinking approach to planning. The battery-powered train is an exciting approach to the challenge of decarbonising the railway – visiting the trial on the West Ealing to Greenford line was a real insight into the potential future of services and rolling-stock on the North Downs Line.

London Gatwick believes there are real opportunities for the rail industry to expand its market among airport passengers by extending operational hours support the airport's 'first wave' of early morning flights. Most of these passengers are currently arriving at the airport by car due to limited public transport options at these times, while more rail services would also support our operational, shift-working staff to travel to work via more sustainable modes.

Great Western are already rising to this challenge, working with us and Network Rail to understand the potential opportunity and the options available to trial or introduce timetable changes, recognising the need for maintenance and track access. I'm looking forward to building on and deepening our partnership, and continuing to deliver improvements for airport and rail passengers and local communities along the North Downs Line.

8.4 Central Region



Metro West

In May this year we were delighted to celebrate the first year of enhanced services between Bristol – Westbury and Bristol – Gloucester as a key part of the Metro West strategy. These services, launched by the Metro Mayor in May 2023 and funded by the West of England Combined Authority, have contributed to an average 27% increase in journeys on these important routes. In total over 3.4m journeys were undertaken in 2023/24. The success of these services demonstrates the value of investing in the local rail network across the West of England to support the return to rail.

Ashley Down

An exciting and brand new station at Ashley Down is taking shape on the line between Bristol Parkway and Bristol Temple Meads. GWR is working closely with Network Rail, Bristol City Council and the scheme promoter West of England Combined Authority to get the station ready for opening later this year. When opened Ashley Down will provide important local connections to places including Filton Abbey Wood and Bristol Temple Meads. This is the service that will eventually connect to North Filton (for the Brabazon Arena) and Henbury when this line comes into use as part of a later phase of Metro West.



TransWilts

In December 2023 it was exactly 10 years since Swindon – Westbury services were increased in a joint partnership between Wiltshire Council, Great Western Railway, the Department for Transport and local users.

In that time, TransWilts services between Swindon and Westbury have clocked up more than one million passenger-carrying miles – the equivalent of travelling to the moon and back....TWICE!



Castle Cary

A much-needed new car park at Castle Cary station officially opened for rail users.

The vital project, with land purchased by the railway, more than doubles the previous capacity of the car park and was officially opened on Thursday 16 May.

Funded by GWR and the Department for Transport and delivered with the help of the Emily Estate, the facility provides 193 new spaces, four electric vehicle spaces, new lighting, a new accessible route linking the car park to the station and improvements to the existing forecourt and bus stop.

Castle Cary is an important station serving a wide catchment across Somerset as well as being the main rail gateway to the Glastonbury Festival each year.

Further investment to renovate station buildings is taking place and GWR and Network Rail were pleased to secure funding to bring forward a brand new lift bridge. Together with the Emily Estate’s amazing renovation and conversion of buildings opposite the station into a Creamery, with shop, café / restaurant and cheese making facilities, this corner of South Somerset has been totally transformed.

National Community Rail Week

GWR was proud to host the launch of National Community Rail week at Yatton in May to celebrate the connection between the railway and the communities it serves. Hosted by the Community Rail Network and Severnside Partnership, the event showcased the work of local volunteers and local businesses and how the railway can encourage innovation, inclusion and diversity.

Rupee the dog was the star attraction at the launch of Rupee & Sushi Travel By Train, the perfect companion for those making their first journey by rail.

Written by Carys Thomas, a safety audit manager at Great Western Railway, the book centres on her real-life shih tzu cross rescues Rupee, four, and Sushi, eight.

Readers are given a couple of alternative scenarios and invited to choose their own journey as they navigate their first trip, including planning ahead, purchasing tickets, boarding and then leaving the train ahead of a day out at the beach.



8.6 West Region



Exeter Central improvements

In 2023 GWR and Network Rail were successful in securing funding from the Industry Revenue Generating Investment Fund (IRGI) for widening the gateline at Exeter Central and associated improvements in the concourse. The scheme, which is currently in design, will benefit customers by reducing queues and improving waiting areas and the retail offer. Delivery is expected to commence from Spring 2025.

Further investment is being pursued from the IRGI fund for other projects across the network, including car park schemes, improvements to retailing and concourses and smart ticketing initiatives. We hope to be able to announce the results of this soon.

Okehampton Interchange

The name of a new a railway station near Okehampton was revealed in a special ceremony. Key figures from Great Western Railway; Network Rail; Devon County Council and West Devon District Council, along with Central Devon MP, Mel Stride, met at the site of the planned new station to unveil its name on Friday 10 May.

To be known as Okehampton Interchange, the station will be on the edge of Okehampton and only a 2 minute drive from the A30 to improve rail access for North Cornwall and West Devon. The new station will have a larger car park than Okehampton, as well as improved bus links and better access by walking and cycling.

Services between Okehampton and Exeter have gone from strength to strength, since the station opened in November 2021. Now an hourly service, over 410,000 journeys were made on the line in the last year of operation.



West Region

Mid Cornwall Metro

Cornwall Council, supported by GWR and Network Rail, successfully secured the green light for investment in Mid Cornwall Metro in December 2023 as part of the Council's Levelling Up allocation. The scheme will provide an hourly direct service connecting Newquay, Par, St Austell, Truro, Penryn and Falmouth, as well as station improvements at Newquay and improved accessibility and interchange at Par. Earlier this year we were successful in acquiring property at Par which will accommodate improved staff accommodation to support the new services.



Marsh Barton

Devon's newest station has celebrated its first birthday and those involved in the grand opening marked the special day with a celebratory cake. Devon County Council were the scheme promoter and funder. Festivities were in full swing on Monday 8 July 2024, following the first anniversary of the opening of the station. In its first full year more than 90,000 passenger journeys have been made, benefitting local residents and businesses in the area.

8.8 Wales Region

2023-24 was a big year for GWR in Wales with a number of key changes to our timetable and customer offer for communities in Wales. This kicked off at the start of the year with the biggest timetable change for GWR in Wales since 2019, boosting connectivity in Carmarthenshire & reconnecting key leisure destinations in Pembrokeshire through the Summer.

GWR introduced 65 extra trains a week from May 2023 – which now means Carmarthen, Llanelli & Pembrey & Burry Port have GWR service roughly every 2 hours 7 days a week, increased from two trains a day and a few on Sundays before the change. These services are extensions of our existing train services from Swansea through to London Paddington, so offer new direct connections from Carmarthenshire to Bristol & London. Operated by our Intercity Express Trains they bring long distance trains and 1st class travel to Carmarthenshire with greater availability of good value Advance Purchase Tickets, starting from £32.

GWR worked with Discover Carmarthenshire, the Destination Management Organisation, to promote the new services as well as delivering marketing activity on at stations and on our own social media.

Lee Waters MS for Llanelli said: "We are committed to improving rail services in West Wales, therefore the news that GWR are extending their existing Swansea services through to Llanelli, Pembrey & Burry Port, and Carmarthen, an increase of 65 direct services to and from Bristol and London every week, is very welcome.

The introduction of more rail services is an important part of our plan to boost sustainable transport, making the right choice, the easy one: leaving the car at home and instead, catching a train."

The extra services in Carmarthenshire were Highly Commended at the Rail Business Awards in March 2024.

Our extra services to Carmarthen are running all year round and during the summer support our additional Summer Saturdays services to Tenby & Pembroke Dock. These have long been a part of our service to South West Wales and offer direction train services from London, Bristol, Cardiff & Swansea to destinations in South Pembrokeshire, along the line to Pembroke Dock. This includes key resort destinations of Tenby & Saundersfoot, the historic town of Pembroke as well as hidden gems like Narbeth & Manorbier.

The services were suspended during the pandemic but returned for Summer 2023, running four services on Saturdays between June & September – one from Swansea to Pembroke Dock, one from Paddington and two return journeys back to Paddington. While industrial action affected some of the Summer season, we're pleased to be serving these key leisure destinations again.





Performance focus at Cardiff Central

GWR’s Performance Team have been working closely with Network Rail & Transport for Wales to support improved train service delivery at Cardiff Central. The station is managed and operated by Transport for Wales but is a key station for all train operators in Wales. The project is focussed on improving right time starts and punctual departures for services, particularly those travelling East towards Newport & Bristol where a delay in Wales can continue to affect punctuality all the way to Portsmouth, Penzance or Paddington.

One customer benefit to come out of the project was improved Customer Information Screens, funded by Transport for Wales which makes platform zoning information easier for customers to see. This helps customers make sure they’re in the right place to board their train, reducing the time for customers to board and helping trains to leave on time. The improved screens make better use of platform zoning originally introduced by GWR at stations across the network when IETs were introduced in 2018.

GWR’s heritage in Wales goes back over 100 years and we are always looking for ways to celebrate that heritage, and the communities we serve. In July 2023, we celebrated 75 years of the NHS with Aneira Thomas – the first baby born on the NHS – as she named a train at Newport station after the former Minister for Health, and Tredegar MP Aneurin Bevan.

Following the ceremony, the Aneurin Bevan train operated a service to London Paddington, calling at Swindon to acknowledge the role the town’s railway industry played in the formation of the NHS.

The Great Western Railway Medical Fund Society (MFS) was formed in 1847 with money raised by direct deductions from the wages of colleagues at the GWR works in Swindon. it is reported that Bevan later remarked: “There it was, a complete health service. All we had to do was to expand it to embrace the whole country!”

Wales Region

Community Rail Awards

Swansea Arena is part of the Copr Bae redevelopment at the city’s waterfront, creating a new multi-purpose events space. GWR were pleased to work with Transport for Wales to bring the Community Rail Network’s Community Rail Awards to this new venue in March 2024, as joint hosts with Transport for Wales.

The Awards celebrate the great work that Community Rail Partnerships, Station Adoption Groups and volunteers do on and around the railway across the whole country. The event itself is a gala dinner and presentation but nominees are invited to spend some time in the host location, showcasing the local area

and the work that South West Wales Connected do as the local Community Rail Partnership.

Community Rail Network Chief Executive, Jools Townsend, said: “Our Community Rail Awards give deserved recognition to community rail partnerships, groups and volunteers across Britain and now beyond. This year’s ceremony in Swansea saw 430 guests from across the community rail movement and transport sector celebrating community rail’s role building stronger, fairer, greener communities, served and connected by their railways and wider sustainable transport network.”





8.9 Cllr Rob Stewart,
Leader of Swansea Council

Public transport is vital to the residents, businesses and communities of Swansea and rail travel is a key element. It's at the heart of our ambition for the future economic regeneration of Swansea and the whole South West Wales region.

I'm proud of Swansea and what the city can offer residents and visitors. While many come to the city to enjoy our beautiful coastline and all its wonderful beaches, lots come to enjoy what we can offer during the night-time. The challenge we all face is to connect our communities, businesses, visitors and residents with each other using an affordable, timely and welcoming public transport network. Our residents tell us that public transport they can use to get to work, visit friends and enjoy going places is among their top priorities.

Our city centre is brimming with activity in the evenings, with people enjoying themselves in the many bars, restaurants and activity providers on offer. The new Arena provides a fantastic facility for entertainment and has been one of the key regeneration schemes. Recently, I've acknowledged comments from many of those visitors who want better train links that provide services much later in the evening. This is something I would welcome for the future and look forward to Swansea Council working with rail operators to meet those requests

The arena and our night-time economy is just one example of how public transport is key to ensuring Swansea city centre can be a thriving place to work, visit and live, now and in the years to come. As part of the £1bn transformation of the city centre we're making great strides in the coming year with the opening of new space for tech and digital businesses, the regeneration of Castle Square Gardens, Palace Theatre and Albert Hall. Private sector investors are playing their part by creating new office space and new residential

property in the city centre. Alongside our development partners Urban Splash we're looking to entice even more investors into Swansea in the coming years.

Part of the success story so far and absolutely critical to our continuing effort to realise our ambitions for the future are the partnerships we have with GWR, other transport providers and local councils across the region. We are working together to develop and deliver the Swansea Bay and West Wales Metro project which aims to create a joined-up rail, bus and public transport network that really delivers for our communities. The scale of our joint ambition is reflected in the expectation that the rail elements of the Swansea Bay Metro project are projected to add over a million journeys to the rail network, helping move more people out of cars and on to public transport than any other scheme in Wales.

A case for change for a regional transport plan covering Swansea, Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire and Neath Port Talbot is currently out for consultation. This highlights the challenges but also the continuing benefits of an improving public transport network that better meets the needs of local people and communities across the region, both urban and rural. www.cjcsouthwest.wales/37213

GWR has always been part of our community. Its investment in Swansea Railway Station on the city's High Street has been a welcome boost to the area. So too is its continuing support for our city's annual Wales Airshow. We're working with GWR on plans for through-ticketing and aligning bus-rail connectivity to make public transport an easier, more efficient and more enjoyable experience for passengers whether they live locally or are here for a visit. Together we are stronger, transforming what we do and planning for the future so we can make a positive difference for our communities every day.



8.10 Transport Lewis Brencher,
Director of Communications and
Engagement, Transport for Wales

Transport for Wales (TfW) has continued to work closely with GWR colleagues during 2023/24, from joint marketing campaigns, public affairs, communications, stakeholder management to collaborating operationally, including successfully managing tens of thousands of passengers travelling into and out of Cardiff attending special events.

The RIA Wales and Western Leadership Group has been established this year, with TfW and GWR key members of this rail industry group, which is focused on working together on four key priorities for the region.

Our Joint Communication Board continues to meet regularly bringing together representatives from both GWR and TfW to ensure major event, engineering and safety campaigns are coordinated and communicated in parallel.

We were also delighted to welcome GWR colleagues to our train naming ceremony at Carmarthen in early 2024. We hosted a joint Senedd drop-in, continued to jointly host elected representatives meetings across the South Wales Mainline and we've been collaborating on stakeholder engagement opportunities for the coming year.



The huge investment and introduction of our brand-new fleet continued at a good pace during 2023/24. This year has seen huge change, with the last of the Class 175s and 170s leaving towards the end of last year as more



and more areas of the rail network across Wales and Borders received the brand new Class 197 trains.

In total TfW will be operating 77 of the Class 197 units and over 50 of these have now been accepted and are serving customers the length and breadth of the Wales and Borders network. Their introduction to Fishguard, Pembroke Dock, Milford, Ebbw Vale and Maesteg this year has helped improve connections from GWR services running between Paddington and Carmarthen.

Coupled with the new Class 231 fleet on the Rhymney line it means more and more TfW passengers are now traveling on a far superior type of train. We also launched direct services between Ebbw Vale and Newport which is already paying dividends with more than 40,000 extra customers journeys made already this year. The new services mean people on the line no longer need to travel into Cardiff if they want to make journeys to Bristol, London or Manchester.

Our marketing teams have worked very closely this year on campaigns showcasing destinations across Wales and Borders network including Trails in Wales – which was led by Visit Wales, Wales Week in London and we're currently working on a future joint campaign with TfW, GWR and Visit Pembrokeshire, showcasing destinations accessible via rail. The collaboration between TfW and GWR continues to strengthen year on year and we're very much looking forward to working alongside them over the coming year on a range of exciting projects.

