



Great Western Railway

Customer Panel - Didcot Parkway – 6 February 2018

We met with a range of customers who, as panel members, had been invited to join us for the evening.

Various members of GWR including our Customer Service and Transformation Director provided updates on key issues such as our new trains, investment in the region, electrification, Crossrail and a possible new franchise.

Throughout the meeting, customers had the chance to ask questions, or raise concerns. Where possible we've provided answers below.

Customer Panels

How do GWR select panel members?

We run recruitment drives for our customer pool throughout the year, using social media and station posters that direct them to GWR.com.

When we are planning a regional panel meeting, we email members who live in surrounding areas, based on their postcodes. We also use social media and station posters – as well as reaching out to user groups.

A relatively small number of customers attended; how will GWR share their comment?

We publish our customers comments on GWR.com. If an issue is particularly important, we'll highlight it on the customer panel page until it's been closed.

We also use National Rail Passenger Survey results, and feedback from our Meet the Manager sessions to listen to customers and act on issues raised.

We are also looking at how we might use social media to broadcast the sessions for wider participation and better dissemination of information.

It wasn't clear to some attendees how notes were taken on the night; also, topics did wander at times. Could you set some firmer rules, and record the subjects discussed on a flipchart?

We want to encourage as much participation as possible and at future meetings, we'll make sure there are 2 note-takers – as well as a facilitator. This should help to keep discussions focused.



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There was too much to discuss; it would be good if you could have clearer topics.

We're still working out the best format for our customer panels. At the next regional meeting, in Cardiff, we'll ask customers for topics in advance – which will help us have a clearer agenda.

How do you involve customers who have joined your online community?

Our online community consists of customers from all across the network. We recruit attendees for our regional panel meetings from here. We also carry out targeted surveys – including so far, how we handle planned improvement work and railway upgrades, our Pullman Dining service, and our Cardiff to Portsmouth route – which will be used to improve our services.

Will you have a newsletter for panel members?

We are planning a newsletter, as well as a website for members where they could access news and surveys.

GWR talk about the panel being inclusive, but at meetings this doesn't seem to be the case?

Our new panel has a far broader mix of customers than before, we send invites out based on postcodes and welcome everyone, and while we can't be sure who will actually attend each time, we will do our best to improve the mix as we go forward.

Will you be reinstating Meet the Manager sessions at stations?

Yes, we are looking to reinstate regular Meet the Manager sessions at some of our busiest stations and most popular routes.



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Performance

Is GWR's Moving Annual Average declining?

Yes. Performance hasn't been up to standard recently, and we apologise for the inconvenience cause. There are a number of reasons for this, including transition to our new fleet of trains, which involves driver training and loss of old trains alongside delivery of new trains. We also had a number of weather delays in the autumn, with the UK nationally seeing an increase in adhesion delays. We are working closely with Network Rail to reduce infrastructure failures and to cut back on the time it takes to make repairs.

Keeping services running throughout the largest upgrade of the Great Western main line is a challenge, and access for Crossrail must also be factored in. Over the last 4 weeks, our Right Time arrivals were at 66% - This isn't good enough.

We have a joint performance recovery plan with Network Rail and we are determined to see improvement.

Is the 5% season ticket discount binary; or on a sliding scale?

Yes, it is binary.

Our performance is measured against 2 triggers:

- **punctuality** – the number of trains that arrive at their final station on time* (within 4 minutes on local services, or 9 minutes on long distance services)
- **reliability** – the number of scheduled trains that run

If we fall below either trigger, within the 12 months prior to renewal, we'll give monthly and annual season ticket holders a 5% discount when they renew. If we fall below both triggers, the discount will be 10%. This is applied automatically.

Can you publish the top 3 National Rail Passenger Survey issues, and what GWR are doing about them?

We will add these to the existing Customer Panel page on GWR.com.



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The Cotswolds line performance has been declining since the beginning of January, and there has been no explanation from GWR

The stretch of single track on the North Cotswolds line maximises delays and leads to more cancellations. We recognise how difficult this is and we are taking proactive measures to protect services as much as we can.

We have stepped up our driver training programme for the new Intercity Express Trains. Changes to the availability of new trains and electrified track meant we had far less time to complete training before the new trains entered service in January. We are catching up but there is more to do, and to avoid cancellations we have switched to turbo trains on some services while we work through driver training.

Will the Intercity Express Trains come back to the line?

Intercity Express Trains were not withdrawn from the line. We did make some changes, as above, however they have remained in service on the route since they started on 2 January.

The service between Oxford and Didcot has deteriorated; why hasn't it been electrified?

The original plan was to electrify the line to Oxford. But this was deferred by the Department for Transport. We cannot therefore run our new Electrostar electric trains beyond Didcot. We have maintained some direct diesel services, and should the line be electrified in future we will be very pleased to bring Electrostar trains to Oxford.

The Oxford - Didcot service won't cope with Didcot doubling over the next few years. CrossCountry trains used to stop at Didcot; if some fast trains stopped during peak times, it would make a big difference.

The challenges of a 2-track railway that is used by two passenger train companies, as well as freight services between the Midlands and Southampton, mean changing train patterns is difficult.

The new timetable has changed the frequency - there's now a 25-minute gap between Didcot to Reading services. People arrive at a steady flow, so we need services to be more regular.

Trains come from lots of different places and stop at Didcot. While they might start on a regular interval, by the time they reach Didcot this has changed. The upgrade to an electric railway, with brand new trains and greater acceleration will mean the January 2019 timetable will provide more regularity at more places. For instance, there will be a direct Cheltenham service every hour.

We will also review to see if any adjustments can be made in the next interim timetable.



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The new trains are good but, with only 2 sets, most people are rammed at the back, and can't walk through. Morning trains to Paddington are often slower? Will journey times improve?

We're working to help customers understand how two-set trains work; but it will take time for them to get used to this. During the summer we'll introduce nine-car Intercity Express Trains on the route to Cheltenham. These have the same number of seats as a ten car and you can walk the length of the service.

There will be a number of reasons that can impact your morning journey. We are reviewing all our services to make sure we have the best pathing and we expect to make journey time savings in the January 19 timetable. This cannot be done yet as we need to wait the roll out of all the new trains.

How long are we likely to have these shuttle services between Didcot and Oxford?

We don't have a date for that to be resolved at the moment

If you've got bi-mode trains, why aren't you using them between Didcot and Oxford? If you're going from Reading, you have to get off the train at Didcot and then take another train to go one or two stops. Customers are being penalised.

We need to balance the need to maintain and improve journey times for North Cotswolds services to support the local and regional economy against requests to add more station calls. We do have some direct turbo services, but we will take this point away – and keep you posted here of any decisions relating to this.

Why haven't you kept back some trains; why are you shipping them off to other places when they're needed here?

We have kept back as many trains as we could and have negotiated with other companies to do so. They have now reached a stage where we can't keep them any longer. This does mean we are very tight for rolling stock, but new trains are arriving every month and this will ease.

That's not enough, your contingency plans are rubbish then, you can't just say your contractor didn't provide you with the service.

We recognise that it's very disruptive to our passengers. We're working a lot closer with Network Rail as part of our alliance – this should help us to provide a better service.

Recently my train has been a Turbo, instead of an Electrostar. Why is this?

This is a short-term issue. When the trains are coupled, it knocks out the cameras. We're working to fix this within the next few weeks. We'll also find out why JourneyCheck isn't showing the short-formed trains.



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Great Western franchise

GWR presented slides about franchise consultation and urged customers to take part

Will there be a consultation on the January 19 timetable?

We have already consulted as part of our original franchise agreement. We wouldn't do this again, unless there was a significant change.

The North Downs line is really tatty, and not good for the airport. There's no luggage space, and the windows keep slamming open due to the wind. Are you going to refurbish the units?

That's something we would like to see improve in a new franchise. We would like to refurbish those services and extend a second train to Gatwick, as well as fix the window issue.

When Crossrail starts from Reading, will you withdraw your services?

We will continue to run fast and semi fast services to London with Crossrail providing local stopping services

When are you getting more new trains on other routes?

We've ordered variants of the Intercity Express Train, that are more powerful in diesel mode, specifically for the Devon and Cornwall, Somerset, and Wiltshire. They should be in service this summer.



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Upcoming regional developments

There are rumours of a new station outside Twyford – are these true?

We work closely with the local Council and, they are looking at a number of developments are including the potential for a station east of Twyford. The potential is low given proximity to the existing station, the crossover-point for North Cotswolds services to join the mainline and the amount of overhead line equipment in the area which would make building very expensive. We are working the Council to see what more might be done to improve car parking at Twyford.

You say there are going to be two trains an hour on the North Cotswolds line. Why can't one of them stop at Didcot?

We would like to do a lot better with the Didcot to Oxford services, there are a range of new technologies now being explored that might help and this is something that could be considered in future.

Have you considered a station at Wantage Road?

One station will be a difficult case to make. If there were four or five stations on a new stretch of track, so as not to add to congestion on this busy corridor, that would make more sense. With the January 19 timetable, the Swindon to Didcot corridor will be full. We need more infrastructure to have more new services. In the longer term, this could happen - and we are working with others to support future plans

Why not extend the platforms at Appleford and Culham – to allow longer trains

The decision to lengthen platforms would be one for Network Rail. They have had to review budgets and focus on delivery of the mainline electrification programme, and there are no current plans to extend Appleford or Culham platforms.



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Stations and trains

How will you make the flooding that took place in Didcot few years ago doesn't happen again?

We're working with Network Rail who lead on flood prevention, and the other parties involved. Similar work is being done at Newbury, and we're learning from that too.

The earliest Off-Peak train leaves at 09.01, but I can't buy a ticket from the machine till 09.00. Why is this; is it the same at other stations?

We will look into this.

Why do you still have paper tickets - you need to move with the times.

During 2018, all our gatelines will be upgraded to read barcodes so that we can offer mobile ticketing. We're also conducting a pilot between Bristol Temple Meads and Severn Beach for a GWR smartcard, that will be similar to Oyster.

The new app is terrible, the old one was better. I can't buy tickets on the app now.

We know there are issues with the new app – and we're sorry for the inconvenience this has caused. We couldn't keep the old one, as the supplier left the UK market. We have a significant improvement programme and have already upgraded a number of features including ticket sales.

The website isn't much better, ticket buying has been down twice in the last week.

This is as a result of work we're doing to fully introduce a new booking tool. You should see improvements over the next few weeks.

Wrap up