



Great Western Railway

Customer Panel Cardiff – 24 April 2018

We met with a range of customer panel members who had been invited to join us.

Matthew Golton, our Commercial Development Director and Deputy MD, gave a presentation on the challenges of running a modern railway and took questions throughout the evening.

We have set out a precis below of the questions raised, capturing the key points.

Performance

What is the definition of punctuality and reliability?

Punctuality (delays) is the number of trains that arrive at their final station 'on time'. For long distance journeys this means within nine minutes of schedule, and for shorter journeys within 4 minutes. Reliability (cancellations) is the number of scheduled trains that actually run.

How does GWR's Public Performance Measure (PPM) compare to last year?

Our PPM is down on last year. Performance is certainly not where we want it to be. We are currently in the midst of the most complex stage of the transition to new trains and track upgrades for electrification. This has led to more line closures as Network Rail work hard to complete the upgrade against revised timescales. This has had an impact on performance. It has also been challenging to maintain network reliability as the project work has taken place.

At one stage last winter, at least half of all possessions were late notice, this added to the pressures associated with ensuring staff and trains were where they should be. Crew training on new and cascade traction has been challenging as we have had to change our delivery plans, which are now taking place over a much more concentrated period than was originally envisaged.



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Communication

Can GWR communications be improved, especially for customers who are hard of hearing and find it difficult to understand announcements?

Staff at more than 20 of our busiest stations now have handheld microphones. These will help us give more notice when there are platform changes, less carriages than advertised, or a different train is being used.

We are also talking to members of our panel about how we can improve the actual messages we use. We also provide basic sign language training for frontline staff and this is also one of the skills we teach our apprentices.

We will consider the feedback about the clarity of on-train announcements.

The reason for delays and cancellations is often unclear. It can feel like you don't know what's going on?

We always share the information we get as soon as we can, and all our frontline staff have mobile phones with GWR apps that provide extra information; sometimes it is not always clear what the root cause might be, or indeed how long a delay will take to resolve. That can be frustrating and we are working hard with our colleagues at Network Rail to make sure we get as deliver as accurate a picture as we can as quickly as we can, so that colleagues can rapidly update customers and provide good information about onward journeys.

When GWR services are cancelled, or their times are changed, it isn't always announced.

All the stations in Wales are managed by Arriva Trains Wales. This means that when there are platform changes or disruption they deal with customer communications or alternative transport on our behalf, as indeed we do at stations we manage where their trains are affected. We will feed your comments back to them and will check that timely announcements are made in future

Often there doesn't seem to be much help for the elderly, vulnerable and disabled during disruption or platform changes.

Where we have planned line closures, especially where we are using buses, we employ extra staff specifically to help customers. We also offer a free assistance service, which can be booked in advance by freephone for guaranteed help. Booking is not compulsory, we will always do our best to look out for passengers who need help whether that is at the station or on the train. If a station is not staffed there will be a help-point, which is monitored 24 hours a day where staff will be happy to offer advice and organise assistance if needed.



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What lessons have you learned from large events like the UEFA Champions League final?

We work very closely with Arriva Trains Wales, Cardiff City Council, British Transport Police and the Principality Stadium when big events come to Cardiff. The queuing systems and crowd management plans in place mean that large numbers of customers can be moved relatively smoothly, however Cardiff Central station was not designed for the number of people who attend world class events like the UEFA final. We therefore support efforts to remodel the station and the track layout, including electrification of the sidings so that we could bring more trains into the station more quickly reducing queuing time.

It also helps if events are timed well in advance and not at times when there are already programmed line closures such as the Antony Joshua boxing matches.

Why do you use so much 'railway speak'?

We've been working hard to remove as much jargon as we can from our customer communications. We hope you've notice that a lot of our station posters are easier to read now, and we're working on guidelines for staff that make announcements too. There is clearly more to do, so please let us know about any examples you spot where you feel that we are not getting it right.

New Intercity Express Trains

The new trains are more uncomfortable and stressful - with vibrations, hissing sounds, and uncomfortable seats which cause fatigue. The seat feels narrower than before and the armrest is uncomfortable.

Both the seats in Standard Class and First Class are the same width as those on our High Speed Trains, they have far more leg room however, and we have added more tables into Standard Class as requested by customers. We carried out joint research with East Coast and most customers felt the seats were as good, if not better, on long journeys.

We will ask our Engineering colleagues to speak with Hitachi (the train builders) to investigate why the air-conditioning seems to be noisy. Overall, the trains are much quieter than the HSTs they replace, especially when they switch to electric mode. There have been some teething issues around some of the software which has affected the reservation system, and announcements, but these are being fixed through software upgrades.

Why did GWR get rid of the Express cafe?

We trialled our At Seat trolley service in Standard Class on our HST trains and found that more customers used the service than used the traditional buffet car. In surveys, customers told us that they prefer us to bring food and drink to them, as we have done in First Class for many years. Customers specifically cited the concerns of what to do with valuables and not wanting to leave their seat vacant as key reasons for not using on-board facilities. We have introduced full kitchens on every IET, which allows us, for the first time, to provide a consistent hot and cold, food and drink offer, across our high-speed fleet, to customers at their seat.



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Why don't the IETs have a First Class quiet carriage?

The design of the IET trains reflects the approach that GWR adopted for its High Speed Trains some years ago, when the quiet coach was retained in the standard class section of the trains but removed from First Class when the standard accommodation was increased. We don't have any plans to change that approach.

Bikes on trains

Why isn't it possible to book a bike space at short notice?

Bikes can be booked at short notice by phone or in person at a station. This can even be done after the train has started its journey. We are also working on updates to our website and mobile app that will let customers add a bike to their ticket purchase, or to book a space online at short notice. Of course, this will only work as long as there are spaces left. It is also worth noting that, because we allow bookings right up until the train arrives, we must enforce the mandatory reservation requirement on long distance services. Otherwise we could end up with someone booking en route who finds their space taken by a non-reserved bike.

Cardiff to Portsmouth route

What's happening about fitting the air-conditioning to the Turbo trains that will feature on the line between Cardiff and Portsmouth Harbour?

The main cause of discomfort on trains on this route is that they can be very busy, with standing passengers on some sections. Our plans to introduce five-car services will make journeys much more comfortable.

We have also started to fit air-cooling on the turbos, which will mean a further improvement. And while we do have some customers who travel the full route, most customers are travelling for fairly short distances, with the average journey lasting around 30 to 40 minutes.

Why aren't there power sockets and tables on the turbos?

We will be fitting USB charging points, but can't fit full sockets as this is too demanding from an electrical load perspective.

Why can't you reserve seats towards South Coast/Devon?

We only offer bookable seats on our high-speed routes. We have been looking at what we do in the future and the type of trains that might be deployed on these routes in the longer term, which may have a bearing on this.

Why can't you book priority seats online?

Priority seats can only be booked by our Assisted Travel team. This means we can be confident that they are given to customers who need them. They can also arrange tickets and assistance at the station and if you need help we recommend you call them so that they can make sure your journey goes as smoothly as possible.