



Ref: MP/MH/001

19 July 2018

Rt Hon Richard Benyon MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

**Great Western Railway**

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Dear Richard

**Re: GWR Performance Summer 2018**

As you move into summer recess, I wanted to let you know how we are responding to the current challenges on the Great Western route and make sure you have fast and effective access to me and my senior team over the coming months, if you feel you need it.

Firstly, I want to say sorry. In recent months, our train service performance has not been where you, we or your constituents would want it to be. There are a number of reasons for this, some within our immediate control but others where responsibility is shared elsewhere within the industry.

You will know that there are significant challenges impacting the ability of many train companies to meet the standards rightly demanded by passengers. While not as high profile as some, we are not immune to these. Many challenges faced by the industry are caused by an extensive programme to improve infrastructure and introduce more trains that will ultimately lead to a better, faster, more reliable railway. However, that improved future is meaningless to those of your constituents who simply want a stable railway now.

I therefore wanted to assure you I am aware of the frustrations you and your constituents feel and that we have plans in place, alongside our industry partners, to alleviate them.

We are facing challenges in terms of infrastructure and timetabling that could, if not managed effectively by the industry, be potentially as impactful and severe as those faced by some other train operators, but we are doing everything we can to deliver real change while continuing to provide as normal and reliable a service as possible. We have had some considerable success in this regard – we upgraded our entire commuter fleet and completely changed our timetable in the Thames Valley smoothly overnight in January bringing more services and more seats for customers. But we acknowledge this still does not bring the reliability of our service up to the high standards passengers have previously seen on our network.

At the same time, the halving of Network Rail's notice period for timetable changes from 12 to six weeks has the significant potential to cause problems on the network. So far, we have managed to minimise the disruption this causes to our part of the railway and we are re-doubling our efforts to make sure customers have access to the very latest information as early as possible.

The Great Western route continues to require unprecedented levels of engineering access, which can be disruptive to passengers. Over the next few months, we will be working to reduce cancellations and delays as we continue to introduce our new trains, and upskill our crews to use them.

To meet our aim of improving reliability and punctuality, we are doing the following:

- working with Network Rail to stop short-notice possessions for engineering work, which can cause real difficulties in terms of reliability for passengers.
- holding onto some existing High Speed Trains for longer than originally planned, to allow us to use them on other parts of the network when things go wrong, and minimise delays and cancellations that could otherwise be caused.
- partnering with Hitachi to introduce a programme to forensically solve the causes of delays and cancellations on our new Intercity Express Trains. This is based on the successful approach we have already used on our Thames Valley fleet.
- installing better signage and improving information on platforms. This will speed up boarding of trains and reduce unnecessary platform-based delays while passengers are getting used to the new trains.
- supporting Network Rail's commitment to publish reliable timetables and journey information at least 12 weeks before travel, reinstating previously agreed industry standards.

- providing Network Rail with the early information they need to respond to and rectify incidents with their infrastructure significantly more quickly, thus improving reliability for passengers.

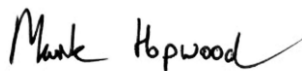
We are proud to be the custodians of the Great Western Railway, and take seriously our responsibility to our passengers, communities and partners in delivering that service. We accept that, even though many of the problems are not directly within our control, the impact is felt by our passengers and we are the appropriate channel through which you and your constituents' concerns should be raised.

Likewise, I am painfully aware that how we are currently handling passenger complaints is not good enough. Having moved our off-shore customer service centre to UK-based Capita in 2015 we are now beginning to bring parts of it in-house before the formal end of the contract later this year, so we can deliver a higher quality of service to our customers through our own Plymouth-based team.

I am sorry that I am writing to you to hold our hands up about the problems we are facing, when there is so much good happening on our line of route. All of us working at GWR share your frustrations about current delivery, but are confident that, over time, the benefits of the current instability will be realised.

In the meantime, we are doing everything we can to address poor performance, handle any concerns effectively and demonstrate both to you and your constituents that this temporary situation is being managed as well as possible and that we are all working towards creating a level of service over the next 12 months that is an improvement for every passenger.

Yours sincerely



**Mark Hopwood**  
Managing Director  
Great Western Railway