



Great Western Railway

Customer Panel Exeter – 6 November 2018

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

Our regional performance and development teams gave presentations on the challenges of running a modern railway and took questions.

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

Okehampton has the potential to be a multi-modal hub. To do this there has to be investment in a Parkway station/station improvements

We're currently working with Devon County Council and other partners to respond to the Secretary of State's request for a report on what would be needed to run a regular train service. Devon County Council are also looking at the potential for a new railway station.

Dawlish station – disabled access to the south west bound platform

Dawlish station received staunch support from customers and stakeholders in our Access for All consultation, and a bid has gone forward to the Department for Transport for funding to make both platforms accessible. We now wait the outcome of the bid.

What are you doing to maintain resilience when the sea wall fails at Dawlish

As well as regular maintenance work, Network Rail has announced a six-month programme to repair four breakwaters that protect the coastline.

Community events have been held in Dawlish, Teignmouth and Holcombe for residents to find out more about the project. And, there will be further consultation on Network Rail's longer-term plans to use a causeway, rebuilding the line from the tunnel at Smugglers' Lane in Holcombe, out on to the beach past Spray Point, curving back in land towards Teignmouth.



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Why are so many trains being cancelled between 16.00 and 20.00 at Penzance at the weekends (mostly Sunday evenings)?

As we bring brand new long distance trains, and better local trains into the South West, we need to train our drivers and on board crews. The additional time needed for this has meant fewer colleagues able to cover weekend services. This is a temporary situation and will improve during 2019.

Do you have any plans to increase car parking at Exeter St Davids?

We're looking at ways to add more spaces and improve the forecourt area generally. It's a big undertaking, and we're working closely with our partners at Devon County Council, Exeter City Council, and Network Rail, on initial concepts.

You seem to suffer a lot from not having enough staff in the right place at the right time

We have increased staffing levels, employing more drivers than ever before, but the training programme for the new trains is having an impact. Crew availability is also affected by delays and cancellations. As we come to the end of the training programme and as performance continues to improve, there will be fewer occasions where staff are not where we need them to be.

Network Rail need to cut back the trees and bushes either side of stations on the North Devon line so that customers can see the train and the driver can see them at request stops.

Network Rail will cut back trees and bushes where they affect safety. Earlier this year the Department for Transport made clear that trees should not be felled unless it was dangerous not to do so.

What are you doing to improve provision for bikes on GWR; the new high-speed trains don't have as much space as the old ones?

The storage space on our new trains has been designed to be as flexible as possible to balance the needs of both bike users and those with larger items of luggage. We also welcome folding bikes on all our services. And we work closely with many external stakeholders and organisations to improve bike storage in and around our stations and encourage hiring schemes.



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Could you keep some of the trains that will leaving GWR and convert them so that they can carry more bikes on local services?

We do have plans to keep, and convert, a number of our current High Speed Trains. They will have automatic doors and toilet retention tanks, and will operate as four-carriage services on some of our longer distance local journeys such as Penzance to Cardiff.

Why are you having so many problems with the new reservation system, the old one just worked. And, it's even worse if GWR change the type of train you're on.

We know there have problems with the new system on our Intercity City Express Trains. We are working hard with Hitachi to resolve these and you should have noticed improvements recently.

When will you be able to choose a specific seat on high-speed services?

Although we have no firm plans, we are working closely with our partners to investigate how feasible this would be. However, no changes would happen until we have completed the introduction of our Intercity Express Trains.

When will we see the new timetable; will there be any significant improvements in 2019?

The timetable process is on pause nationally. We are working with Network Rail to see what improvements can be brought in during 2019 and we expect to see some changes this May, with more changes in December. We will continue to deliver our train cascade plan and expect to see more capacity on key services in the second half of the year.

Why is the 19.03 always so busy

Peak time services from London are busy, and the 1903 is no exception. This is why we need the extra capacity of the new trains, which will mean up to 24% more seats per train. The roll out of services is proceeding and should be complete this Spring.

What are you doing to extend platforms to deal with the new, longer, high-speed trains?

We're working with Network Rail on a programme to lengthen platforms at key stations, such as St James Park.



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Will you consider bringing more trains down to the South West to help solve some of the overcrowding issues?

FirstGroup has invested in the fleet of brand new Intercity Express trains, we are also bringing more local services, and keeping converted High Speed Trains in the region. In addition, we're planning more services in the new timetable, including two trains an hour between Plymouth and Penzance - doubling the current frequency.

Will you be adding First Class lounges to any of your busier stations?

We work closely with local stakeholders and organisations to continually review the services we provide at our stations. Examples of this co-operation are the new Night Riviera Sleeper lounges at Penzance and Truro, which were built by GWR and funded by our partners, Cornwall Council.

The new trolley service on your high-speed trains just isn't as good as the old buffet car

When our new trains were being designed, we talked to our customers about how they wanted to buy their food and drink. Most told us they didn't want to leave/pick up belongings on the trip to the buffet - and this is backed up by the fact that we have seen a significant increase in sales.

The new seats on your high-speed trains just aren't as comfortable as the old ones

The seats on our Intercity Express Trains are designed for longer distance travel and while some customers have said they prefer the older seats, Transport Focus' independent National Rail Passenger Survey results for June 2018, following the introduction of the new trains, show a 3% increase in the score for comfort on GWR services.

Crediton station needs a ticket machine and information screens; are these planned?

This is not something we can do in the current franchise, which finishes in March 2020. However, we are in discussions with the DfT on station improvements that might be possible in the next Great Western franchise, which will run from April 2020 to March 2022..