

# **Response from the Great Western Coffee Shop forum**

to Department for Transport Great Western Franchise consultation, 2017/18

## **Who are we?**

See <http://gwr.passenger.chat>

The "Great Western Coffee Shop" is an online forum run by GWR passengers for GWR passengers.

Over 100 new topics (threads) are started each month, with around 2,000 messages added. The forum has been running for over 10 years and has an archive of over 200,000 messages added by 1,000 different contributors. Around 90% of content is public readable - and well read. Over 250 signed up members have logged in this month (this paragraph written on 31st January), plus around a further 5,000 visitors to our public pages. Around 30% of those are first time visitors, arriving from search engines or other links, with around 70% being returning visitor. On average, visitors look at six pages on each visit. 97% of our visits are from within the UK - the top dozen towns / cities being London, Bristol, Reading, Trowbridge, Oxford, Exeter, Didcot, Slough, Worcester, Bath, Maidenhead and Plymouth according to Google Analytics.

Members of the Coffee Shop forum met in early January to discuss the scope of the consultation and how to make valid responses. We are fortunate to have amongst our contributors and readers a wealth of rail industry, project and local government skills, and advice was shared on that day together with some thoughts on the 18 consultation questions asked. Since then, many members have attended the Department for Transport briefing meetings across the region and discussed and co-ordinated thoughts widely. Many of these thoughts are logged on the forum; many more are being discussed and shared within stakeholders as they write their responses.

## **What is this response?**

Our early January meeting concluded that The Coffee Shop should in its own right submit a short response to the consultation on broad and broadly agreed topics, but leave responses on more local issues to the individual members / stakeholders concerned. This is that general response.

## **Question 1 - Objectives**

Generally agree with the objectives. Add Objective to provide transport at times and to destinations required, and prioritise reliability (cancellations at any station) over strict timekeeping

## **Question 2 – Splitting the franchise**

There is a strong general view that the franchise should not be split. There would be some support for a structure of management units within a single franchise.

## **Question 4 – Relationship between Train Operator and Network Rail**

Passengers are looking to use rail services to travel and are not directly concerned with the relationship between the operator and the provider to the operator, save for wanting a set up that provides the end product effectively and without complexity to their journey.

## **Question 5 – Train frequency and length of day**

Services should run as a minimum hourly serving all stations, in both directions, and from early in the morning through to late evening, seven days a week. It is generally accepted that there may be some exceptions to this general rule, but forum members feel that it is up to members from individual areas to make their own knowledgeable comments for their own areas.

## **Question 6 – New Stations**

Forum members are generally supportive of new stations and accept that they may add a few minutes to journey time. They cannot see so many new stations being opened within the next 10 years that this timing becomes a problem. There is a need for new stations to be provided with an appropriate train service with enough capacity to handle current and growing traffic on the line.

## **Question 7 – Leaving out stops**

Maintaining frequency at intermediate stations is more important than shaving a few minutes from schedules. There may be exceptions, but usually leaving the station skipped on some services with at least one train per hour each way.

## **Question 8 – Direct (through train) provision**

The thing that has come out time and again is the importance of end to end journeys where connections (train and bus) are involved – the total journey time, and the reliability of connections.

Where services abut end to end, they should be usefully joined up; 40% to 45% of business is lost at intermediate changes and so changes should be avoided where practical.

## **Question 12 – Rolling Stock**

New stock where classes 143, 150, 153, 158, 165 and 166 run will be needed during franchise, with luggage space, corridor throughout and no 2 + 3 seating please. Please ensure that train capacity allows everyone who wishes to sit to have a seat in all but the most exceptional of cases.

## **Question 15 - Ticketing**

Ticket Vending Machines to offer lowest fare/combination & be clear on route & timing restrictions

Any reasonable route to be acceptable for travel on tickets NOT marked as either "via xxx" or "not via xxx". If you turn up at your starting station, reasonable routes should include whatever route will get you there soonest. That's in addition to any alternatives offered by the routing guide.

## **Question 16 – Community Rail**

Passengers / members strongly support Community Rail as providing a voice from outside into promoting the passenger experience. The forum requests that direct award and franchise requirements be written in such a way as to provide a continuity of operations for partnerships.

## **Question 18 – Any other business**

1. Customer service performance levels. There should be a target time for answering questions to customer services. Currently routine answers take a month, with many queries extending for a lot longer for our members. A monitored target, with an effective penalty clause in the direct award or franchise contract would help concentrate minds.

2. For the two years of direct award, forum members would like to see

- a) Early morning to late evening service provision on all routes, stepping up to or towards hourly frequency as routine.
- b) The opportunity of retimetabling to be taken to provide better journey opportunities, appropriate extra through journeys and much improved connections train to train and train to / from bus.

## **And finally**

**A big THANK YOU to our forum members for their inputs, and to the Department for Transport for inviting and considering our response.**

Document correlated 9<sup>th</sup> February 2018 after forum thread consultation.

**Signed by these 37 members** between 10<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> February 2018:

grahame, SandTEngineer, mjones, didcotdean, rogerw, Western Pathfinder, johnneyw, eXPassenger, WSW Frome, ChrisB, tomL, GBM, broadgage, Oberon, Smiffy9373, Oxonhutch, ellendune, Bob\_Blakey, 81F, eightf48544, Bus Queen, Reginald25, John R, Timmer, Four Track Now!, Chris from Nailsea, Kernow Otter, Andy, bobm, basset44, lordgoata, IanL, Rob on the hill, Rhydgaled, bignosemac, PhilWakely and Southernman.

Forum may be reached / read via <http://gwr.passenger.chat>

Emails to [info@firstgreatwestern.info](mailto:info@firstgreatwestern.info) will be forwarded to our admin team. 01225 708225.

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