



Department  
for Transport

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From the Secretary of State  
**The Rt Hon Grant Shapps**

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Our Ref: MC/368648

4 October 2021

Dear Christopher,

Thank you for your letter of 15 September, about the planned changes to the South Western Railway rail services.

Firstly, may I thank you for your kind words regarding the publication of the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail. I am determined that this fresh start for the railways is customer focussed and the input of organisations like TravelWatch SouthWest, which represent the interests of businesses and communities, will be key to shaping the future of our railways.

In terms of South Western Railway's consultation on the specification for its December 2022 timetable, I appreciate you raising your concerns with me and would like to address some of these below.

The consultation on South Western Railway services concluded on 19 September 2021 and we await the outcome of the responses from key stakeholders on that consultation. The Department will work closely with South Western Railway to ensure that the right balance between service provision and efficiencies to the taxpayer are met. We are monitoring developments very closely as we await South Western Railway's findings and the subsequent report due in October.

In relation to Exeter shuttle services specifically, additional services were squeezed onto a single line section between Exeter and Axminster in between other services which were difficult to operate reliably. South Western Railway feel it is better to have remaining services running consistently with sufficient seats.

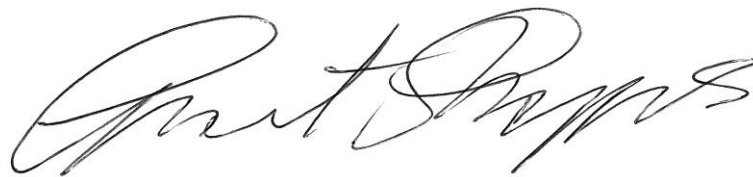
The Department will be working closely with the operators to achieve additional services between Exeter and Axminster in both the short and long term. Great Western Railway can potentially offer a more efficient use of rolling stock and crew resources based in the Exeter area to allow improvements to these services.

With regards to the decision to withdraw South Western Railway services on the Bristol to Salisbury route, it should be first noted that this decision was made independently of the December 2022 Consultation and will take effect from the December 2021 timetable.

South Western Railway is withdrawing Bristol to Salisbury services to reduce duplication with Great Western Railway services as part of that requirement to look at efficiencies. South Western Railway acknowledge that this will make some through journeys less attractive at certain times of the day. The Department will work with the Great Western Railway to improve connections at Salisbury wherever possible.

Thank you again for contacting me. I hope this reply addresses your concerns.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Grant Shapps', written in a cursive style.

**Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP**

**SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT**