

From: Coffee Shop Forum * 21st August 2022
To: Mark Hopwood, Managing Director, Great Western Railway



Dear Mark,

Failure to provide a reliable GWR train service is driving customers away

I am writing to ask you, with the assistance and co-operation of other parties copied on this open letter, to consistently provide a reliable train service, as per the published season's timetable, across the GWR network.

This letter is written on behalf of the "Coffee Shop" GWR area online passenger forum. We have over 2,000 members and around 13,000 visits with 1,000 posted messages a month.

This summer should have been a re-opening of rail travel in the UK for our members, but in a poll over the last week, over 60% said that "Unreliable train services" were holding them back - over twice the number held back for any other reason. Under 4% said that nothing is holding them back, and under 10% are held back by remaining health (Covid) concerns. I am including a full copy of the poll results in an appendix to this letter, and background to how it was sampled and conducted. You are welcome to dig deeper into the results - there is more to learn, but I want to keep the headline of this approach **to simply ask you and other parties, please, to run a reliable service.**

Just a couple of member comments:

"P" writes: "I used to commute 5 days a week, latterly 3 days a week. It's often one day a week now, and only then if I have watched the service levels over the course of the previous few days and feel confident enough that they are reliable enough to ensure I'll be able to get home again - sadly no guarantee given the remarkably high incidence of short staff"

"H" writes : "Back in GWR-land, an essential journey. Portsmouth-Cardiff ran late and missed connection. Coming back, two consecutive Portsmouth trains cancelled so over an hour late home. The Cardiff-Portsmouth route (and its offshoots to Swindon and Weymouth) are performing miserably this year and it's not all down to strikes.

Mark, you have some excellent leisure services in your timetable, but performance has been so awful that we, your rail user friends, have found ourselves unable to market them and encourage passenger back onto the trains. It should have been a new spring of rail use, re-opening after Covid and so much more aware these days that a new generation can be tempted to the train not the car.

To clarify, the services are considered to be unreliable at present due to both industrial action and other causes that were with us before the current industrial action started, and both matters need your urgent attention

We very much appreciate that the problems are not unique to GWR, and that you as a train operating company have to work with so many others - so please can you all work together? Not just for our little sample of passengers - but for all passengers, and for your own staff too, for the very future of services (some of which are already lost) and indeed for whole lines.

I would very much appreciate, for publication, your response as to how you will be restoring reliability, and I welcome inputs from other recipients of this letter. We very much look forward to a service which once again is fit enough for us to help promote to new and returning rail users.

Graham Ellis – graham@sn12.net 01225 708225 * 07974 925928
Webmaster at the Coffee Shop forum - <http://www.passenger.chat>
Written on behalf of the moderator team running that forum

Votes by members of the Great Western Coffee Shop Forum between 15th and 19th August 2022.

When asked "What is suppressing your train use?", members voted as follows:

unreliable train services	62%
my work pattern has changed	31%
services are more limited	31%
cost of tickets	31%
less comfortable trains	25%
overcrowded trains	22%
my personal pattern has changed permanently	22%
things are different this summer in my personal life	16%
extreme weather	15%
harder to find out what is running	13%
remaining health concerns	9%
associated costs	9%
nothing is holding me back	4%
safety concerns	0%

Multiple choice was allowed; a total of 159 votes were cast by 55 members. The percentage shown represents the percentage of voters selecting that option.

The First Great Western Coffee Shop was set up in January 2007 as an online group for passengers, by passengers, independent of rail companies or government. It's run by a volunteer team of a dozen moderators and has an "all views welcome" policy; provided that posts are legal and relevant to public transport in our area, anything goes. Initially a protest site, we have turned very much more into partners, helping to inform and explain, whilst not averse to searching questions and criticism where it's due. Although a passenger site (rather than a rail professional or enthusiast one), we very much value inputs from those quarters, and especially have a number of very well informed members from within the industry. The "Coffee Shop" is free to use and advert free. More details at <http://www.passenger.chat/1761>

We have over 2900 members, with around 13,000 visits and 1000 new messages posted every month. Over 23,000 subjects (threads) have been covered, with an average of 15 messages on each of them. We conduct around 2 or 3 passenger polls every month – see <http://www.passenger.chat/poll.html> for previous polls.

The poll and discussions around it may be found online at <http://www.passenger.chat/26633> closely associate topics "looking forward" may be found at <http://www.passenger.chat/b40>

Please address any queries (rail industry or press) to admin@railcustomer.info or contact the editor of this document – Graham Ellis – on 01225 708225 or 07974 925 928; graham@sn12.net