



LAURA FARRIS MP

Member of Parliament for Newbury

Huw Merriman MP
Minister for Rail
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
SW1P 4DR

25th May 2023

RE: Great Western Railway services in the Newbury constituency

Dear Huw,

Following the recent timetable changes, I write to you to express my continued concern about Great Western Railway (GWR) services in my constituency.

At the May timetable change last year GWR cut back on the number of direct services between Hungerford, Kintbury and Paddington. This meant many passengers travelling to/from London Paddington had to make one change (at Newbury) or two changes (at Newbury and Reading) for a journey that had previously been direct, adding complication and delay to a well-established commuter route.

This reduction was blamed on a need to move Intercity Express Trains (IETs) from the Kennet Valley route to other areas of the network. At the time, GWR expressed a desire to return their pre-pandemic timetable, but this has not yet materialised.

Instead, changes to timetables and stock usage, made at this month's timetable change, have caused further problems including serious overcrowding at peak times. By way of illustration the 0454 from Plymouth to London Paddington, calling at Hungerford (0736) and Newbury (0745), has been reduced from a ten-car to a five-car service resulting in standing-room only on one of the most important commuter trains to Reading.

I have been told by GWR that this decision is a result of a network-wide need to reduce the fleet size, as a result of increased financial constraints.

With this in mind, I would be grateful for clarification on what the Department for Transport is doing to ensure current financial constraints are balanced against the needs and comfort of travellers who rely on GWR services for daily travel?

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It seems especially short-sighted to reduce the number of cars on a peak commuter service when it is so obviously a busy time.

Added to this I'd like to make clear my own support for a return to pre-pandemic timetables on the Kennet Valley line.

From the 1990s local campaign groups such as the Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group, my predecessors and many residents worked hard to improve rail connectivity on the Kennet Valley line and secure the electrification of the track to Newbury. The result of this hard work was an hourly and reliable service into London Paddington. This was something my constituents came to rely upon and, as such, they are understandably frustrated by the regressing standards in service.

Thank you in advance and very best wishes,

Laura Farris

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cc. Mark Hopwood, Managing Director Great Western Railway