

25 June 2018

Dear Member of Parliament,

An update from GTR

I am writing to inform you of changes in GTR management and, as requested by a number of MPs, to provide a fuller explanation of the issues surrounding the implementation of the new rail timetable.

Changes in GTR management

As you may know by now the Chief Executive Officer of GTR, Charles Horton, has decided to step down. Whilst this was an industry-wide failure, Charles believes that with leadership comes responsibility and has decided the right thing to do is to step down from his post.

The company has announced that Patrick Verwer will become the new Chief Executive Officer effective from early July. Patrick and I have worked together in the past and I can vouch that he is a highly experienced railway manager and will bring new energy and a new perspective to meeting these significant challenges.

I know Patrick will be keen to engage with you as Members of Parliament, and we will be in touch about this in the near future.

The causes of the problems with the new timetable

I wanted to provide a further written explanation of the causes of the problems and details of our plans to put things right. Charles Horton and I appeared before the Transport Select Committee last week to set out the position in respect of each of these issues.

Firstly, I would like to put on the record our sincere apologies to all of our passengers who have been affected in recent weeks. The service has simply not been good enough for yourselves and your constituents, and for that we are truly sorry.

The introduction of a new timetable is a complex task requiring input, decisions and actions from a wide number of people including ourselves, Network Rail and the Department for Transport (DfT). In the case of this new GTR timetable, the process was considerably more complicated and time consuming than usual, with the times of every single one of our 3200 daily services changing, as well as the introduction of 400 new services per day and the creation of new routes connecting destinations that have never been linked together by rail before.

In August 2017, GTR submitted a bid (in compliance with DfT specification) to Network Rail to operate 24 trains per hour in order to deliver the capacity benefits outlined in the franchise agreement. Following a recommendation made in April 2017, the DfT announced its decision to phase the implementation of the timetable in October 2017. Whilst we supported this decision, it changed the requirements of the May 2018 timetable once again and meant a huge amount of timetable planning work had to be re-done by both Network Rail and GTR.

At the same time, an Industry Readiness Board (IRB) was created to oversee the full process, under the chairmanship of Chris Gibb and including representation from all affected train operators as well as Network Rail, the ORR and the DfT.

In November 2017, Network Rail offered a timetable back to GTR, but with a large number of train rejections – it was not an operable timetable. In January 2018, GTR bid for the new timetable in response to this, including the required phasing, as well as late-notice changes to services between Bedford and London on the Midland Mainline. It wasn't until April 2018 that GTR's bid was approved by Network Rail which left only three weeks to complete three months work before implementation. This was followed by the standard scrutiny process with the trade unions, which was completed shortly before the timetable introduction.

While GTR were waiting for this delayed approval, mitigating measures were being taken forward and planning work undertaken on a set of assumptions from the previous year's plans and these proved to be partly incorrect once the timetabling work was concluded. This meant there was a mismatch between the final timetable and the required route knowledge skills of drivers.

In simple terms, this left GTR with three weeks to do a minimum of three months work (12 weeks is the regulated target). During this time, GTR continued to train drivers for the new timetable.

The route knowledge drivers require takes time to accrue and it was impossible to know which drivers needed which route training until three weeks beforehand when the timetable was agreed, as a result of those earlier delays. Furthermore, regulations dictate that route knowledge expires after six months if not used, so it was impossible to speculatively train drivers on a range of routes very far in advance of those colleagues driving them. Given the short notice of the timetable, the issue we faced was around matching the driver knowledge with their new depots.

As you will be aware, GTR is leading the UK's largest train driver recruitment programme and over the past two years, our driver numbers have increased by 19%. As the summary above outlines, problems arose from drivers not having the right route knowledge for the new timetable, rather than there being a shortage of drivers.

Whilst this driver training was ongoing, a huge number of other tasks were required during that condensed three-week period. Critically, we needed to create 'diagrams' (the industry term for the work schedules drivers use each day) for the new timetable – another task that was impossible to commence until the timetable was received from Network Rail.

Whilst it was clear, which we stated, that there would be some teething troubles with the timetable three weeks out, it was only in the final days when the work schedules were finalised and applied to the work rosters in crew depots that the sheer scale of the problem became apparent. At that point, in an ideal world we would have postponed implementation of the timetable, but the knock-on effects to the rest of the rail network would have been enormous and would have made matters worse for even more passengers.

Clearly there are lessons that we can draw from this and will but also the wider industry arrangements for making changes have been found wanting and collectively across the network this needs to be addressed. We fully support a system of independent checks and measures operating across the industry going forward and a review of the industry

arrangements that have caused us and Northern such challenges and difficulties for our passengers.

Delivering a more dependable service

The top priority now is to deliver a more dependable service for our passengers, your constituents. I would now like to set out that plan below.

- **Phase 1 | 24 June – Mid-July**

Our first step is to give passengers a more predictable service. In the short term, the only way to do this is to regularise the services being cancelled and amend online journey planners accordingly. Until now, these have needed to be updated on a weekly basis but from Monday 25 June passengers will be able to plan their weekday journeys in advance for the coming three weeks.

We will prioritise peak trains and school trains, giving more certainty for passengers to plan their journeys to and from work and school. Regularising the service allows GTR to increase the amount of driver training on routes they need to drive and gives passengers a service they can plan around again. We are working hard to reduce the number of ad hoc cancellations which have been so frustrating and reduce service gaps during this time. In this period some short form trains may run while we move the fleet to the correct positions. We will continue to support the service gaps with buses and taxis.

- **Phase 2 | From Mid-July**

As a second and most important step, from mid-July, GTR aims to implement an interim timetable which will give passengers a more dependable service. This will be based on the targeted May 2018 timetable, but with fewer services primarily in the off peak period to further enable us to augment the driver route knowledge training programme.

From this timetable, we will aim to gradually introduce more services to complete the intended May 2018 timetable; but we will only do so when we are certain it can deliver the passenger benefits of extra rail capacity, reliability and journey options that it needs to.

Encouraging passengers to claim Delay Repay

We know this issue is a matter of great importance to both you and your constituents, and we do not underestimate the impact the recent problems have had on peoples' lives. We are using all customer information channels available (website, social media, station posters, information screens and media advertisements) to encourage passengers to claim the compensation they may be entitled to. Please reinforce this important message to your constituents and ask them to visit the Great Northern and Thameslink websites to claim Delay Repay, which provides for money back for delays of 15 minutes or more.

We are also working with the DfT on a compensation package in addition to our existing Delay Repay scheme.

Keeping you informed

We will keep you and your offices aware of the situation over the summer to keep you informed on the progress to restore the railway to the service you rightly expect – this includes weekly updates by email. We are also holding briefings in Parliament, as well as continuing to meet with as many of you as possible on a one-to-one basis as required.

Should you require a fuller briefing, please do get in touch with our stakeholder team on gtr.stakeholders@gtrailway.com to arrange a convenient time.

I hope that this letter has given you a fuller understanding as to the root causes behind the problems we have encountered in introducing the new timetable, our plan to put things right and our great regret that what was so eagerly anticipated has not yet been brought to fruition. I am confident that we will do so, and that in time the full benefits of the Thameslink Programme will be felt.

Yours sincerely,



Nick Brown
Chief Operating Officer