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**Sent:** 14 March 2014 00:35

**To:** [tony@rfg.org.uk](mailto:tony@rfg.org.uk)

**Subject:** Fw: Additional seating capacity secured and consultation begins on improved timetable for West of England

Dear Tony

As you know we have been working with the Department for Transport (DfT) to secure further rail improvements for the South West including additional standard class seating capacity on our long distance trains.

This is something both our stakeholders and our customers have asked us to address. I am therefore delighted to confirm that we will be increasing standard class capacity on our High Speed Trains. The extra seats come through converting some of our first class carriages.

This will be a joint investment of around £13 million in trains serving the South West with the Department for Transport (DfT) funding the additional standard class capacity and FGW funding a refresh of our first class environment.

This partnership approach will deliver almost 3,000 more standard class seats a day for customers across the network, giving our customers nearly 16% more standard class accommodation on High Speed Trains into London in the morning peak.

On 35 of our High Speed Trains we will be taking a first class carriage and converting it into a standard class carriage with 80 standard class seats. In addition to the extra seats, we have listened to customer feedback and these carriages will also have more 4-person tables. The other 18 High Speed Trains will have a first class carriage converted into a composite carriage, half standard and half first, with the saloons fully divided with a door.

All our High Speed Trains will retain one and half carriages of first class seating on every train. Even after these changes we expect the vast majority of services to have spare capacity in first class, and room for growth.

Since we know the importance of a premium service to our commuter, business and leisure customers we are investing in a refresh of the first class carriages. This will include realignment of single seats, installation of privacy screens, more comfortable, new headrests, re-covered leather seats, new carpets, LED lighting and other changes designed to improve the experience for first class customers. Catering will not be affected as a result of the investment; both the first class at seat trolley service and a buffet car service

will continue to be offered and our very popular Pullman dining services will continue.

All the work to convert the carriages and to refresh the first class environment will be done in the UK, with the work to the first class carriages being undertaken at our depot in Laira, Plymouth and the reseating work being undertaken in Scotland. The first completed carriages are expected to be running in June 2014, with the entire fleet completed by late summer 2015.

Our programme to fit Wi-Fi to all these trains is unaffected. The first services with Wi-Fi will operate from June and by December of this year all our high speed trains should be offering the free service to both standard and first class customers.

Ultimately, the only long-term solution to busy services is more trains. New Intercity Express trains are on their way, and we will keep looking for other opportunities to bring more trains onto the network, however, it will still be some time before they will be ready for service. The conversion of these carriages to create more standard class seating is crucial in the interim period and we are delighted to be able to do this for our customers.

As well as the exciting news about the extra seats, we have just been given permission by the Department for Transport to implement some timetable changes in May and start a formal consultation on some important prospective changes for December.

After the tough times the South West has faced in recent weeks, I am pleased to report that we will be making some changes that will help us get more customers to and from the region this summer. The changes will include the use of a High Speed Train on the Bristol-Weymouth route on summer Saturdays to provide more capacity to and from the coast; more capacity on the Cornish and Devon branches; use of a loco-hauled train between Par and Exeter on summer Saturdays and the extension of a high speed London service to/from Weston-super-Mare on summer Sundays.

Looking beyond the summer we want to change our timetables to bring improvements that will really help the South West regional economy. For some time we have wanted to meet the aspiration of stakeholders and customers to provide an earlier direct service from London to Plymouth and Cornwall and to speed up some services to and from the West of England.

Under our proposals the current 0706 Paddington to Paignton service would run to Plymouth and key stations in Cornwall; achieving around a 40 minute earlier arrival than today's first London train at Totnes, Plymouth and key stations through to Penzance.

The present 0730 service from London Paddington to Penzance would run to Paignton via Bristol, retaining London connectivity. Torbay and Exeter would gain a 19 minute journey time improvement, with the 1106 Paignton-London train leaving later.

From Cornwall high speed services to London would be more evenly spread through the day. New journey opportunities would be created by the introduction of a 1133 Paddington to Exeter service and a 1453 Exeter to London service.

There would be a number of consequential changes to local services in Devon and Cornwall and along the Berks and Hants route.

Our consultation will involve representatives from across our network, including local authorities, business leaders and travel watchdogs representing passengers.

These proposals would deliver a much improved service for the West of England, supporting economic growth through the enhancement of connectivity between major centres. As with any timetable there may be some changes that will not suit everyone. We have worked hard to minimise these and the vast majority of customers should find the changes offer them new opportunities and better timings. And we hope they will also win new business to the railway and the region.

As we said when the interim franchise of 23 months was awarded last October, we would not be standing still and intended to still drive through improvements to improve the overall experience for our passengers. With the support of the DfT, and with the help of all our stakeholders and partners, we are doing just that, and today's announcement shows what can be done if we all persevere and keep putting customers at the forefront of everything we do.

We intend to keep working with the DfT and you on further improvements throughout this franchise period, and, we hope for some time after that, too!

Best wishes,

Mark

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