

## **Bristol area Saturday Evening /Sunday Morning Train Service Reductions**

### **Explanatory Note from Great Western Railway**

The new timetable (effective from Sunday 13 December) means earlier finishes on Saturday evenings and later starts on Sunday morning for Bristol services. This is temporary. Later Saturday services and earlier Sunday services will return to their normal pattern in December 2021.

The changes in Bristol are part of our support for the major engineering work that Network Rail will be completing on Bristol East Junction and Bristol Temple Meads station. The work on the junction will improve reliability and is essential to enable the additional capacity needed to start operating MetroWest services. It is therefore a really important piece of work for improving Bristol and West of England suburban services.

By amending the weekend timetable Network Rail have a longer period where they can complete overnight work. There will still be other line closures that will impact on weekday and weekend services, most notably in July and August, but the extra time overnight each weekend has reduced and removed some of the all day Sunday blocks previously planned and helps ensure that the work is completed on time.

In addition to this, the effect of Covid-19 restrictions has been particularly acute for driving training. Drivers need to undergo a period of in cab training as well as classroom training. For many months we were not able to complete any in cab driver training at all. We do now have a safe bubble system in place, but this is still limited, and we have a significant backlog of training to complete. This impacts on driver availability and is particularly acute on Sundays due to driver contracts.

By making a proactive decision now about our weekend services, we are supporting Bristol Rail Regeneration and reducing the potential for ad hoc and late notice cancellations, making the timetable more robust and reliable. We appreciate that there will be some customers who will find the changes difficult. However, customer numbers are much reduced and are likely to stay lower than usual this year. We want those who are travelling to be able to rely on their timetable and we felt it better to be clear and consistent, rather than have regular changes, some of which would be at short notice.

We held a feedback meeting for stakeholders in September to let them know our thinking and to take soundings about the rationale. The general view is that this was the right approach and we then sent a mailing to all stakeholder organisations on 19 November to let everyone know the outcome and to share the new timetables. We used traditional and social media to alert customers to the timetable changing, reminding them to check the timetable and we also used Bristol specific posters (see attached) to alert customers to the weekend changes.

We want to bring customers back to rail, getting the Bristol East Junction work finished to time and having a robust timetable that customers can rely on is part of that. It will still be challenging – as with any business Covid-19 is impacting on our available staff numbers and our teams are working very hard to keep services running, and we may still need to make further changes. If that is necessary we will keep you updated and we will continue to hold six monthly feedback meetings with stakeholders to discuss timetable changes in advance.