The Train at Platform 1

The Friends of Honiton Station Newsletter 66 - September 2025

Welcome to the September newsletter. This month we report on the imposition of the emergency timetable from August 11th, due to the many essential speed restrictions along the line. We look forward to the time when these restrictions can be lifted, and services return to normal. In the meanwhile, everyone is trying to make the most of the limited service available. This is particularly important for Exeter College students returning for a new term. It was good to meet SWR's new MD when he was in Honiton, seeing for himself the impact of all this on passengers here.

A nostalgia look back to a previous visit by Clan Line to Honiton. Photograph by Dave Withey

New MD Sees for Himself Effect of Reduced Timetable at Honiton

August 11th saw the introduction of a reduced timetable on the West of England line west of Salisbury. As we reported last month, this was due to a series of speed restrictions imposed along a number of clay embankments along the line which have been seriously affected by the driest spring and summer since the "Great Drought" of 1976.

If you remember that summer, it was one of the hottest for decades, a dry spell that only ended when Dennis Howell was appointed Minister of Droughts. It hardly stopped raining from that day onwards.

Maybe the present Prime Minister should consider a similar appointment. Suggestions for a likely candidate should be sent to Number 10… Those who like puns may or may not suggest Angela Rayner!!!

The replacement timetable meant that here in Honiton we were back to the all too familiar two-hourly service, with trains passing in Honiton and all services slowed down by repeated extended waits at stations.

As well as Honiton, trains made lengthy stops at Axminster and Yeovil Junction. Overall journey times between Exeter and Waterloo went up by an hour.

While this should have made for a more reliable service – and generally it did – the temporary service suffered from the beginning from the ongoing issue of Class 159 units being out of service due to engine problems. On the first day of the new timetable, for instance, three units were out of service. In previous weeks, this number had been as high as eight. Thankfully, as time sent by this situation improved, with more units back in service.

A two-hourly service with three-carriage trains should have been a recipe for potential disaster, or at the very least sufficient overcrowding to make journeys very uncomfortable – particularly as onboard air-conditioning on some of these trains seemed not be working properly. On one awful journey the Chairman experienced, the air con only managed to blow even more hot air into the cabin. Free water was given out to passengers on a number of occasions, so unpleasant were conditions in the cabin.

As it happened, passengers seemed to have decided, temporarily at least, to give the railway a miss, with observed passenger numbers on the western leg of the route early on in the first week of the timetable being far lower than expected. However, trains through Honiton were particularly busy on the Friday, no matter how many carriages they had, with several being full and standing.

Things can only get more difficult when Exeter College students return shortly for their new term. Urgent talks took place during August on how to meet this peak demand. It is expected that provision will be similar to that of 2022, when buses were the main source of extra capacity.

Least successful was the information provided to passengers in advance of the introduction of the reduced timetable. Things began well, with a carefully planned and executed communications plan by SWR and Network Rail, involving a range of stakeholders, including our group.

The official announcement was well trailed, and supplemented by a background paper on the issues affecting the clay embankments and their causes. Posters appeared promptly at stations, and announcements at stations were accurate and timely. The SWR website had a full briefing, which was regularly updated, and a press release was jointly issued by SWR and Network Rail.

However- and it is a big however, a huge however – the vital last stage of the plan was, arguably, badly fumbled. Passengers were advised to check details of the timetable on SWR's Journey Planner – there was no pdf copy of the timetable available to download, despite promises. And yet, repeatedly details uploaded to Journey Planner were incorrect, sometimes wildly so, showing the wrong times, and missing out key station stops.

Despite this happening repeatedly before, and SWR being told about it by us repeatedly, once again a version of the timetable was uploaded that missed out Feniton or Whimple stops. It was very close to implementation before a correct timetable was finally available from Journey Planner. SWR's managers intervened helpfully and repeatedly when I asked, to try to resolve these issues. Whilst we appreciate their input and support, including over the weekend, it should be noted that this exact same set of errors and exactly the same set of delays have happened almost every time temporary timetables have been introduced.

Someone, somewhere must surely have learned how to do this properly by now. If not, someone somewhere must surely be told to write out 100 times: "I must make sure all trains stop at Feniton and Whimple in both directions."

One bright spot in all this was that SWR's new Managing Director, Lawrence Bowman, was determined to see for himself how this reduced timetable was working – or not – and what impact it was having, by travelling along the line all the way to Exeter. And he did so on the very first day of the new timetable. He has also asked his senior management team to repeat the exercise within the first two weeks.

And how do we know this? Because Lawrence stopped off at Honiton, when our Chairman was able to get five minutes of his time to exchange views. I was able to pass on some of our concerns, especially about the timetable uploads and the three-carriage units. I was also able, of course, to make sure the new MD was aware of the excellent support we receive from some of his key managers, including Andrew Ardley and Paula Aldridge.

In a most useful, if unplanned, meeting Lawrence was able to briefly discuss some of the problems with stock availability and plans for the start of the Exeter College term. Hopefully there will be future opportunities for the new Managing Director to meet local groups.

As to the future of the temporary timetable, present indications are that it will be many weeks (even months) before the restrictions can be lifted. Extensive rainfall be needed before there is any chance of a resumption of normal service.

One things is for sure: Network Rail will be hoping to get services back in place before Tuesday November 4th, when a number of GWR trains between Paddington and the South West will need to be diverted along the West of England Line between Exeter and Yeovil Junction, during a three-day line closure north of Exeter, impacting the SWR timetable.

Following the start of the temporary timetable, the Chairman and Secretary of the Salisbury to Exeter Rail Users Group, Bruce Duncan and Nick Hurrell, met with Lawrence Bowman on August 18th. He was accompanied by Peter Williams (Customer and Commercial Director), Andrew Ardley (Regional Development Manager, West) and Mike Terry (Infrastructure Maintenance Delivery Manager, Network Rail).

Lawrence's new responsibility covers both "track" and "train", therefore bringing together functions previously managed separately by SWR and NR. He is presently forming a team that will take responsibility for this.

As reported above, he travelled the entire length last week of the West of England Line on the first day of the reduced timetable. He is well aware of the development work already undertaken over the past 5 years (CMSP, Salisbury Strategic Study, SWR Rolling Stock Plans, etc) and his aim is to review these separate documents and pull together a coherent strategy.

That requires the appointment of a new role - Strategic Development Director – and he is actively looking to recruit. He believes the role will be up and running in 3-6 months and hopes that within the next 18 months there will be a cohesive Business Case to propose investment in CP8. He stressed that the economics must work for the Treasury.

It seems that the driver for the overall plan will be the rolling stock which must be replaced in some form or other by around 2035. This is irrespective of possible Government intervention into climate change targets, as there is only a limited amount of work that can be done to keep the current class 158/9s running.

Whilst proposals on replacement with modified battery/electric class 450s will continue, other options will also be sought which offer the flexibility to order different coach lengths to allow different stock formations or simpler platforming at key locations.

The rolling stock decision is likely to be the catalyst for other developments, including those at Salisbury (depot, extra platforms, re-signalling, etc). SERUG also highlighted the importance of the much-needed re-signalling works at Exeter which will no doubt be required to enable capacity increases.

Mike Terry advised that although the current Soil Moisture Development issues are worse than those experienced in 2022, a good deal of work had been carried since then, so the resultant timetable changes are no worse than 2022. However, more rectification cannot be carried out to fix the track alignment until the soil is sufficiently moist. Timetable changes are therefore likely to continue for some time; estimates include until November.

SERUG highlighted the current poor levels of on-time performance, short-formed services (3 car vs the timetabled 6), last minute cancellations resulting in 4-hour gaps between some services and the poor communication of timetable changes.

It seems that there is no "spare" rolling stock to operate extra services on the busy Axminster Exeter corridor. SWR are unlikely to be able to procure additional units from elsewhere. Andrew Ardley is talking to local colleges/schools to arrange bus services at peak times (direct to colleges).

Peter Williams advised that SWR were once again looking at how onboard refreshments might be provided. However, it was not profitable pre-Covid, so a business case will be hard to justify. Alternatives are still being evaluated – but little further progress has been made.

Commenting on the meeting, Bruce and Nick said:

"We had a good meeting. He's a dynamic character and with a huge task on his hands in bringing track and train together, in advance of the formation of GBR.

"The issue, as we all know is money - there is none at present. But he is keen to pull together all the previous pieces of work from different entities (SWR, Network Rail, etc) into a single cohesive Business Case to present to the Rail Minister and DfT/Treasury at the appropriate time.

"We shall see.... but our initial feedback on the new SWR leadership is positive."

For details of the present temporary service, check out SWR's website. There is also information on our website, including a pdf of the timetable.

See the end of this newsletter for Stop Press news on services at the end of August.

Beware Penguins on the Platform

Customers at Exeter St Davids were surprised last month with the gift of 90 Penguin books hidden around the station, celebrating 90 years since the famous publisher was founded, as well as joining in celebrations for Railway 200.

It was actually 91 years ago, in 1934, when Sir Allen Lane found himself unable to purchase a good book to read at Exeter St Davids station, following a visit to see Agatha Christie in South Devon. His predicament inspired him to start his own publishing company and, one year later, Penguin Books was born, adhering to the principle that high quality, engaging and reasonably-priced books should be available to everyone, anywhere.

In 2023, Exeter City of Literature returned to this ethos with the introduction of the Penguin Books Vending Machine at Exeter St Davids, with the machine being officially unveiled by Sir Allen's daughter Clare Morpurgo, along with her husband, famed author Michael.

Clare and Michael once again returned to the station in August to celebrate the publisher's milestone anniversary, helping to curate a list of books to populate the vending machine including favourite Penguin novels Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen and Charlotte's Web by E. B. White.

After cutting – and serving - a magnificent 'vending machine' cake, created with loving attention to detail by local bakery, The Cakery, Clare and Michael then went on to hide Penguin books throughout the station, delighting unsuspecting customers with a treat for their upcoming train journey.

The books, a gift from Exeter City of Literature, Penguin and GWR also included a bookmark telling the story of Sir Allen Lane's journey 91 years ago, with some copies being placed on the same platform that houses the orange plaque marking the site of his fateful journey in 1934.

Anna Cohn Orchard, Executive Director of Exeter City of Literature, said:

"Lane's legacy reminds us that literature has always been more than words on a page - it's a way to connect across class, time, and geography. So today, we honour the past. But we also celebrate what comes next - communities telling their stories, bringing new ideas to life, and making literature part of everyday experience."

Rebecca Sinclair, Chief Brand Officer at Penguin Books:

"In 1934 at Exeter station, Allen Lane had the simple but radical idea that quality literature should be cheap and accessible for all. The following year, Penguin books was founded, changing the way the nation reads forever. Today, Lane's mission remains central to everything we do, and we're delighted to celebrate his legacy, which has given us books that will long continue to educate, inspire, and challenge us."

The latest banner to go up at the station is to promote Honiton as a Fair-trade Town.

Autumn Engineering Report

Details of how planned works will affect local trains must be considered provisional at the moment, due to the ongoing Reduced Timetable on our line.

Saturday 6th and Sunday 7th September

The lines in the Wimbledon area will be closed all weekend due to maintenance work. Berrylands station will be closed all weekend. Please use other nearby stations.

Saturday

London Waterloo to Exeter St Davids services will be revised.

Buses will run between Clapham Junction and Surbiton

Sunday

London Waterloo to Exeter St Davids services will be revised with some services starting from Basingstoke.

Buses will run between Clapham Junction and Surbiton

Saturday 27th and Sunday 28th September

The lines between Yeovil Junction and Exeter St Davids will be closed all weekend due to maintenance work.

London Waterloo to Exeter St Davids services will terminate at Yeovil Junction.

Buses will run between Yeovil Junction and Exeter St Davids.

Wednesday 15th and Thursday 16th October

On these days, the New Street bridge will be closed to vehicles. Diversions will be in place. This road closure is to allow an inspection of the bridge to take place.

At this stage, no plans have been announced to close the railway line above this bridge during the day while these works are taking place. It is likely, however, that the line may be “closed” for short periods during the time when trains are not expected, in order to facilitate any access from below that workers need to have. This is actually easier to achieve during the time of reduced timetables, as there is effectively an almost two hour gap when the line is quiet.

It is also possible that the line will be closed overnight between Wednesday and Thursday while this work takes place. If so, neighbours can expect to receive letters from Network Rail warning them of the work.

And Looking Further Ahead…

Between Tuesday 4th and Thursday 6th November, SWR services may be subject to re-timing. This is due to engineering work between Taunton and Exeter St David's which will require some GWR services between London Paddington and the South West to be diverted between Yeovil Junction and Honiton. This work - and the diversion - may be impacted by SWR's reduced timetable if it is still in operation by then, which it may well be!

New Stamp Trail Launched for Railway 200

As part of the celebrations for Railway 200, Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership have launched a limited-edition Stamp Trail at stations across Devon and Cornwall.

You can pick up your collector's card at station ticket offices, explore the local area by train and collect handstamps as you go. There are 33 stamps to get at station ticket offices, station cafes and other participating locations. These include the Stationmaster's Café at Barnstaple, the Bulleid Buffet at Okehampton and the Station Tea Rooms at Crediton.

Each of the locations has their own dedicated Railway 200 handstamp. Simply visit the location with your Stamp Trail guide and ask them to stamp the circle next to their name on the map.

David Whiteway, Regional Development Manager (West) for GWR said:

"This initiative is a fun and engaging way to celebrate 200 years of railway heritage, while promoting rail travel and local tourism and was one of the Community Fund projects GWR committed to funding this year."

Richard Burningham, Manager of the Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership said:

"I very much hope the new Stamp Trail will lead to many people exploring our great local rail network to collect the stamps. What better way to celebrate locally the contribution the railway has made to the country since the first public trains ran in 1825."

A spokesperson for Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership added:

"Please allow plenty of time at each location to get your stamp. And be patient as the staff may have other duties they have to attend to first."

As well as the Stamp Trail, DCRP is celebrating Railway 200 with a series of extra-special Fantastic Facts boards at selected stations. These include Plymouth, Newton Abbot and Topsham, where you can learn more than you probably want to know about how the local railway line once depended on Guano for much its trade. And yes, that is bird poo!

The Railway 200 Stamp Trail has been made possible thanks to a grant from GWR's Customer and Community Improvement Fund. **(Photo credit for Stamp Trail photos: DCRP)**

New Interactive Device Makes its Debut at Station

Visitors to the station will have noticed a new addition to the waiting room, in the form of an interactive information totem. This has been funded as part of a wider project promoting travel to the Jurassic Coast.

As we reported in July, the Jurassic Coast by Train initiative was recently awarded money from SWR's CCIF fund to develop its work.

The latest stage of the project will include a video promoting journeys to Seaton, building on the success of last year's video made featuring the bus link from Honiton Station to Sidmouth.

There will further developments to the project website, as well as social media campaigns.

Costing around £12,000, the interactive totem allows passengers to see a rolling feed of live information, and to access further information by interacting with the large touch-screen device.

As well as arrival and departure information, the screen gives access to information about onward travel, and walking routes to key places in the town such as the Thelma Hulbert Gallery and Allhallows Museum. There is also information about the Community Rail Partnerships linked to South Western Railway.

We are pleased to note that the totem also provides British Sign Language interpretation of information about the next two train departures from the station. The provision of this information is something we reported on before, when it was only available at the very largest of SWR's stations. It is encouraging to see this technology being rolled out more widely, as these totems are installed at more stations.

At present, some sections of the totem's screen are under-developed, but that is inevitable, given that key sections of the information screen only contain partial data at present.

When not operating in interactive mode, the screen shows a rolling sequence which includes information on the next few departures, as well as adverts linked to SWR, such as promotions for theatre productions and other events.

Once everything has bedded in, we intend to work with SWR and the Community Rail Partnership to see how we can make the most of this new facility.

We are grateful to all at SWR and to Richard Burningham for working so hard to get this piece of kit for Honiton.

Battery Powered Train Passes New Milestone

As we continue to ponder the best options for decarbonising the railway, and especially for the future traction on our line, Great Western Railway recently announced that they had set a new world record for the furthest distance travelled by a battery-electric train on a single charge.

In the year the industry celebrates 200 years since the birth of the modern railway, GWR registered an incredible 200 miles on a return journey from Reading Train Care Depot which took in London Paddington (twice) and Oxford.

It was enough to smash the previous record of 139 miles achieved by Stadler Deutschland in Berlin in 2021 and demonstrates the capability of battery-electric trains as GWR seeks to replace its ageing diesel fleet.

Officials from the Rail Performance Society, an organisation dedicated to recording and studying the performance of railways and railway traction in the UK, were on board to witness and verify the new world record.

Rail Performance Society Vice Chair, Nigel Smedley, said:

“We can confirm that, subject to final checks, the Great Western Railway Class 230 train travelled 200 miles on a return journey from Reading Train Care Depot without charging its batteries from any external energy source.”

The Class 230 train, number 230001, is the one used for GWR’s successful trial of fast-charge technology on the Greenford branch line over the past year.

The new world record follows the release of a report published by GWR last month, outlining the findings of the trial, which proved battery trains could provide a viable and cost-effective alternative to diesel trains.

It comes as the operator prepares plans to renew its ageing regional fleet trains, which are expected to go out of serviceable use in the next 7-10 years.

GWR Engineering Director, Dr Simon Green, said:

"We're delighted to set a new world record - and to reach 200 miles in such a landmark year for the rail industry is the icing on the cake. It's a real tribute to colleagues at GWR and Network Rail who have worked so hard on developing fast-charge technology.

"Today's record attempt has been a bit of fun, but it also underlines a serious point: investment in battery technology is essential as we look to replace our ageing diesel fleet.
"Overhead lines will remain the first choice to power electric trains, but where that isn't possible or desirable, battery technology like this offers a reliable and efficient alternative to bridge the gap.

"As part of our future rolling stock plans we'll need battery trains to routinely cover over 60 miles between charges - and today's achievement provides clear evidence that this is a viable and exciting solution for the future of our railway."

Network Rail Operations Director, Simon Gillibrand, was among those at Reading Train Care Depot to welcome the record-breaking battery train. He said:

"We'd like to congratulate GWR on setting this world record – reaching 200 miles during the Railway 200 celebrations is not just a symbolic achievement, but an important breakthrough that highlights the potential of battery-powered trains.

"Rail is already the greenest form of public transport and today's record-breaking journey shows what an important role new technologies will play in our commitment to a low-emission railway, with a goal of reaching net-zero by 2050."

New Sign at Station Bus Stop

If you have travelled from the station recently, you will have noticed that a new laminated paper sign has been erected in the bus shelter.

The sign directs passengers to the correct place to catch the various buses that serve the station. Previously it has been slightly confusing that the automated display gave times for buses without making clear that some of those listed did not actually stop at the station bus stop, but on the road outside.

Following the intervention of our colleagues at Community Rail Network and the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership, Devon County Council have now put this right, with a "temporary" sign.

Women's Rugby World Cup Comes to South West

Among those who are gearing up for a successful Women's rugby World Cup are the South West's train operators. With a number of key matches being played in Exeter and Bristol, GWR in particular are looking forward to a successful World Cup, and supporting the red Roses (and Wales!) as they try to bring the trophy home.

World Cup Matches will take place at two Premiership stadia: Sandy Park in Exeter and Bristol's Ashton Gate – both perfectly positioned for train travel.

For the South West, the tournament launched with a blockbuster clash between France and Italy at Sandy Park, kicking off on Saturday 23rd August.

For the opening match, half-hourly services ran from Exeter St Davids to Digby & Sowton, and from Exmouth to Newcourt, ensuring fans were able to reach the ground with ease.

GWR, who operate the train service, recommended allowing extra time for your journey and checking live travel updates before departure – particularly if passengers were travelling from further afield.

Those travelling from afar were affected by a reduced timetable being operated by CrossCountry over the Bank Holiday weekend due to industrial action, and by South Western Railway's reduced timetable between Waterloo and Exeter.

Later in the tournament, Exeter and Bristol both host Quarter-Final matches, with Bristol then staging the two semi-finals, before attention switches to Twickenham (and SWR!) for the Final. Good luck to all the teams taking part.

Remaining Sandy Park Fixtures:

Saturday 6 September: Canada v Scotland and Wales v Fiji

Saturday 13th September: Quarter Final match

Sunday 14th September: Quarter Final match

Ashton Gate Fixtures:

Saturday 13th September: Quarter Final match

Sunday 14th September: Quarter Final match

Friday 19th September: Semi Final match

Saturday 20th September: Semi Final match

Rail Delivery Group Tells Passengers ‘On the Train You Can’

You may have seen the new TV advert, extolling the virtues of train travel. Called 'Before', the advert is described by its makers as demonstrating *“how train journeys can unlock intimate moments to connect.”*

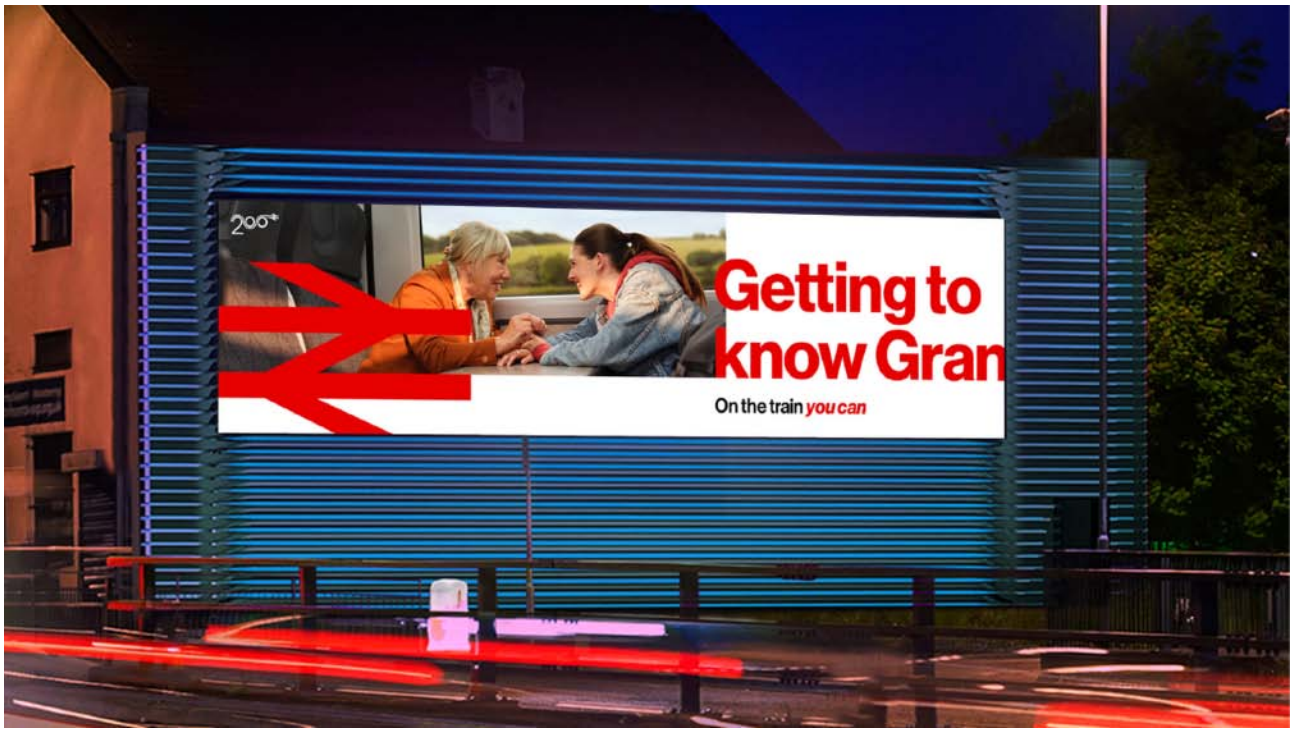
Opening with a young couple falling in love on cobbled Mediterranean streets, the story is narrated by a grandmother recalling her youth to her granddaughter on board a train. When the granddaughter says, “I didn't know you and grandad met in Italy,” Gran replies, “Oh no... we met the following year!'” As they laugh and the next mischievous tale begins. As the camera pulls away, the voiceover concludes, “Getting to know Gran before she was Gran. On the train you can.”

For those who may be worried that our rail fares went on sending actors and crew to Italy, the advert was actually filmed in Wales (presumably at Portmeirion?).

Rail Delivery Group (RDG), the membership organisation that works on behalf of the rail industry, has launched this new integrated campaign as part of the rail industry’s National Marketing strategy developed by the rail industry’s customer and revenue growth team.

'On the Train You Can', aims to show how travelling by train is a way to reclaim quality time for what matters. The emotive campaign highlights the power of human connection and meaningful moments found on the journey, not just the destination.

The campaign is due to unfold say TMW, the agency responsible, in three strategic areas of focus. They state that: *“The initial launch will establish the emotive foundation of the campaign – personal, human connection onboard the train, through high-impact above-the-line media, including TV, radio, cinema and large-format Out Of Home (i.e. billboards, large screens etc).”*



For 'On the Train You Can', TMW ensured that the iconic double arrow railway logo features loudly and proudly across all channels, ensuring that every part of the campaign is clearly linked back to the train experience. **(Images Credit: TMW and Rail Delivery Group)**

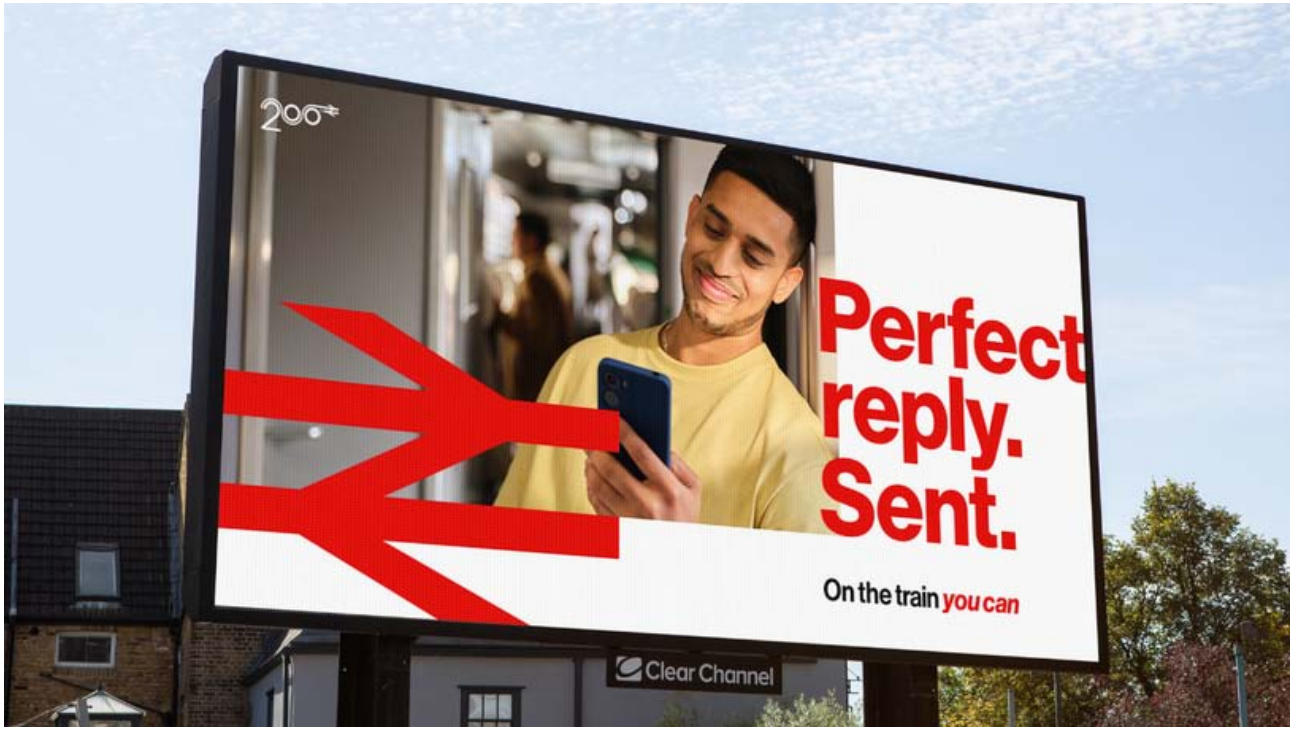
Commenting on the launch of the campaign, Penny Allen, Head of Marketing Strategy in the rail industry's customer and revenue growth team said,

"We're not just selling train travel - we're selling time. A key insight theme is that travellers see train travel as time well spent. This campaign reflects the experience of rail travel across Britain, wherever you're going and whoever you travel with. Our vision is to position train travel as the smart, sociable, and enjoyable way to get around - a chance to reclaim your time and reconnect with what matters, both onboard and beyond.

"With 'On the Train You Can' we want to make train travel more mentally available by showing how rail lets you do more of what you want - from relaxation to productivity. It's about encouraging people to travel by train more often, not just because they have to, but because they want to."

Leaving aside whether the real issue is whether trains are "mentally available" (whatever that means!) or just whether they are actually running, it is clear that the new campaign is focusing on the experience of travelling, whereas the previous Rail Delivery Group TV campaign had featured the feeling of arriving at our destination and meeting those we were travelling to see.

There are, of course, risks with this approach, as passengers could reflect on the negatives of their journey experience – no refreshments, over-crowded carriages, trains that are not always as clean as they might be – and compare this campaign with their daily reality.



Looking at it more positively, however, Graeme Noble, Chief Creative Officer at TMW said,

"In a world where almost everyone feels like they're too busy, this campaign celebrates a simple truth: the train is one of the few places where you can stop, breathe, and just be.

"For some people, that might mean a rare moment to have a breather and catch up on some life admin, get lost in thought or, even better, take an opportunity for a proper face-to-face conversation with friends and family."

Stop Press: August Ends With a New Low

Just as we went to press, August ended on a very difficult note on our railway, with a range of issues affecting the service through Honiton for several days.

First, services were delayed or cancelled due to problems with a level crossing east of Axminster.

Then SWR services were caught up in a major signalling failure in the Exeter area, which also led to cancellations on the Exmouth branch and services running west of Exeter. At least one westbound service was terminated at Honiton before the problem could be resolved.

Finally, on Friday August 29th, matters came to a head when several services were cancelled due to a shortage of guards, leaving a four-hour gap between trains.

The short notice given of this, the fact that it was a Friday – one of the busiest days of the week for long distance travellers during the summer holidays – and that it was the end of the summer school holiday, all conspired to make this a very tough day for everyone concerned…

Not least the station staff, who were left trying to get passengers to their destinations somehow, while also explaining why this further reduction of service was happening. To make things worse – if that is possible – the automated station displays could not cope with these further changes to the service.

As we have pointed out before, over the last few weeks these systems have become increasingly unreliable and inaccurate. For instance, they cannot display accurately the number of carriages expected in trains that are due, and they cannot explain accurately which carriages passengers should board for Feniton or Whimple.

On August 29th, the automated display had a further meltdown, when the 16.11 departure to Exeter vanished completely from the system. It had first been cancelled by SWR due to the crew shortage, then re-instated as a Yeovil Junction to Exeter service. Then that was itself cancelled, and the original train re-instated. The result was that the system could not cope, and the train vanished into thin air, only to reappear when it left Axminster for Honiton.

Not entirely unconnected, the information that feeds the brand-new Interactive Totem was also not working, with the screen only able to offer its rolling display of adverts, and live data being shown as being unavailable.

SWR is exploring why this system is not working properly. Hopefully, they will do the same for the automated displays and announcements, on which passengers are so reliant.

Our colleagues at SERUG are also in discussions with SWR about the reasons for the sudden cancellations on August 29th, as well as exploring with them the wider issue of the reduced timetable and how it is operating.

Rumours of Steam Special: Yet to be Confirmed

Following the postponement of the Atlantic Coat Express on August 16th, another operator is negotiating with Network Rail about getting access to the West of England Line to run a steam special on October 11th.

At present it unclear whether permission will be granted to West Coast Railways to operate the service, given the present reduced timetable, increased journey times and a number of speed restrictions in place, all making finding a slot to run a steam special more difficult to manage.

We will update everyone when we know more. At present, the plan is for a Merchant Navy Class locomotive (not Clan Line) to haul the special. Possible timing have not been announced.

Coffee and Conversation

Please book the date for our next members' Coffee and Conversation session. It will be held at the Beehive Cafe at 11 a.m. on Monday September 29th.

As well as our usual railway-based chat, we will take this opportunity to complete the key task of an AGM, which is to vote on the Chairman for the next year, as required by our constitution.

And yes, the present Chairman is willing to stand again…