

# Obsessed with performance

By Alison Forster, **Director and General Manager, Safety and Performance, First Great Western**

The message from our customers is that performance is their number-one priority. First Great Western is dedicated to continuously improving punctuality for the customers and, through a wide range of initiatives over the past 12 months, has improved its own delay minutes by 20 per cent. As this is only part of the performance challenge, First Great Western is working in partnership with Network Rail to mitigate the impact of infrastructure delays. First has developed an improvement plan between First Great Western and Network Rail, it has established a joint Control Centre in Swindon, and is working on joint operational activities in Reading.

However, despite all this effort, performance in terms of punctuality – as measured by PPM – is only improving slowly year-on-year, and is subject to major setbacks. Last year, delays in the Great Western region were worse than ever, including the immediate aftermath of the Hatfield accident. Landslips, flooding, derailments, signalling problems, broken rails, speed restrictions and fleet problems all combined to give the customer a truly awful experience. If we do not overcome these problems the rail industry's future will be bleak; customers may choose to travel by other means and the Government will choose to spend resources elsewhere.

Through these experiences, we have been motivated to look for inexpensive and more immediate solutions that can improve our service to our customers.

## Timetable changes December 2004

With First being selected as preferred bidder for the Thames franchise, this allows for a timetable that will deliver improved punctuality, reliability and capacity. This is done by: -

- Substantially achieving homogeneity of train performance on the main lines

and the relief lines between Reading and Paddington;

- Largely removing the conflicting moves across the main lines, particularly in the Reading area;
- Unifying our approach to managing platform capacity at Paddington, and thereby removing the conflicting moves in the Paddington throat; and
- Aiming to improve train regulation policy by having a single franchise owner covering Thames and First Great Western.

## Command and Control

The effectiveness of real-time operational decisions is critical in recovery from incidents. Having competent people, equipped with clear communications, is vital if we are to operate the railway in the best way. We hope the decision makers can focus on overall service quality rather than narrower commercial interests. We have a plan with Network Rail that, over the next six months, should make the step change in our command and control of the service.

We have just appointed a senior operations manager at Reading to take command of all real-time issues working with Virgin, Network Rail, EWS and Thames. It is our intention to create a single operations decision maker for this vital hub, which should optimise performance for all. An important part of this drive is the active involvement of key front-line staff (drivers, signallers, controllers, station and maintenance staff) who, when asked, very often know what should be done to make this better!

## Planning

The timetable must be realistic and must reflect the operational constraints of the infrastructure, particularly temporary speed restrictions (TSRs). Much of the delay caused by TSRs is absorbed by recovery time but, as recovery time is absorbed, there is less time available to absorb delay from other causes. The increase in TSRs is the biggest cause of our deterioration in performance. As a result of this, an in depth review of the timetable is being carried out.

In addition, we have significantly increased the turnround times of our rolling stock to prevent the propagation of delay to trains at the start of their journey. We have put in the equivalent of two HST sets to deliver this level of resilience. In addition we have increased the turnround times of train crew and put in stand-by traincrew.

## First Great Western's own performance

First Great Western is responsible for 20 per cent of all the delays to our services. Delays caused by First Great Western stand at an average of 10,500 minutes per period; the lowest-ever recorded delay.

Some of the measures taken by First Great Western to achieve this significant improvement are outlined below:

- Adoption of improved performance management process throughout FGW, concentrating on reducing delays through ownership of problems;
- An extensive refurbishment programme for FGW HST fleet;
- A joint improvement plan with ALSTOM for Class 180 fleet;
- Ownership of the FGW fleet within the engineering team;
- The adoption of a robust internal timetable production process;
- Commissioning of independent performance studies of the Great Western region;
- Using independent consultants to simulate performance of FGW timetable, to ensure robustness and resilience of any change;
- The recruitment of additional senior operations managers to act as duty control managers at London Paddington and Bristol Temple Meads. This is now in the process of being extended to Reading;
- The implementation of FGW commercial 'Service Recovery' process;
- A staff incentive scheme for FGW station staff, to improve dispatch of FGW services from stations;
- The continual development of our manpower plan, ensuring adequate/surplus traincrew are available to resource the timetable;

- National training award for FGW's driver training programme; and
- The recent award of 'Investors in People' (IIP) status to our Commercial department,

## FGW performance philosophy

At First Great Western we are obsessed with performance but, along with the other long-distance operators, delivering a punctual service for our customers is proving enormously difficult, due to the deterioration that followed the major disruption in 2000/01.

In the late 1980s the common saying in the railway was 'if you are not measuring it then you are not managing it' and, certainly at that time, the measurement of just about all activities was relatively novel. I think that some are now in danger of being so busy measuring performance that they really haven't got time to manage it! This is a particular danger when the computers we all now use so readily produce nice looking tables and graphs giving the illusion of activity.

Be assured that, in First Great Western, we measure and analyse our performance, but with the sole purpose of determining what is going wrong – and putting it right. We pride ourselves on our commitment to improve performance through the following:

- Full commitment and involvement of all staff from the ground floor to director level;
- The thorough understanding of the causes of delay;
- Robust processes and systems for measuring and monitoring delays, their causes and trends;
- The setting of achievable targets, with clear accountability;
- Actionable plans with resources available to achieve them;
- Co-operation between all parties; and
- Delay budgets to some 50 individual managers.

The management of performance requires relentless attention to detail, and a team of people who are focused on both the planning and delivery. I have such a team at First Great Western.

#### PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FOR RAILWAY OPERATORS

- Have you got experience of operating the railway?
- Do you want professional recognition, development and qualifications?
- The Institution of Railway Operators has been established to provide a professional structure and qualifications for people with knowledge and experience of operating the railway, at all levels.
- A new information pack is now available for anyone interested in finding out more about the Institution and its education programme. Please e-mail, write, phone or fax to Claire Wickes at the above address if you would like a pack for yourself or colleagues.

#### MEMBERS' NEWS

##### Corporate Membership

The following employers operate a Corporate Membership scheme, by paying a one-off annual fee which covers all their employees' Affiliate or Associate membership subscriptions. (Those with full Membership will continue to pay their subscription personally, irrespective of whether they can subsequently claim it back from their employer through expenses).  
Network Rail, London Underground Ltd, Wales and Borders, Freightliner, Virgin Trains, First North Western, First Great Eastern, First Great Western, Go-Ahead Group, Transport for London, Docklands Light Railway, Thames Trains, South Central, Thameslink, Stagecoach Rail, London Lines, GB Railways, Sheffield Supertram, WAGN, Anglia Railways, Island Line,

Silverlink Trains, Hull Trains, South West Trains, c2c, GB Railfreight, EWS Railway, Northern Ireland Railways, South Eastern Trains, Iarnród Éireann, Corus Rail Consultancy, ScotRail, Central Trains.

Any company not listed is welcome to contact us to find out more!

#### DIARY OF EVENTS

##### NORTH WEST AREA

Wednesday 24 March 2004 – North West Annual General Meeting with talk by Tom Birch on the Institution's Education Programme.

For details please contact: Clive Evans on 01270-629009 or email us at: [Northwest@railwayoperators.org](mailto:Northwest@railwayoperators.org)

##### MIDLANDS AREA

Provisional dates for the next few meetings are:

- Monday 23 February 2004;
- Monday 22 March 2004; and
- Monday 26 April 2004

For information on all Midlands Area events, please contact Julia Stanyard on 0121 345 3099 or email us at [Midlands@railwayoperators.org](mailto:Midlands@railwayoperators.org)

##### SOUTH EAST AREA

WEDNESDAY 18 FEBRUARY 2004 – Kim Howells MP, Minister for Transport (Sponsored by Porterbrook)  
TUESDAY 30 MARCH 2004 – Tim O'Toole, Managing Director, London Underground.

MONDAY 24 MAY 2004 – Ray Price, Operations Director, Arriva Trains.

All meetings take place at the Union Jack Club, Sandell Street, Waterloo. Doors open at 1800 and

the talks commence at 1830.

To contact the South East area on any subject please send an e-mail to the following address: [Southeast@railwayoperators.org](mailto:Southeast@railwayoperators.org)

##### NORTH EAST AREA

TUESDAY 2 MARCH, 1730 for 1800. Scott Handley of Wensleydale Railway on the operational aspects of the launch of the railway and operational progress to service expansion. The Studio', Platform 9, York Station. Buffet provided. Non-members welcome.

TUESDAY 4 MAY. Visit to Neville Hill depot. Meet at 1745 in front of WH Smith on Leeds station concourse for minibus to/from depot. Stout footwear required – other PPE will be provided on site. As places are limited, it is essential that you e-mail [mike.hogg@ews-railway.co.uk](mailto:mike.hogg@ews-railway.co.uk) if you wish to attend. Places will be confirmed by e-mail. Return to Leeds station by minibus by 2030.

The North East Area of the IRO continues into its fourth year of bi-monthly lectures and visits. Around 20 to 25 people attend lectures at our normal venue of the Studio at York Station – kindly facilitated by GNER. Members are encouraged to bring guests. We e-mail/post out an A4-sized forthcoming meeting notice, and members are asked to display this at their workplace. As is now traditional, the summer sees two site visits, the first of which is advertised above. As space on these is normally limited special (but simple, e-mail-based) booking arrangements will always apply. The Area is looking for one or two members to join the NE Council, which meets bi-monthly at York to plan events, review the budget and

undertake new member grading. We are especially keen to see sharp-end staff join the council. If you are interested in joining us for this fairly small time commitment, please contact Mike Hogg on 01302 766300 or 07801 905262.

North East Area meetings normally take place at 1730 for 1800, at York, and full details will be published, in advance, each month in this column. For further news on the IRO in the North East contact us by e-mail at: [Northeast@railwayoperators.org](mailto:Northeast@railwayoperators.org)

##### SCOTTISH AREA

For information on all Scottish events and matters, please contact [Scottish@railwayoperators.org](mailto:Scottish@railwayoperators.org) or phone Douglas Kerr on 0141 335 5430.

##### SOUTH WEST AREA

The South West area now holds an open committee meeting, followed by a social evening in Bristol on the second Tuesday of the month – next ones 10 February and 9 March 2004. The meetings start at 1600 in the Network Rail offices at Temple Point, Redcliffe Way, Bristol. The social is from 1700 in the 'Shakespeare', Victoria Street (close to Redcliffe Way).

An all-day, Saturday event has been arranged for 24 April, to visit Mendip Rail, and Merehead Quarry operations near Cranmore, meeting at Westbury for road transport. Lunch will be at a suitable location in the Merehead area. Please put this one in your diaries – full details to follow.

For all events, contact Lawrie Hall, internal 07 79307, mobile 07771 827797 or e-mail us at [Southwest@railwayoperators.org](mailto:Southwest@railwayoperators.org).

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