

CHILTERN RAILWAYS PASSENGER BOARD: 2018-19 ANNUAL REPORT



Introduction

This is the 17th Annual Report of the Chiltern Railways Passenger Board (CRPB) and summarises the main issues that have been reviewed and considered at Board meetings during the past year together with contributions made by Board members at each of the meetings and in correspondence.

The CRPB plays an important role in providing the opportunity for Chiltern Railways' (CR) senior management to present their proposals and future plans and to be held accountable for any adverse performance issues. The Board also acts as a useful information source enabling CR senior managers to understand, at first hand, the issues and concerns that directly affect passengers using their services.

I would like to express my thanks to all Board members for their support and respect during the year.

Background

The Chiltern Railways Passenger Board was first established in April 2002 and facilitating the Board is a requirement of the Chiltern Franchise agreement (schedule 13 – clause 11.7).

The Board comprises representatives of Passenger User Groups and Local Authorities from along the routes served by CR's train services. The Board monitors the regular operational performance of CR and reviews infrastructure upgrades, passengers' facilities, timetable changes, fares' proposals and passenger satisfaction surveys.

Currently, four quarterly Board meetings are normally held every year with the venue alternating between Birmingham Moor Street and London Marylebone stations. Additional meetings covering specific issues can be convened as and when required.

Detailed minutes are produced after each meeting summarising the matters discussed that record Board members' views on performance data, ideas for consideration and the responses from CR management representatives to queries raised by Board members. These minutes are not published to avoid any possible breaches of confidentiality and/or commercial sensitivity.

The following pages contain a summary of the major topics and issues covered at each Board meeting during the previous twelve months. References to Chiltern Railways are abbreviated to CR and similarly Network Rail is NR.

JULY 2018 MEETING

This meeting was held at Marylebone with eighteen people present including six from CR.

Election of Chairman for 2018-19

Chris Bates was elected unopposed as Chairman for the year to July 2018. John Elvin was elected unopposed as Vice-Chairman.

Alan Riley, Customer Services Director

Alan Riley updated the board in respect of a number of ongoing projects which form part of the company's Transformation Plan;

- Ticket Machine replacement programme. The installation phase was now complete, with focus turning to the major software upgrades due to take place from December 2018. These will include the introduction of functionality to support a Chiltern Smartcard and the retailing of tickets to / from anywhere in a three-month timeframe.
- Station transformation and refreshes. An overview was provided of major changes being made to the booking offices at Aylesbury, Gerrards Cross, Leamington Spa and Warwick Parkway. It was thought that these projects would be completed in the first half of 2019.
- Cycle storage facilities would be significantly extended at Bicester North and at Bicester Village stations in the second half of 2018.

- Other senior managers present at the meeting then briefly fielded Q&A sessions. Subjects included:
 - The impact of engineering work on customers and how CR planned for such events. It was noted that The Events Team have been shortlisted for a national award.
 - Revenue Protection strategy. Short term aim is that customers see staff on trains than has previously been the case. Surveys and samples suggest that CR has one of the lowest rates of ticketless travel in the UK. Medium term plans are to carry out increasing number of 'surprise' checks at stations and to extend the hours of operation of ticket barriers at many stations.
 - Environmental concerns at Marylebone. A review of announcements at the station had reduced the number of automated announcements by 26%.

- Two new digital information boards were about to arrive at Marylebone with another four in the pipeline. This will then assist with Dual Boarding and posting of platforms. Aspirational is for 12 minutes notice for all trains and 15 minutes for Birmingham and Oxford services. Acknowledged that these timings would be a real challenge as the train plan meant that some of these timings could never be met.

Review of Performance Issues

CR reported that performance over the last three periods had been hugely variable with the largest performance impacting incidents being attributed to CR, to other operators and also to NR infrastructure failures. Punctuality has fallen below strategic long-term targets however it was noted that despite this the company performs better than most other operators nationwide, with league table positions ranging from 6th to 2nd in the last quarter.

Future Passenger Board Meeting Times

The Board reviewed the programme of existing meeting dates, times and venues, and after discussion, agreed to continue with a programme of quarterly meetings starting in the early afternoon, with venues rotating between the South of the route (London) and the North (Birmingham).

OCTOBER 2018 MEETING

This meeting was held in Birmingham with twelve people participating including three from CR.

Project updates:

CR provided updates on the forthcoming Ticket Machine upgrades and an overview of retail channel changes. It was noted that there had been an increase in the number of complaints received relating to online ticket sales. CR confirmed that the website was under constant review and development.

Updates were provided on the upcoming station refresh projects. It was noted that any proposed change of station tenant inevitably leads to an increase in complaints, however CR confirmed that it was content with its strategy of using independent agents to appoint tenants based on objective scoring methodologies, aimed at improving the customer experience.

Review of Performance Issues

CR reported that very sadly, performance over the last three reporting periods had been affected by an unusually large number of incidents involving members of the public being struck by trains. The company reported that an increasing number of staff have been on training courses run for the rail industry by the Samaritans, to help staff who become involved in conversations with individuals who may be at risk.

September also saw a sustained period of track defects, particularly in the area between Haddenham & Thame Parkway and Bicester. Most notable of these events was the slippage of an embankment at Piddington which resulted in a 20mph emergency speed restriction towards London and emergency changes to the timetable. Network Rail's response to the incident appeared to be prompt and appropriate with passengers being able to see the large scale earthworks taking place throughout the second half of September.

205 Bus Consultation

It was brought to the Board's attention that Transport for London were carrying out a consultation in respect of proposed changes to a number of Central London bus routes. Included in the proposals was a suggestion that the 205 bus would be diverted so as to no longer call outside the front of Marylebone station. CR confirmed that they were objecting to the proposal and it was agreed at the meeting that User Groups would actively participate in the consultation. Regrettably, in April 2019, TfL stated that they intended to proceed with the proposed changes.

Driver Shortages

CR were challenged on the high number of train cancellations seen recently, attributed to no drivers being available. The company explained that some of this had been due to the high number of fatalities experienced recently (understandably drivers may be off work for extended periods after such incidents) while some was as a result of a change in rostering policy. The company advised that (at the time of the meeting) pre-planned cancellations had almost stopped and, at the time of writing this report in July 2019, it does appear that the instances of driver shortages have reduced significantly.

Boxing Day

CR confirmed their plans to operate a limited service on Boxing Day. It was stressed however that this could not be guaranteed for future years as the availability of the infrastructure was determined by whether or not NR required track possessions so as to carry out maintenance work.

JANUARY 2019 MEETING

This meeting was held at Marylebone with eighteen people participating including 5 from CR.

Dave Penney, CR Managing Director, attended the first half of the meeting

Dave Penney, Managing Director

Mr Penney advised the Board that 2018 Performance was 92.7% vs target of 93.75%. TOC on Self attribution was better than 2017 however NR attributed causes were worse in 2018 than in 2017. Some of the background to this is mentioned in the above notes relating to the October 2018 meeting.

The National Rail Passenger Survey results for Autumn 2018 were due to be published shortly after the meeting. Mr Penney advised the board that he was hopeful of a very good set of results. It subsequently transpired that CR scored a satisfaction rating of 92%, the highest of any UK franchised train operator.

A Q&A session focussed on brief updates on;

- Potential for services to Old Oak Common in the future
- Rolling stock availability
- Hybrid trial by the end of 2019
- Vision 26 – Five year franchise extension being looked at
- Williams Review
- HS2 corridor – confirmed no direct conflict.
- Croxley Rail Link – not something that CRCL is minded to push for.

Smartcards

The CR Head of revenue presented to the Board members the strategy for rolling out smartcard ticketing along the Chiltern route. The session included plenty of opportunity to ask questions and to gain a greater understanding of the technology that will benefit many regular travellers and season ticket holders.



GPS positioning of trains

At the January meeting we also received a presentation on a project that is aiming to track the position of all trains accurately. The intention is that the information will be fed to industry data feeds. Benefits for Chiltern customers will be that, for the first time ever, the progress of CR passenger trains will be visible between Harrow-on-the-Hill and Amersham. This means that all train

running information will be more accurate than now, particularly during disruption. CR hope to have this up and running over the coming months.

APRIL 2019 MEETING

This meeting was held in Birmingham with thirteen people participating including two from CR.

Review of Recent Performance Issues

The most disruptive incident over the previous three months was a trespass incident that affected the morning peak. An emerging theme advised to the Board was that infrastructure failings and other operators account for more delay attributions than those caused directly by CR.

At the time of the meeting, the rolling Public Performance Measure was 92.77% (trains arriving less than 5 minutes later than scheduled, slightly less than the 93.75 % target, but better than most operators. Recent Performance Briefings had been circulated in advance of the meeting and the highlights were summarised by CR.

Fleet Performance

The Board was pleased to note that fleet failures had been noticeably reduced and had been only responsible for a minority of major delay issues during these periods. There was however increasing concern at the frequency with which trains are running with fewer carriages than planned. We asked CR to explain their position with regard to fleet availability at a future meeting.

High Wycombe Bay Platform Starting Signal

A recurring theme for the Board over the last couple of years has been the unsatisfactory stopping positions of trains that terminate in the bay platform (1) at High Wycombe. The Board received another update on this outstanding issue and was informed that NR were actively pursuing funding options for a technical solution that would safely allow trains to stop much nearer to the station buildings. Collectively the Board has expressed an intention to work with all interested parties to ensure a solution to the problem is found.

May 2019 Timetable Preview

CR briefly summarised the forthcoming changes to the timetable, most of which related to the increase in the number of direct train services that would operate between London and Stratford-upon-Avon.

Chiltern Website & App Update

A further update was provided to the Board relating to changes and improvements being made to the CR online ticketing sales platforms. CR advised that a specific project had been set up to speed up

the App and that more journey opportunities were being enabled for smartcard tickets as the rollout of upgraded ticket machine software continued.

Nominations for Chairman at next AGM

The Chairman reminded members of the timing of the process for electing a new chairman at the July AGM. Members were urged to consider putting their names forward to ensure the effective running of future meetings.

Chairman's Comments:

Finally, on behalf of the CRPB, I should like to express the Board's thanks to the Directors, Managers and Staff of Chiltern Railways for giving their time to the Board during meetings, consultation processes and correspondence throughout the past year.

Chris Bates
Chairman
Chiltern Railways Passenger Board 2018-19