



Western

The Western route stretches from London across the Thames Valley to Oxford, Worcestershire, the Cotswolds, the West and South West, serving some of Britain’s most important towns and cities. We own, maintain and operate more than 1,847 miles of track and manage Paddington, Reading and Bristol Temple Meads stations. We transport hundreds of thousands of workers on their daily commutes, and connect national and international travellers with some of Britain’s most popular tourist sites. For many people, their first experience of the UK is the rail line linking Heathrow, Europe’s busiest airport, to the Western route’s busiest station, London Paddington.

Key statistics

92m passenger journeys each year

650 level crossings

2,200 train services per day

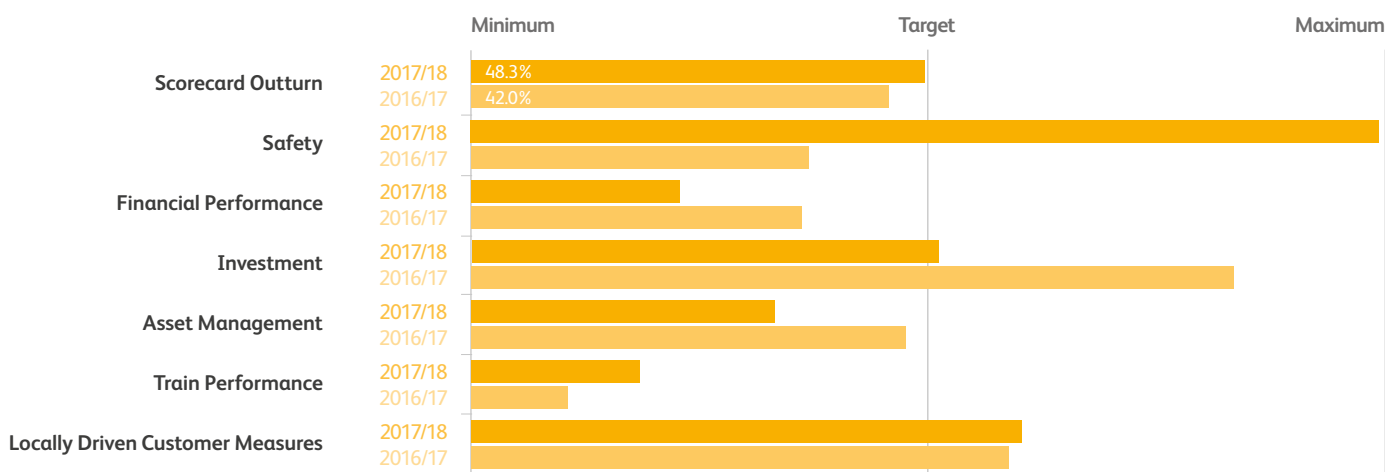
2,600 employees

c. 6m tonnes of stone, steel and petroleum carried annually

£1,150m spent on renewals and enhancements on the route in 2017/18

2,839 bridges

Key scorecard targets



Activities in the year

We have made excellent progress on safety this year, with positive results across the board, including an impressive 32% reduction in lost time injuries across our workforce. Looking after our workforce is important to us: we want great people working in a great culture, so it was good to exceed our people

measure target for this year. We have set further ambitious goals for the coming year, including significant investment in front-line accommodation, and we are committed to attracting and nurturing the strongest talent regardless of race, gender, religion or sexual orientation.

Western continued

2017/18 has also been a strong year of delivery, with key projects coming online after several years' work, bringing benefits which are being felt by thousands of passengers across the route. The upgrades and improvements we have made to power, signalling, track and stations across the route are enabling the largest fleet upgrade in a generation.

Last year the first brand-new class 387 Electrostar trains started to run between Paddington and Hayes & Harlington; they extended their range to Maidenhead in May 2017 and to Didcot by December as we delivered new overhead electric power lines to Didcot. In addition to greater comfort and reliability, each train offers up to 30% more seats. This influx of new rolling stock into the Thames Valley has released a fleet of newer Class 165/6 Turbo trains to move to the West and South West, improving services on local Bristol, Exeter and Cardiff routes.

Just as significant has been the arrival of the new GWR Intercity Express Trains which can operate in diesel and electric modes with faster acceleration and braking which reduces journey times. These new trains provide 10% more seats into and out of London Paddington during peak hours and 20% more seats through Bristol Temple Meads.

This year we welcomed a new operator to our route in the form of MTR Crossrail, who are operating the Elizabeth line on behalf of Transport for London and managing stations between Acton Main Line and Twyford. The effort to prepare the network for the new Class 345 trains, which the service will use, was a major part of our work at Christmas 2017.

Our Railway Upgrade Programme includes continuing weather resilience work across the South West, notably major drainage works at Hinksey and Chipping Sodbury, the start of Cornwall resignalling, enabling increased services between Plymouth and Penzance, and the commissioning of a new platform at Bristol Parkway. This will improve the reliability of both direct GWR services between Bristol and London and CrossCountry Services. The fact that we have managed to significantly reduce complaints by lineside neighbours during this volume of work is testament to our commitment to being a good neighbour.

Behind all of this success is our Alliance with Great Western Railway. This partnership, supported by the independently-chaired Route Supervisory Board, has given us a sharper focus on customer service and enabled us to deliver benefits while minimising disruption and cost. The new timetable introduced on 2 January 2018 was just one direct result of this ethos of joint working, which is being applied to other operators, including Heathrow Express, CrossCountry and the freight operators.

Both train performance and asset reliability have fallen short of target (despite asset performance having a strong recovery in the second half of the year) but we have aggressive short- and long-term plans to rectify this, such as the replacement of track circuits in the Paddington area, which will help improve reliability.

Financial performance has been negatively impacted, largely due to increased compensation paid to train operating companies. This arose from our asset performance during the summer and autumn (some but not all of which was weather-related), plus the effects of the snow and storms towards the end of the year. Our track renewals programme has also been impacted as we balance the huge demands for track access on our route with the need to minimise the impact on passengers.

Delivery against our financial plans in operations, maintenance, renewals and other income has been on plan with a number of additional efficiencies delivered. Strong management and control of our route-wide expenditure has resulted in an overall neutral cash position despite the financial challenges we faced.

In the year ahead

Over Easter 2018 we replaced the signals in the Bristol area, the single largest programme of its type ever undertaken by Network Rail, relocating most of Bristol's signal control to our Didcot signalling centre. This year we will also install two extra tracks into Bristol at Filton Bank. The combined result of all this work will enable more and faster services between Bristol and London from 2019. We will work to complete the Great Western electrification programme to Cardiff and Newbury, extending the benefits of electric trains to more passengers.

The new 2019 Western timetable will improve journeys, providing more services with more seats, faster journey times and new connections across the route.

The biggest change for the Thames Valley will come with the arrival of the Elizabeth line. Our focus for 2018/19 will be the final work on this huge programme and the integration of the new lines onto the network in advance of the Elizabeth line opening fully in December 2019. This line will run from Reading to Paddington, through new tunnels under London, to Essex and Kent, increasing the total rail capacity for London by 10%. Benefits to passengers will start to be felt from summer of this year as MTR take over some services from Paddington using new Class 345 trains. Meanwhile we will continue to develop plans for a Western Rail Link to Heathrow, and third party schemes such as MetroWest. The Western route is being transformed, with new trains, more seats, greater capacity and better connections, and this remains one of the most exciting periods for our railways in generations.

Efficiency case study:

Didcot/Cocklebury sidings: The electrification of the Great Western Main Line is bringing a new fleet of electric trains to the route. The new longer trains require new longer sidings for when they are not in use. The original plan was for the new sidings to be located at Didcot. However, following collaboration between GWR and Network Rail it was identified that it would be possible to locate the new sidings at existing facilities in Cocklebury, Swindon, and by agreeing this change a saving of approximately £11m was made.



Mark Langman,
Route managing director,
Western

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