

Department for
Transport

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Dear Mr Thomas,

Thank you for your letter of 6 October 2006 to me following on from your earlier letter to Douglas Alexander MP. I should like to apologise that this response has been delayed.

You urge the Department for Transport to require the operation of at least three-car trains on the Cardiff-Portsmouth corridor and for fines to be imposed on FGW if it does not operate them. The franchise agreements do not, however, make the stipulation of train lengths on particular train services a matter for the Department. This is a matter for the train operator concerned.

The FGW franchise agreement requires FGW to use reasonable endeavours, in planning its timetable and the rolling stock diagrams needed to implement it, to provide passengers with a reasonable expectation of a seat off peak and within twenty minutes of boarding during the peak period. This does not mean that there is an absolute obligation to provide this capacity on the day of service, as the franchise agreement acknowledges that problems can occur in provision of rolling stock.

There are some issues about the use of the Arriva Trains Wales depot in Cardiff for servicing the FGW trains used on the Portsmouth-Cardiff route and other services in the ex-Wessex Trains areas. It is not ideally configured for the number of both ATW and FGW trains currently using it. A number of problems with the rolling stock have also been identified which reduce its availability for use in service. These sorts of problems can frequently result in trains being displaced from the services on which they should run and shorter trains than planned being used. The new franchise agreement commits FGW to two areas of significant investment in response to these problems.

It is also clear that availability (the number of train units available for service each day) has been particularly poor recently. This makes successful implementation of the investment commitments all the more important. In the interim, FGW has hired in two additional trains from its sister company First Transpennine Express, which FGW is maintaining at its own depot in Exeter.