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Dear Mr Thomas

Thank you for your letter of 6 October 2006. I am sorry that my previous reply failed to hit the mark, and on reflection I can see why you are aggrieved. It did not cover all your points and I apologise.

I am also sorry that we have run with a number of "short formed" services recently. I regret that we have had a shortage of units due to train failures. The reduced number of carriages should be shown on the automated information screens at Temple Meads. I have alerted both the Station and our Control team that this has not been happening and if we do need to reduce capacity this way again I trust you will see it advertised. If not please email jane.iones@firstgroup.com, or call her on 08457 00125 and she will investigate.

I understand how frustrating it is to run with fewer carriages on these trains. We are investing £8 million in the depot at Bristol which will enable us to bring the maintenance of the ex Wessex stock under our control. This will improve both reliability and cleanliness and should reduce the occasions when we run with fewer carriages.

There were a number of problems with crowded trains, which we inherited when we took over the Wessex franchise in April, but we have made a commitment to improve this for the future. As part of this, we intend to introduce four more class 158 trains with the advent of the December 2006 timetable. These trains will be used to augment existing services on our network.

The major benefit will be the ability to strengthen key peak and off peak services, which our customers have informed us are regularly crowded as well as creating standby sets in case of train failure. They will mainly be used on the line from Portsmouth Harbour to Cardiff, which has been one of the most badly affected since we adopted the Wessex franchise.

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