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New report: First Great Western puts Passengers before Profits

Oxford train services to London Paddington are still inadequate for the number of passengers traveling each day, according to a new report released by passenger group Ox Rail Action today (WEDS/THURS).

Susan Westlake, spokeswoman for Ox Rail Action, says: "Over-crowding continues to be a problem on some services and time-keeping for all fast peak-time morning trains is shambolic."

The report is based on the findings of regular passengers and Ox Rail Action members who monitored First Great Western's morning peak-time fast services from Oxford to London Paddington on weekdays between January 22 and February 2.

On December 10 2006, FGW slashed fast morning peak-time trains from six to three – reducing seat capacity by up to 80 per cent. A month later, the train operator was forced to bow to public pressure and introduced a revised timetable on January 15.

Ox Rail Action welcomed the fact First Great Western had responded to passenger anger, but reserved judgment on the service changes until their impact could be monitored in detail.

The key findings of the report are:

- All trains consistently arrive late at London Paddington
- The newly-introduced 6.45am train (unveiled as a 'fast' service) is useless to Oxford passengers traveling to London – with a journey time of around 1hr 15mins it leaves Oxford almost empty each morning alleviating no pressure from the over-crowded 7.05am
- Passengers catching the 7.05am train are still forced to stand all the way to London Paddington from Oxford on some days
- Now that a small Turbo train is used for the 7.05am service, even when there are available seats passengers opt to stand or sit on the floor because the seats are too small and cramped
- Communication with passengers at Oxford station via electronic screens and announcements is erratic and cannot be relied on

Ms Westlake says: "Our report shows that the service we receive each day is simply not good enough. First Great Western continues to put profit before passengers.

"Services are inadequate and unreliable. This has a huge impact on the lives of thousands of Oxford residents each day – whether they are regular travellers, their partners or their families – and is potentially damaging to Oxford's economy.

“We pay thousands of pounds each year and have no choice but to take the train. FGW needs to start putting passengers first.”

The report outlines some key recommendations which Ox Rail Action members say First Great Western should take in order to improve services. These include:

- Improving punctuality and reliability overall – particularly on the 7.33am which regularly arrives too late for passengers to get to their desks before 9am
- Reducing journey time for the 6:45am departure from Oxford for London Paddington
- Scrapping the use of a Turbo train on the 7:05am service and introducing an Adelante or High Speed Train instead
- Repairing or replacing unreliable information boards and platform screens at Oxford station. As a short-term measure, when the boards fail, an immediate notice should be put up by the ticket barriers to tell passengers that the information being shown is wrong
- Immediately investing in supporting staff training in customer service to help improve the frequency and reliability of announcements with minimum standards of information set.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

1. Ox Rail Action members will be available for interview at Oxford station on Thursday March 1, at 6.45am. Call Zahra Akkerhuys on 07974 313566 or Susan Westlake on 07743 055487 if you would like to come along
2. For a copy of the full report visit <http://oxrailaction.wordpress.com>
3. Ox Rail Action was formed by Oxford passengers – for Oxford passengers. We want to see:
 - An adequate supply of seats and services to and from Oxford in peak hours
 - Proper passenger consultation and representation