



Keeping the West moving

Rail replacement buses are rarely popular, but the services put in place after storms hit the South West won a resounding thank-you from customers.

The challenge

In February 2014, storms caused major damage to the Great Western rail network.

When rail lines were flooded in Somerset, First Travel Solutions was already providing a rail replacement service between Exeter and Taunton, during planned improvements to the Whiteball Tunnel. Those services were adapted to keep customers moving.

However, severe storms then hit the Devon coastline, causing significant damage to the Dawlish seawall. It was immediately clear that this would cause longer-term disruption to rail services.



The solution

Staff at our Simonstone headquarters set about contacting the operators of the vehicles that were being used on the Whiteball Tunnel blockade, to secure these resources for the weeks ahead.

Meanwhile, the Somerset Levels flooded in the Fordgate area – which meant that in addition to the Devon rail replacement services, there was a need for transport between Bridgwater and Taunton.

We were able to resource the required vehicles to put a planned service in place, using around 166 vehicles carrying out over 360 bus and coach journeys every day.



**360 daily
replacement
bus and coach
journeys**





“First Travel Solutions exceeded our expectations – and those of our customers – in their outstanding response to an emergency. They excelled in sourcing a huge volume of vehicles and in providing extra services in response to demand – all at extremely short notice.”

To support the local economy, a luxury coach service was also introduced to replace the Night Riviera Sleeper between Tiverton, Portsmouth and Truro. And extra services were provided for local schools and colleges.

We made special efforts to improve customers’ experience during difficult journeys. We arranged for a FirstGroup driver training bus to be equipped as a waiting room at Dawlish station – especially welcomed while the storms continued. We also provided a Portacabin at Exeter St Davids station for the same purpose. This included photographs of the flooding and damage, helping customers to appreciate the need for rail replacement services.

Uniformed ground staff who had worked on the Whiteball Tunnel project were retained to guide customers at stations during the disruption. Coordinators had the discretion to make decisions to help customers whose journey was disrupted, allowing flexibility over ticket restrictions.

The result

The rail replacement services managed to keep the West moving over an unprecedented area. Customers offered compliments in person and thank-you cards. Plymouth City Council invited First Travel Solutions to a civic reception to thank staff for their efforts on the city’s behalf

Special extra services in response to customer demand

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