**South Hampshire Rail Users Group’s Newsletter [Hog Rider]**

**No 152 (September-November 2016)**

This newsletter contains evidence-based reports, research, analysis and discussion from the South Hampshire Rail Users’ Group (SHRUG), founded in 1993, and complements our widely-researched History of South West Trains under Stagecoach [see www.shrug.info].

**[Business as usual: if Stagecoach wins another SWT franchise, passengers will continue to pay the price, especially disabled people](#_Hlk468292739" \s "1,379,518,0,,Business as usual: if Stagecoach)**

**[SWT re-franchising: Stagecoach grooms public with obfuscation and deception](#_Hlk468292782" \s "1,4108,4185,0,,SWT re-franchising: Stagecoach g)**

**[SWT’s timetable changes from 11.12.2016 include ‘additional services’ which already exist](#_Hlk468292834" \s "1,7379,7470,0,,SWT’s timetable changes from 11.)**

**[SWT’s September ‘Webchat’: manipulation results in number of questions falling from 147 to 29 compared with the previous event](#_Hlk468292891" \s "1,9643,9770,0,,SWT’s September ‘Webchat’: manip)**

**[Track South West Issue 2 – more manipulation](#_Hlk468292925" \s "1,10912,10957,0,,Track South West Issue 2 – more )**

**[Govia reportedly got a poor deal on the amalgamated GTR franchise; yet Stagecoach is repeatedly ‘cashing in’ on passengers’ consequent sufferings with comparisons which misrepresent SWT as one of the better London & South East franchises](#_Hlk468292976" \s "1,12118,12356,0,,Govia reportedly got a poor deal)**

**[National Rail Passenger Survey for Spring 2016: South West Trains making little progress and remains generally worse than five years ago](#_Hlk468293016" \s "1,14993,15130,0,,National Rail Passenger Survey f)**

**[First Group’s Great Western rated more highly than Stagecoach’s SWT](#_Hlk468293071" \s "1,16814,16882,0,,First Group’s Great Western rate)**

**[Hope for ‘open access’ Waterloo-Southampton Wessex Electric trains](#_Hlk468293120" \s "1,19101,19180,0,,Hope for ‘open access’ Wessex El)**

**[Southampton-Totton-Fawley rail line prospects](#_Hlk468293176" \s "1,27170,27216,0,,Southampton-Totton-Fawley rail l)**

**[Southampton the 7](#_Hlk468293235" \s "1,30116,30180,0,,Southampton the 7th worst UK cit)[th](#_Hlk468293235" \s "1,30116,30180,0,,Southampton the 7th worst UK cit) [worst UK city for pollution (London is 6](#_Hlk468293235" \s "1,30116,30180,0,,Southampton the 7th worst UK cit)[th](#_Hlk468293235" \s "1,30116,30180,0,,Southampton the 7th worst UK cit)[)](#_Hlk468293235" \s "1,30116,30180,0,,Southampton the 7th worst UK cit)**

**[Looking after the pounds while the passengers look after themselves, day after day: neglect and desertion on SWT following two decades of Stagecoach franchises](#_Hlk468293288" \s "1,31519,31681,0,,Looking after the pounds while t)**

[**Examples of passengers’ comments on Twitter**](#_Hlk468293517)

**[Letter from Jeremy Varns to the Rail Minister and SWT Managing Director](#_Hlk468520009" \s "1,57814,57887,0,,Letter from Jeremy Varns to the )**

**[RAIB report on Lamington viaduct subsidence further highlights loss of corporate memory in the rail industry (think Great Western electrification problems)](#_Hlk468293662" \s "1,57184,57340,0,,RAIB report on Lamington viaduct)**

**[History repeats itself - Stagecoach condemned for ‘absurd’, ‘inaccurate’ and ‘misleading’ evidence again](#_Hlk468293786" \s "1,59980,60085,0,,History repeats itself - Stageco)**

**[Newsboard](#_Hlk468294149" \s "1,63138,63148,0,,Newsboard)**

[**Acknowledgements / Contact details**](#_Hlk468294933)

**Business as usual: if Stagecoach wins another SWT franchise, passengers will continue to pay the price, especially disabled people**

**THE KIND OF THINGS PASSENGERS WANT FROM A NEW OPERATOR:**

* A railway to be proud of, instead of one geared for the acquisition of castles, mansions and huge personal investment portfolios
* Consistently professional standards, with courtesy at all times
* Openness, instead of failure masked by PR
* Value for money, including trains suitable for length of journey
* Punctuality targets met other than in exceptional circumstances, instead of routinely missed
* More focus on passengers’ needs instead of operational convenience
* Services which match the sizes and needs of communities
* Fair treatment instead of heavy penalties for problems arising from unstaffed ticket offices, awkward ticket machines, and a hugely complicated fares system

**THE STATUS QUO**

The Stagecoach founders enjoy huge dividends from holding around a quarter of their company’s shares.

With a billion-pound fortune to safeguard, including mansions and castles, their approach to winning franchises is well rehearsed:

1. Groom public perceptions with manipulative behaviour;
2. Offer government a huge premium to ensure a winning bid; and
3. Raise prices while reducing standards and customer service.

**New weekend restrictions introduced from September**

An underhand fares increase has already been introduced from September, as in SWT Managing Director Christian Roth’s letter of 30.8.2016 to Anne Milton MP:

“Mr Varns may be interested to know that fares are changing on the 4th September 2016 to introduce a restriction on Super Off Peak tickets at the weekend. Super Off Peak tickets will no longer be valid all day.”

Super Off Peak was the new name for Off Peak tickets, after Stagecoach increased the price of the latter by 20 per cent. They are not available on trains arriving at Waterloo before 12 noon.

DfT’s press release, when the current franchise was awarded, said “It is expected that many regulated season tickets will be discounted for passengers travelling outside the height of peak times”. So passengers were led to expect better value and got worse.

For travel away from London, SWT’s off-peak fares have soared. Today an off-peak day return from Southampton to Weymouth by SWT (63 miles) costs £27.00 while one from Southampton to Brighton (62 miles) on Southern costs £15.40.

**No price too small for looking after SWT passengers**

* A commuter holding a first class season ticket was refused his complimentary cup of tea from a SWT trolley because it had run out of the cheaper tea bags used for this purpose.
* A passenger who asked for two plastic ticket wallets at Basingstoke station (one for tickets, and one for his disabled person’s railcard) was told firmly that he could only have one.

**Disabled people invisible on SWT**

A diabetic passenger arriving off a ferry needed to catch the 22.24 from Portsmouth to Woking. He was just in time to take a photo of it leaving at 22.21. He then had to catch the 23.24, which only goes to Guildford.

At Guildford he was told he would have to wait for a bus to Woking at 03.30. He found a member of SWT’s staff and a security guard and asked if they could open a waiting room as he was cold and beginning to feel ill. The SWT member ignored him and the guard insisted he wait for the bus outside the station. Thirty minutes later he was taken to the Royal Surrey Hospital by ambulance, suffering from mild hypothermia.

**SWT re-franchising: Stagecoach grooms public with obfuscation and deception**

A sentence in Modern Railways (November 2016 issue) shows how delusional views of Stagecoach have become: “South West Trains’ partnership with the DfT in the current franchise has been inspirational”. So inspirational in fact that Stagecoach lost the opportunity of extending the franchise for two years because it wanted too much money. And that was in addition to attempting an £11 million tax avoidance scam.

As always when refranchising is in hand, SWT tries to re-invent itself. In the second week of October, two large placards in eye-catching colours appeared on the main concourse at Southampton Central. They stated:

"Inclusion and Diversity

A more inclusive railway

Being a catalyst for change

Offering support and direction

Engaging with staff

Sharing and learning together

Opening up opportunities

Fulfilling potential

A happier environment

SWR are committed to being an inclusive employer.

The South Western Railway"

Sounds great, but what is the South Western Railway and who would provide it? The Department for Transport uses the term “South Western Rail Franchise” for official purposes. Stagecoach trades as “Stagecoach South Western Trains” for official purposes and “South West Trains” in day-to-day contexts.

The internet provides the answer through a remarkable document called “South West Trains – Your partner for a better South Western Railway”. This is essentially an update of Stagecoach’s prospectus for the current franchise which was entitled “Building on Success”. The success at that time was the second SWT franchise having been reduced from 20 years to three for poor performance, with profits soaring and investment in capacity delayed for a decade.

The problem with such documents is that the authors may be deluded into believing their own PR, with not much changing in reality. For example, the new document tells us,

“Our railway is about people”. Quite true, but only in the sense that it’s a passenger railway.

And, “Our vision is for a railway that is more responsive, and built around each customer, their priorities and their communities”. So, no more senior diabetic people left to collapse outside stations in the middle of their night after their trains have left early? Perhaps even satisfaction with value for money soaring above today’s rating of 40% satisfied and 36% positively dissatisfied?

And, “We are proud of the changes and improvements we have made to the railway so far.” Shouldn’t ‘railway’ read ‘Stagecoach founders’ fortune’? If things are better, why is passenger satisfaction lower than 5 years ago, not only overall but in many individual aspects? 32% satisfaction with train toilets. Satisfaction with punctuality/reliability down from 86% to 75%. 41% satisfaction with availability of seating. 33% satisfaction with how the company deals with delays.

The document ends with the remarkable claim that Stagecoach is “the right partner for the next franchise”.

Rather fitting that the Oxford Dictionaries’ top adjective for 2016 is “post-truth”?

**SWT’s timetable changes from 11.12.2016 include ‘additional services’ which already exist**

SWT announced minor adjustments to its services from 11 December 2016. These were initially presented in 12-hour clock times which helps to make them appear unfamiliar:

* “An additional two trains per day between London Waterloo and Castle Cary, Bruton and Frome – bringing the total to three.”

These ‘new’ trains are a sleight of hand:

The exceptionally circuitous 16.50/17.50 Waterloo-Salisbury-Yeovil Junction-Westbury-Salisbury trains are currently advertised as direct services from Waterloo as far as Yeovil Pen Mill.

From December the 16.50 is advertised as a direct service beyond Yeovil Pen Mill to Westbury. The 17.50 is replaced by an 18.50, which likewise is advertised as a direct service from Waterloo to Westbury. A knock-on effect is that there is also a new 20.30 Yeovil Pen Mill-Yeovil Junction.

* “A new Friday Night train to Yeovil Junction departing London Waterloo at 11.40pm serving Tisbury, Gillingham, Templecombe and Sherborne.”

This is an extension of the 23.40 Waterloo-Salisbury and the additional calls are to set down only.

* “A Sunday evening service from Frome, Westbury and Warminster to Clapham Junction and London Waterloo.”

This is an extension of the 18.52 Salisbury-Waterloo. There is an outward working from Salisbury to Frome at 17.10.

* “A new Saturday morning service for Weymouth, Dorchester and Wareham to London Waterloo.”

This is an extension of the 07.07 Poole-Waterloo.

* A later last train on Saturday evenings - the 8.20pm Waterloo to Yeovil Junction is extended to Crewkerne and Axminster.
* On Mondays to Fridays the 6.15am Yeovil Junction to Exeter will start from Gillingham.

Delayed announcements

* The 16.38 Winchester-Totton (Mondays-Fridays) will call additionally at Redbridge.
* Additional Saturday trains to Southampton Central from Basingstoke at 05.10 and Portsmouth Harbour (via Eastleigh) at 05.40.

**SWT’s September ‘Webchat’: manipulation results in number of questions falling from 147 to 29 compared with the previous event**

SWT’s twice-yearly Webchat events have hitherto been advertised weeks in advance on the homepage of their website. They have attracted a considerable range of comments and complaints. The March 2016 Webchat attracted a typical number of 147 questions.

The September 2016 Webchat was announced with little advance notice, and passengers needed to scroll through SWT revised website to find it. SWT claims the event was also advertised on stations, but it appears that few people were aware of this. Result: 28 answers to 29 questions from 20 people. Almost half the questions (13) came from just five people. Suspiciously, the normal practice of numbering questions was dropped. Interesting to speculate whether SWT’s Passengers Panel helped with this, in return for their free season tickets.

There was just a single question about performance. Rather remarkable, given the angry complaints on SWT’s Twitter day after day?

**Track South West Issue 2 – more manipulation**

The second addition of SWT’s PR magazine ‘Track South West’ paints a continuingly glossy picture of the company. Two hazy pictures of ‘passengers’ look across the page to sharply-focused pictures of Managing Director Christian Roth and a lookalike of actress Lacey Turner. So much for focusing on passengers.

Turn a couple of pages and we learn that SWT has planted 20,000 bulbs and 36 million seeds, though we are not told what kind of bulbs or seeds, or where they were planted. Illustrative figures from the internet suggest that 20,000 daffodil bulbs might cost about £2,500. The number of grass seeds per kilo, depending on variety, might range from 500,000 to 4 million.

SWT’s internal targets for ‘Customer effort’, ‘Net promoter’ and ‘Customer satisfaction’ are all met. Pity that their external targets for punctuality continue to be missed across the past 52 weeks, and their external satisfaction scores are in many aspects worse than 5 years ago.

Then there’s lots more statistical manipulation, as below…

**Govia reportedly got a poor deal on the amalgamated GTR franchise; yet Stagecoach is repeatedly ‘cashing in’ on passengers’ consequent sufferings with comparisons which misrepresent SWT as one of the better London & South East franchises**

Govia’s Southern franchise (now part of GTR) has long been regarded as offering better value for money than Stagecoach’s SWT.

The recent disruption on Govia’s amalgamated GTR franchise therefore came as a disappointment. The reasons are now clearer. Soon after the unexpected resignation of the popular rail minister Claire Perry, quoting the failure of GTR, The Times of 18.7.2016 reported that the contract which DfT offered Govia had seriously underestimated the disruptive effects of infrastructure work at London Bridge and had offered fifty more drivers than were actually available.

The first two issues of SWT’s ‘Track South West’ magazine focus heavily on comparing SWT with Govia’s franchises. The comparisons ignore Transport Focus’ ratings for the other 'London and South East' operators: Abellio Greater Anglia; C2C; Chiltern Railways; Gatwick Express; Great Northern; Great Western Railway; Heathrow Connect; Heathrow Express; London Midland; London Overground; and TfL Rail.

So SWT’s position among the train operating companies is repeatedly and cynically misrepresented as below:

**Overall passenger satisfaction**

Transport Focus’ Autumn 2015 rating for SWT: Joint 10th best out of 15.

Stagecoach’s distorted rating: Best of 4.

Transport Focus’ Spring 2016 rating for SWT: 7th best out of 15.

Stagecoach’s distorted rating: Best of 4.

**Punctuality and reliability**

Transport Focus’ Autumn 2015 rating for SWT: 9th best out of 15.

Stagecoach’s distorted rating: Best of 4.

Transport Focus’ Spring 2016 rating for SWT: 10th best out of 15.

Stagecoach’s distorted rating: Best of 4.

**Frequency of trains**

Transport Focus’ Autumn 2015 rating for SWT: Joint 9th best out of 15.

Stagecoach’s distorted rating: Best of 4.

**Satisfaction with ticket buying facilities**

Transport Focus’ Autumn 2015 rating for SWT: 5th best out of 15.

Stagecoach’s distorted rating: Best of 4.

**Helpfulness of staff on trains**

Transport Focus’ Spring 2016 rating for SWT: Joint 3rd best out of 15.

Stagecoach’s distorted rating: Best of 4.

**Satisfaction with cleanliness inside train**

Transport Focus’ Spring 2016 rating for SWT: 8th best out of 15.

Stagecoach’s distorted rating: Best of 4.

**National Rail Passenger Survey for Spring 2016: South West Trains making little progress and remains generally worse than five years ago**

A bright panel on SWT’s website declares, “South West Trains rated one of the best in London and the South East” with “significant (year-on-year) improvement in many of the 37 categories”. Really? Transport Focus itself records significant improvements in only five areas for Spring 2016:

Ticket buying facilities up 5%;

Connections with other forms of transport up 5%, but that is largely something out of SWT’s control;

The frequency of trains up 5%, despite only minimal service increases;

Value for money of the price of the ticket up 5% to just 40%, but with 36% positively dissatisfied; and

Sufficient space to sit or stand up 4% to 64%, but with 22% positively dissatisfied.

The survey further confirms that SWT shows no sustained progress. Stagecoach’s asset-stripping is likely to be a major factor.

* Overall satisfaction is 82% compared with 85% in Spring 2011.
* Satisfaction with punctuality/reliability has crashed from 86% to 75% over the same period.
* Satisfaction with space to sit/stand on trains has reduced from 69% to 64%. Satisfaction with train toilet facilities is down from 36% to 32%.
* The score for how well the company deals with delays remains stuck at 33%.
* The score for the attitude and helpfulness of staff has increased from 68% to just 69% on trains and 70% on stations.
* Value for money has risen from 37% to just 40% - that’s equivalent to a 0.6% average annual improvement in delivering passengers’ prime aspiration.

**First Group’s Great Western rated more highly than Stagecoach’s SWT**

MTR is now to bid jointly with First Group for the new SWT franchise, on the

basis of a 30% share. It has ended its bid for the West Midlands franchise,

so presumably thinks First Group’s proposals have a good chance of success.

This, incidentally, leaves West Midlands as the second franchise with only two

bidders.

So how do Stagecoach’s ratings for SWT compare with First Group’s ratings on adjacent Great Western in Transport Focus’ Spring 2016 passenger satisfaction survey?

Of the 36 topics surveyed, Great Western’s scores are higher on 25, equal on 4, and lower on 7.

It might be argued that some Great Western services have inter-city rolling stock, and could be expected to be rated more highly. So had SWT’s Waterloo-Portsmouth and Waterloo-Weymouth services before Stagecoach downgraded them.

The biggest differentials in the scoring are:

* Value for money: First scores 50% and Stagecoach 40%.
* Attitudes and helpfulness of station staff: First scores 79% and Stagecoach 70%.
* Car parking facilities: First scores 56% and Stagecoach 48%. Perhaps Stagecoach’s lower score was anticipated, explaining why car parks are suddenly being extended at a number of SWT stations.
* Availability of station staff: First scores 69% and Stagecoach 56%.
* Availability of station seating: First scores 55% and Stagecoach 41%.
* Toilet facilities on trains: First scores 45% and Stagecoach 32%.
* Sufficient room to sit/stand on trains: First scores 72% and Stagecoach 64%.
* Dealing with delays: First scores 42% and Stagecoach 33%.

Stagecoach does score 80% for connections with other forms of transport, and First only 71%, but that is not something over which the operators have much control.

First’s partner in its bid for SWT, MTR (which runs Hong Kong’s Mass Transit Railway) already has a 50% interest in the hugely improved London Overground operation, and has been chosen to operate the Elizabeth Line (Crossrail). With SWT’s inner-suburban services likely to transfer to London Overground, MTR’s involvement in SWT would be a very logical step.

**Hope for ‘open access’ Waterloo-Southampton Wessex Electric trains**

Alliance Rail Holdings is proposing to launch an open access passenger service on the Southampton - London Waterloo route in December 2017. Such services provide competition with those provided by franchise operators.

Alliance already operates between King’s Cross, Bradford and Sunderland, and has approval to run between London and Blackpool from early 2018.

Managing Director Ian Yeowart told Railway Gazette on November 8 that Alliance aims to increase capacity on the intensively-used route and make passengers' journeys 'less fraught', by offering a higher standard of comfort than on the current franchised services and helping to enhance rail's overall attractiveness.

Alliance envisages that there would be seven off-peak services a day, calling at Eastleigh, Winchester, Basingstoke and Hook. Two peak services would be added from December 2018, once a major upgrading project has created extra capacity at London Waterloo station. The peak service might not call at Basingstoke, as Alliance believes there is strong demand for travel into London from stations further out.

Alliance has submitted an offer to lease Class 442 third-rail electric multiple-units, which were built for the route in the 1980s but subsequently transferred to Gatwick Express services and are now in storage. An initial seven-year lease is planned to align with the competing South Western franchise.

Mr Yeowart said Alliance was planning to launch with a 'traditional' open access model, using existing rolling stock to build a market before new trains were acquired. In the longer term, there are 'plenty of options' for third-rail electric rolling stock.

Track capacity has been identified for the off-peak services, and Alliance intends to run long trains because 'we would not expect to use short trains on peak paths'.

The peak service would offer 600 seats per train, with 2+2 seating in standard class and 2+1 in first. Alliance is aiming for a 'traditional' level of comfort, in contrast to the capacity-focused designs of some more recent rolling stock. Both operator-specific and inter-available ticketing is planned, and Alliance is to meet with consumer groups to discuss proposals such as enabling season ticket holders to reserve seats.

**Support for the proposed new services**

* A research fellow of the Centre for Policy Studies is strongly pushing the case for the extra trains and we have sent him our history of SWT under fiercely anti-competitive Stagecoach.
* Nick Gross, Head of Transport & Logistics at award-winning solicitors Coffin Mew,

Had the following letter published in the Southern Daily Echo of 11.11.2016:

“Bit of Healthy Competition

The rail service between Southampton and Waterloo has never been busier, and it continues to increase in price.

The rail franchisees don’t have a monopoly on services in their franchised areas. Independent firms can compete with the franchise incumbent, and operate rival services, as long as they can show that they will expand the rail market. However, the Office of Rail and Road only approved four out of 19 so called ‘open access’ proposals received between 2000 and 2014.

However, in March this year, the Competition and Markets Authority published a long-awaited review into the rail sector, in which it recommended the best way to push down fares and improve passenger services was to increase the number of train operators on the East Coast, West Coast and Great Western routes.

This was followed by the Office of Rail and Road approving a new £25 service between London King’s Cross and Edinburgh, to compete with Virgin East Coast. There is a clear shift in thinking taking place.

Now, Grand Southern has revealed its plan to launch a new open access company to run services between London Waterloo and Southampton on the South Western network. It has pledged to run less expensive services with more comfortably laid-out carriages on the London-Southampton route, which South West Trains, owned by Stagecoach, currently runs as a commuter service.

To use a railway expression, this development is long overdue.”

Note: Virgin East Coast is 90% owned by Stagecoach, which has severely reduced cheaper tickets since taking over.

* Contributors to the Echo’s blog were similarly in favour of the new services.

**Comments from SHRUG’s co-ordinator**

[Text submitted following request for comment by the Echo and published on 19.11.2016]

“In principle, a new service would be great, if the track capacity is available.

The services would reportedly use some of the comfortable Wessex Electric units which Stagecoach, the company that runs the South West Trains franchise, took off lease to boost profits.

Around twenty per cent of services between Southampton and Waterloo are currently operated with outer-suburban stock which is unsuitable for this length of journey.

The latest trains just aren't as comfortable.

Privatisation was supposed to be all about competition and getting a better deal for

passengers, but when it comes to South West Trains, people have just been paying more

and more.

Fares have soared, along with station car park charges, and successive additional restrictions have been introduced on the availability of cheaper tickets, the latest from September this year.

One example I'd like to mention is that a SW Trains day return from Southampton Central to Weymouth - which is a 63 mile journey - costs £27.

A journey on Southern Trains from Southampton to Brighton - which is 62 miles - costs £15.40.

There are also no peak trains from Southampton Central to Eastleigh between 7.38am and 8.35am, Monday to Friday. The only option is to go out to Winchester and come in again, which is only a minute or two quicker than waiting for the next direct train from Southampton at 8.35am.

The proposed stopping pattern of the new service would offer faster services for Eastleigh and Hook.

Eastleigh's London services have been slowed in recent years and Hook has never had the type of service which the town's considerable growth merits.

The existing Southampton-London services suffer badly from overcrowding, particularly in the peak hours because of demand, and off-peak because too few carriages are used.

This would be mitigated by having additional trains.

Another of the main issues is when there are delays or changes to service. They often don't let passengers know in time when stops are to be omitted. The on-board announcements are no good if you cannot get off in time to avoid being carried past your station!

Revenue protection has been a very high-profile problem for customers at times. SW Trains have dragged people to court for accidentally under-paying, but a lot of cases have been thrown out of court.

Finally, the behaviour of South West Trains' staff often falls below professional standards.

The company's Twitter feed has a good number of complaints on most days.

The same old problems come up every day. Since Stagecoach took over SW Trains and

cut middle-management, nothing gets solved.

At the stations themselves, some of the staff are really nice, but some are very unhelpful.

Ultimately, we need to see more trains and cheaper fares for passengers.

Any extra operating costs could be covered if more people are attracted to rail travel.”

**Other ways the Wessex Electrics may come back**

Rail magazine (Issue 814) hints that the Wessex Electric trains may return as part of the new SWT franchise. If Stagecoach were unfortunately to win, this would be very odd, as they won the current franchise through cost-cutting downgrades which included taking these trains off lease.

There are also suggestions that a few units may be used with diesel haulage on cross-Bristol services to/from the south and west (See ‘Newsboard’, below, for the context).

**Southampton-Totton-Fawley rail line prospects**

David Harrison, the commendably engaged Hampshire County Councillor, continues to

support local aspirations for a Southampton-Hythe/Fawley passenger train service to mitigate traffic congestion and pollution in this area of ever-increasing population.

Two new developments have helped boost the case. First, the Hythe-Southampton ferry service may end for financial reasons. Its disadvantage, compared with a rail service, is that it attracts very limited custom in the winter months.

Secondly, plans for 1,000 new homes on the site of the closed Fawley power station are expected to create substantially increased demand for a train service.

It would be interesting to have estimates, for comparison, of the costs of introducing the rail service as soon as possible, and of leaving the rail infrastructure to deteriorate for perhaps a decade while the housing scheme is implemented.

SHRUG’s Co-ordinator had the following letter published in the Southern Daily Echo of 2.11.2016:

“**Rail Network Shortcoming**

The Echo has long been reporting aspirations for a passenger train service to Hythe.

Portishead, also on an underused branch line and with a population similar to Hythe’s, is soon to have passenger trains restored.

The crucial difference is that these are part of a strategic plan to improve local services around Bristol, while the Hythe scheme is stand-alone.

Hythe services should also be welcome at ever-growing Totton. Data from the Office of Rail and Road show that passenger entries and exits at intermediate stations between Southampton Central and Weymouth increased by an average of 22.1 per cent in the five years to 2006-07, but by 71.7 per cent at Totton. South West Trains then cut and downgraded Totton’s service, and the position for the following five years was an average growth of 16 per cent with a 1.4 per cent decline at Totton.

Among other shortcomings, there is no morning peak train from Southampton to Eastleigh between 07.38 and 08.35. National Rail’s on-line journey planner suggests travelling via Winchester, but with arrival only two minutes earlier than on the 08.35!

With the help of Southern Trains, the morning peak service provides 4 departures from Netley and Woolston to Southampton between 07.40 and 08.40, but SWT’s evening return service is just hourly.

Local rail services surely merited a root and branch review when the South Hampshire Rapid Transport scheme was abandoned, and this could usefully be set up with the involvement of the Department for Transport, local authorities, and train operators.”

Note: Unfortunately, a charter train scheduled to visit the Fawley line on 5.11.2016 had to be cancelled after a carriage derailed on Southampton’s Canute Road level crossing.

**Southampton the 7th worst UK city for pollution (London is 6th)**

The World Health Organisation’s findings on pollution have become increasingly high profile. In Southampton, over 6.3% of adult deaths in 2011 were attributed to air pollution.

Transport clearly bears a high degree of responsibility, particularly diesel cars, container lorries, aircraft and shipping. Drivers of diesel cars could now be charged to enter the city.

That said, this is clearly a national problem which merits both national and local initiatives. With so many empty, over-priced seats on off-peak inter-city trains to and from London, could available funds for rail development be better used than on HS2?

Alternative options might include electric tramways in major cities, increasing busy routes used by container trains to four tracks, and putting more freight through the Channel Tunnel (though exiting the EU would appear counter-productive, probably resulting in more long-distance container ship activity and development of a new terminal at Dibden Bay).

In addition, the pint-pot CrossCountry trains inherited from the Virgin-Stagecoach partnership share main routes with London trains over long distances and could be lengthened to maximise capacity.

**Looking after the pounds while the passengers**

**look after themselves, day after day: neglect and**

**desertion on SWT following two decades of**

**Stagecoach franchises**

As the Daily Telegraph commented over 11 years ago: “SWT has struck on one of the great philosophical truths of all time: the lower the standards that you set yourself, the easier they are to meet”. SWT’s new website has conveniently hidden details of closed ticket offices and broken ticket machines under an ‘All live travel updates’ link.

**A summary of some station problems, in most cases repetitive, September-November**

SWT ticket offices advertised as closed during opening hours:

Addlestone, Aldershot, Andover, Ascot, Ashford, Bagshot, Barnes, Bedhampton, Bookham, Bournemouth, Bracknell, Branksome, Brentford, Brockenhurst, Byfleet & New Haw, Camberley, Chertsey, Chessington North, Chiswick, Christchurch, Claygate, Crewkerne, Datchet, Dorchester South, Eastleigh, Egham, Esher, Farnborough, Farncombe, Farnham, Feltham, Feniton, Fleet, Frimley, Fulwell, Gillingham, Godalming, Guildford, Hampton Court, Hampton Wick, Hamworthy, Haslemere, Hedge End, Hersham, Hinchley Wood, Hinton Admiral, Honiton, Hook, Horsley, Hounslow, Kingston, Liphook, Liss, Lymington Town, Malden Manor, Martins Heron, Milford, Mortlake, New Milton, Norbiton, North Sheen, Petersfield, Pokesdown, Portsmouth & Southsea, Putney, Raynes Park, St Denys, St Margaret’s, Shanklin, Southampton Airport Parkway, Southampton Central, Staines, Strawberry Hill, Sunbury, Sunningdale, Swanwick, Sway, Swaythling, Teddington, Twickenham, Upper Halliford, Vauxhall, Virginia Water, Walton-on-Thames, Wandsworth Town, Wareham, West Byfleet, Weybridge, Weymouth, Whimple, Whitton, Winchfield, Windsor & Eton Riverside, Winnersh, Winnersh Triangle, Witley, Woking, Wokingham, Wool, Woolston, Worplesdon, Yeovil Junction.

Ticket machines advertised as failed (closed ticket offices are frequently followed by out-of-use ticket machines, in a spiralling cycle of failure - staff who aren’t available to sell tickets also aren’t available to tend ticket machines):

Addlestone, Alton, Ashford, Ashurst, Axminster, Bagshot, Botley, Bracknell, Brentford, Byfleet & New Haw, Chessington South, Chiswick, Christchurch, Claygate, Cranbrook, Datchet, Earley, Ewell West, Fareham, Farnham, Feniton, Frimley, Godalming, Grateley, Hamble, Hamworthy, Hilsea, Hinchley Wood, Hook, Isleworth, Liphook, Netley, New Malden, Norbiton, Overton, Parkstone, Petersfield, Pinhoe, St Denys, Strawberry Hill, Syon Lane, Thames Ditton, Totton, Upper Halliford, Wanborough, Wandsworth Town, West Byfleet, Whimple, Winnersh, Witley, Wokingham, Wool, Woolston, Wraysbury, Yeovil Junction.

Disabled people beware: lifts advertised as out of use at various times:

Out-of-use station lifts can also help make it difficult for disabled people to buy tickets and access services. Out-of-use lifts have been advertised for Axminster, Basingstoke, Bracknell, Brentford, Clapham Junction, Earlsfield, Fareham, Fleet, Fratton, Godalming, Haslemere, Kingston, New Malden, Putney, Southampton Airport Parkway, Southampton Central, Staines, West Byfleet, Weybridge, Wimbledon, Winchester, Woking.

**Examples of passengers’ comments on Twitter (spelling and grammar modified, and expletives deleted)**

* Thanks for the late platform change on the 18:43. I'm sure many of the people on platform 17 are on the wrong train.
* Salisbury train station offers 1 day of parking, which isn't even 24 hours, for £8.20. Absolute bloody rip -off, only just parked my car until 11.59pm tonight and apparently that counts as one day? Thought one day was 24hrs.
* How can the 08.57 from Farncombe to Waterloo leave 12 minutes early with no announcement?! Confused commuters now running late!
* Train to Honiton last night - 3 coaches, previous 2 trains cancelled, packed like sardines...THIRD WORLD TREATMENT.
* What is happening at Virginia Water?? Station is closed. Where are the buses going from? Where do you get tickets? No info!!
* Please explain why your app says £7.90 for a single from Ascot to Waterloo but the machine charged me £15?!
* Not impressed with your response. So in the meantime we hop on and off at different stations to use the loo. why don't you have any toilets working on train to Poole?
* Hi, was delayed more than 2.5 hours more than a month ago and haven't had a response to my complaint. Whom should I contact please?
* Just saw totally unacceptable threatening behaviour towards two ladies by SWT employee at Wimbledon. Not giving people time to board, he blew the whistle before people had finished getting off. Train was the 1913 Wimbledon to Richmond from platform 8.
* At 8 months pregnant, thrown out of First Class and told to look for spare seats at front of 4.55pm Ash Vale train. I showed my [Mums to be] pass but was told to search for seats at the front.
* Another unreported SWT ticket office closure? Hook now has overflowing bins, and no loos or inside seating.
* Rear seat on the right of the back of the carriage. Some kind person had urinated and I sat on it through my journey! Cost me £30.
* I explained to Michael that the local public toilets were closed; he refused to provide me access to toilet on the station. I explained I have IBS and was in need and he couldn't have cared less.
* Thanks a bunch for sending train through Clapham junction without stopping as per schedule. Not fair to just sprint to end point.
* Hate SWT leaving the platform a minute early?!?! Thanks for making me late to work.
* A 40-minute journey has taken an extra hour and a half due to SWT and Network Rail.
* Well-behaved and trained dogs not allowed on rail replacement bus services? Driver refused access although dogs are allowed on trains.
* Do you interview/screen [bus] drivers or accept anyone? This driver was rude and ignorant.

Not someone I would want representing me.

* New lows of chaos. No info / apologies. Why not ditch the timetables totally and let us be grateful for any train that may arrive.
* Hour after I leave Twickenham for Hounslow I'm at... Twickenham, on bus to Barnes. Between last night and today you have ruined my weekend.
* Tried 6 power points before I found one that worked. The seats are filthy, as are the carpet, windows and curtains.
* What's going on with site?! Watching prices go up by the minute before my eyes and can't check out!
* The Hounslow train just left Barnes from platform 4 when it's still being shown on the screen as leaving from platform 3.
* This one didn't even stay on the platform 30 seconds. It came in early and left early.
* For 2 days I'm getting error 500 on your website when trying to book tickets?!? When is this going to be fixed? [SWT response: Very sorry to hear this - you may find you are able to book from an alternative train operator website].
* Well done SWT, your driver forgot to stop at Mortlake! Maybe need to feed them more coffee!
* Can you tell me why your machines at Portsmouth Harbour refused to accept the new fiver this morning? [SWT’s response: We will be working to make machines compatible with these notes. You can of course use them at the ticket office.]
* I will be putting in a complaint, I hope the other 40 people you delayed will do so too!
* Thanks to SWT for leaving me stuck on a train and not opening the doors whist I missed 3 trains and the start of my show.
* Here we go again, train delayed so let’s not stop it at Farncombe again, why? No real excuse, over one hour between Farncombe trains.
* She could have gone round me, also they need to learn manners, calling me a "lippy s\*\*t".
* Your systems take at least a week to send out smartcards, yet your website only sells smart 'tickets'.
* Funniest train guard, “The train doesn't like Mondays and is throwing a temper tantrum and won't open the doors”.
* Trying to book a ticket with SWT and the price went up by £4 while I was buying it...
* Platform staff got on train at Waterloo to be rude and unhelpful to my girlfriend who has a slipped disc. Completely unacceptable.
* 1839 Waterloo to Guildford. Just cancelled stops after Epsom, to run fast to Guildford. What's the point? Just more inconvenience!
* Delays last night. Reduced carriages this morning. Delays tonight. Do you ever sit back and think 'Wow. We're really bad at this'?
* 17.09 Waterloo-Portsmouth, coach 7. Air conditioning not on again. Noise but no air as usual.
* My journey was uncomfortable because the train toilets weren't working.
* Providing a polite customer service is what you should do. I had my money ready, my receipt and new photo. I don't need you to tut at me because I lost my previous card.
* Congrats as usual: every Friday the same, trains packed like sardines. How is this even safe? Disgraceful. you aren't improving anything at all.
* Do you only employ extremely rude members of staff at Waterloo??? Disgraceful service!!!
* Another day where SWT \*\*\*\* up. Seeing my connecting train’s doors shut before my doors open as you "Don't want to delay those people too" because an extra 30 seconds wait would ruin their day”. You know I paid for my train fare too, I have the same rights! Disgusting.
* Why is your staff's default mode grumpy/aggressive/cocky? Are these the behaviours taught at training school?
* Why have you cancelled the 07.44 Eastleigh to Southampton Central? As usual, lots of unhappy helpless folk now late for work
* My ticket wouldn't work through the barrier even though it's valid. I said to the staff member ‘Please can you let me through, my train is about to go and I really need to be on it’. He was taking ages and I missed it because he took so long to let me through.
* No trains running to Wokingham, replacement bus service, bus has broken down so not now bus either! Not on!!
* It was doomed from the start, driver had no clue what he was doing at Twickenham. Another poor service from SWT.
* Please can you tell me why your rail replacement services don't allow dogs? Refused entry at 11.22 service from Twickenham. Your staff refused to speak to tfl bus driver to explain situation too- really unhelpful- dreadful customer service in summary.
* Cancelling the Shepperton train on platform 1 with everyone on it and platforming the Teddington train on platform 18 with only 3 minutes to get there is brutal.
* Another day, another delay. If I have to get another taxi home tonight I am going to start looking to you for reimbursement!
* A MONOPOLY THAT DOESN’T GIVE A HOOT ABOUT ITS CLIENTS. That’s SWT’s yesterday's 18:32 from Waterloo to Guildford, dumping passengers at Effingham Junction.
* Approached a staff member at Waterloo saying I saw an unattended bag on the train. She

Says, “That’s not my job”. Wow!

* Next time a train is coming in on a different platform than advertised, an announcement would be better than expecting us to run! Wandsworth Town 15.35 to Weybridge. Many missed it, only a couple managed to get there in time.
* Catching a taxi home from Waterloo for £100. Assume you're paying me that back, yeah?
* SWT once again cancel the Shepperton service at Fulwell, with no consideration to passengers. Just a consistently shocking service!
* Last two days the trains have been delayed and two days in a row they've been skipping Hampton with hardly an announcement!
* SWT are an absolute shambles. A trip that should have cost around £35 has cost me nearly £70 because of their mistake. Fuming.
* Could you ask the ticket inspector at platform 12 at Waterloo not to be so rude?Could you ask the ticket inspector at platform 12 at Waterloo not to be so rude?Could you ask the ticket inspector at platform 12 at Waterloo not to be so rude?Could you ask the ticket inspector at platform 12 at Waterloo not to be so rude?
* Shocking service in Waterloo, leaving people in trains with no info, cancelling them and followed by badly informed staff!
* So because your Waterloo to Reading train runs late, you decide not to stop at any station before Staines? Rubbish service.
* I joined the train from Parkstone at 10:54 which was due at Brockenhurst at 11:44. It didn't stop. The guard gave no explanation.
* I don't care about your replacement buses. I'm furious about the customer service. What got me cross is that I made a member of your staff aware of a medical condition and was told to wait like everyone else.
* WE ARE ON A BUS WITH A DANGEROUS DRIVER. I got the people off and onto a SAFE coach. it wasn’t just bad. It was terrifying. I am still shaking.
* Missed 18.23 connection Woking. Now leaving Woking 30 mins late on same bus to try to catch connection at Weybridge.
* It was meant to leave at 16.51. Seriously, he's relying on passengers telling where to go. How is this happening?
* Company should OFFER refinds because the service we paid for is not what we got.
* Need to work on customer service at Eastleigh station...
* Why are your staff so rude at Waterloo?so this train 'just hasn't shown up today'. It doesn't feature on any info boards. Now a 24 minute wait explain?so this train 'just hasn't shown up today'. It doesn't feature on any info boards. Now a 24 minute wait explain?

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* So this train 'just hasn't shown up today'. It doesn't feature on any info boards. Now a 24- minute wait. Explain?
* So how do I make a complaint to a person? Nobody at Vauxhall or Putney can, last time told to go to Richmond to complain!
* Train waiting at platform. Told can't get on. Train leaves and next one is cancelled. Don't even give reasons. Helpful.
* Made to feel like I need to apologise for being disabled by one of your staff AGAIN this morning. Complete disgrace. Consistently fail disabled passengers. Unacceptable. How much longer do you need? You've had 20 years and franchise is in a pitiful state.
* It's not just me. Load of us mistrust your platform info. We lurk at the top of the stairs, waiting for the train at Southampton.
* Why did I just see a virtually empty train go past me at Martins Heron, now 2 trains-worth of people waiting for another delayed service.
* Gutted for the seven or so people just trapped on board the train to Winchester from Waterloo, there's an hour of their lives gone.
* Allow passengers more time to get off. I and other passengers stuck on a train heading to Winchester, hardly allowed time to leave at Woking.
* I want a customer service number or address, this is \*\*\*\*\*\* ridiculous today. Putting on buses with drivers that don't know their way.
* There were people smoking in the carriage, using obscene language and intimidating many passengers. I did not see the guard for the entire journey, and I was terrified to move.
* Disgusting employee on platform 3b at Southampton Central currently. Told him how rude he was and he shouted at me multiple times.
* Are trains now leaving early to keep your averages down? 8.36 leaving at 8.34 = pretty annoying when you reach the platform at 8.35.
* Horrendous journey from Dorchester to London, long waits at Bournemouth and Southampton due to missing drivers. 5 carriages in place of 10.
* It's a Sunday, you're hardly running any services (why?) and you still can't get trains on time, delays all day, it's ridiculous.
* Almost 3 hours to London from Salisbury because of works? Really? Driver change at Southampton - 25 minute delay! No seats!!!
* Another wonderful Sunday spent travelling back to London on a 30 minute delayed, packed SWT service with no seats.
* We're waiting at Southampton for our 3rd driver since Bournemouth. People standing to London. On a Sunday. When is licence up?
* You are the worst company I have ever had the displeasure of dealing with.
* Thanks for changing my train to a fast to Waterloo when I was going to Wimbledon. Missed my connections.
* Loving your rail replacement bus service. Got in at Hounslow aiming to get off at Feltham, but we've ended up in Fulwell...
* It was scheduled to leave at 14:53. Went to get a ticket. Came back and it was driving off at 14:49.
* What a nightmare train journey on 5.39 to Portsmouth harbour. Animals would not be transported dead/alive like this.
* Nice pile of sick on train to Syon lane, probably from the weekend. Good to see they maintain their trains to a high standard...
* Are you going for some sort of record! SIX days in a row the Reading to Waterloo is late!
* Vauxhall station. Someone has been using my card since it’s been handed in - must be one of your staff.
* Great, was just on a train and none of the doors worked so couldn't get off at my stop!
* Get staff to mark broken ticket machines and get their facts right before letting me buy another ticket! He was vile!! totally shocked at how I was spoken to.Busy train, and having to sit in the door with this at my feet.
* Busy train, and having to sit in the door with this at my feet. Extortionate fares are being paid, to sit in filth.
* Bus left Fareham 5 minutes early, now expected to wait an hour for the next train? I would like a refund.
* Why did my train from Twickenham to Reading NOT stop at Virginia Water despite the on- board guard saying it would. Thanks a bunch!
* Refused entry into local train to Barnes. All others only to Clapham and Waterloo. No use whatsoever, lots of people struggling.
* There's no signage at Bitterne station saying where to get the rail replacement bus from. Might need to sort that out?
* It's Monday so of course the ticket machine is out of order AGAIN!
* 18:50 Waterloo-Weybridge running 8 minutes late so will miss 19:37 Addlestone connection with yet another 30-minute wait. What a crummy service this is.
* Unhelpful staff member at Teddington tonight after shambolic service.
* Total rubbish on South West trains. Shame. Every day we go through trash to get home!
* 1351 from Windsor. Here 15 minutes early. Guard appeared 3 minutes before, used wrong ramp, so I loaded my daughter in her wheelchair myself.
* Why only 4 old carriages on main train 16.22 from Bournemouth to London? Poor and packed!
* No working toilets on 14.35 Waterloo-Weymouth? Seriously.
* Been trying to book tickets now on your site for around an hour. It isn't letting me and in that time the prices have gone up!
* Where is the replacement bus at Sholing?? Says see your website, and the website says nothing.
* 7pm Portsmouth train from Waterloo 5 coaches!!! People standing everywhere. Declassify first now!
* Rode your service yesterday, Exeter-London (4 hours). Not even an offer of tea, coffee, drinks, refreshments - anything?! Bad service.
* I simply can't believe the Sherborne bus replacement was allowed to leave before we had time to get off the train and on the bus! The bus 'left on time', but the train was 2 minutes late!!! Unbelievable. £22 for a taxi.
* There's a growing trend of rudeness in your staff judging by Twitter. Why is this and how are you addressing it?
* Not using your Norbiton station again. Don't appreciate being talked down to, and having my ticket thrown back at me.
* Paid for an overpriced ticket to sit on the floor and be rudely shouted at by the train guard
* I haven't made any journey due to bus replacements, but the website saying trains running fine. Not what I need after a 13-hour shift.
* You can't make it up. Platform guard at Surbiton admits he would rather walk than rely on a SWT service.
* Could you explain why the Shepperton train at Vauxhall decided not to open its doors and just drove away?
* 1806 Hampton Court from Waterloo delayed and ran fast to Surbiton. Berrylands passengers abandoned. No announcements. You shouldn't pass stations just like that! Nightmare.
* 14:46 from Barnes Bridge didn't open its doors at Clapham Junction, the guard just shrugged and the train carried on!
* It's always 5 coaches and that's not enough, you left kids behind because they couldn't physically fit.
* Your rail replacement is rubbish. Two rugby games and many firework displays and you cancel trains between Richmond and Twickenham.
* The overcrowding in this train must be a Health and Safety issue. I have been forced to stand on the join between carriages!
* Not sure why the 15.57 from Ewell West to Waterloo whizzed through the station without stopping?!
* Worst train company in history.
* So because you are not stopping at Fratton I’m having to drive home which just made my journey an extra 20 miles.
* No toilets on a train that has a journey time of 2hrs 40mins?? How is that even allowed to happen?
* Consistently awful customer experience you provide.
* Your "service" is a disgrace! No information from the guard, no logical reason for a 45 -minute delay then you cancel stops! Useless.
* Saw an elderly gentleman fall over at the station today. Staff member stood right there and did nothing at all!!!! Shocking!
* I waited 2 hours in the cold at Reading for a SWT train. Is there any compensation? The prices go up each year but same problems.
* Make a complaint? What good will that do? You will still be useless. it's awful on all levels, it's incompetent on every level.
* Incredibly poor service, please tell me how this will be prevented for future passengers, including myself? Was on the delayed 08:30 train from Worcester Park to London Waterloo. I was due to be getting off at Raynes Park.
* At Worcester Park, the board stated the train was stopping at Raynes Park and several other stops before Waterloo, which it did. But nobody was able to get on or off, despite the train stopping at the station for a good 10 minutes. Then, just after the train left the station, the guard decided to announce he was walking through to the middle of the train to let off people who needed to alight. Of course, this was not mentioned while the train was stopped, otherwise I would have walked to the middle carriage to be let off. I’ve now had to go all the way to Waterloo, several stops past the one I needed.”
* The rudest staff at Cosham station.
* SWT couldn't run a bath. Train cancelled due to "slippery rails", if you wanted to get home, sorry but tough, not stopping there...
* Your utter contempt for your passengers has almost driven me to violent despair. I will be writing to your CEO if/when I get home.
* Hope you are going to do something for the customers who have been through hell this morning?
* They don't give a \*\*\*\* about customers. They only care about profit. They aren't even replying to me anymore.
* Train announced the station was Hounslow so I got off. It was actually Feltham. Bit stranded now. THANKS.
* Who cares about the customers?. Let's be honest, this was changed to ensure it arrives on time and meets targets.
* Why such unprofessional staff on the 15:22 Bournemouth-London? Such unnecessary, rude behaviour, well done guys - great image. Before you completely ignore this rude behaviour by your staff, I will need an explanation as to why I was spoken to like this???
* Please explain why the 18.27 train from Wokingham to Reading let people off but not on. And can you also tell me why no staff at Wokingham.
* People standing on 10.17 Guildford to Waterloo! Declassify first class please. Not acceptable. 5 coaches!!
* So no enquiry then – fob-off. Even if I do waste my time complaining I doubt very much anything will happen.
* Amazing how you quickly respond to anything positive yet ignore thousands of complaints.
* I've caught 10 SWT trains this week and every one has been delayed. How on earth is this acceptable?
* 8:21 Hampton to Waterloo cancelled, no reason given, now a 2-hour gap between trains. Disgusting service as usual.
* Your stupid replacement bus leaving Wokingham for Bracknell 4 minutes early has just ruined my whole night. Thanks again.Your stupid replacement bus leaving Wokingham for Bracknell 4 minutes early has just ruined my whole night. Thanks againYour stupid replacement bus leaving Wokingham for Bracknell 4 minutes early has just ruined my whole night. Thanks again
* 3 weeks you have managed to be late in one form or other. Make me sick. Disgusting service, daylight robbery.
* Bus arrived 2 minutes after the train left.Passengers now waiting another hour in a station with no refreshments after 3-hour bus ride.
* Doors broken on the 14:23 Waterloo to Alton, no crew on the 14:53.Why isn't the replacement stopping at Bentley? Can't find the guard.
* Why have you cancelled the stops between Surbiton and Waterloo AGAIN on the 18.12 from Weybridge! This is ridiculous!
* Seriously considering encouraging people to boycott S W Trains until they run a service on time... Stuck on a freezing platform AGAIN
* I boarded at Havant. It was so busy the ticket office said ' just buy the ticket on train' so I went to find guard! Extremely unhelpful and rude guard won't sell me a ticket on train.
* Been waiting over 2 months re complaint about replacement bus driver refusing to drive to Reading in September...
* Guards on the train need to look at what the hell they are doing!!! Almost had my arm and leg crushed!!!!
* Purchased smartcard ticket online yesterday, but reader won't upload and station ticket office can't help. Any suggestions?
* I'm £70 out of pocket because you sold me the wrong ticket. How do I complain and get my money back?!
* True to form, a half empty train zooms past. Got to keep those stats so you can tell everyone how great you are

Letter from Jeremy Varns to the Rail Minister and SWT Managing Director

Dear Mr Maynard and Mr Roth

Thanks to the Rail Minister for the detailed comments relating to my concerns and those of fellow passengers. Although highly sceptical, I am hopeful that some of the mistakes made by the DfT in 2006 will not be repeated this time around. People have had enough of seeing their stations and trains run-down in the pursuit of greater profits. The normal safeguards of competition do not apply in most of the rail industry and Stagecoach has exploited this fact along with ever decreasing accountability and oversight. I will add that I am not ideologically opposed to privatisation and acknowledge that on some routes, notably those with competition, standards have been driven up and innovation has been led by passenger demand.

However, I have still not received any convincing reason or argument as to why the DfT has failed to attract enough interest in the South West franchise in order to meet the required minimum number of bidders. I draw your attention to an article in the Railway Gazette (04/02/16): 'In November the National Audit Office published a report on the management of the franchising programme which said DfT believed at least three bids for a franchise were needed to ensure quality, and warned that value for money may be reduced if there are fewer'.

Furthermore, can Stagecoach's bid be taken seriously when they have failed to deliver so much of what they promised in 2006? Every day passengers are let down by the company's failure to meet all but one of their Passenger Charter 'promises'. These so-called 'commitments' were later conceded by the then Managing Director Tim Shoveller to be meaningless 'aspirations'. Emboldened by action taken by Southern commuters, a number of SWT passengers have contacted me to ask about the possibility of legal avenues prior to Stagecoach's coronation for the next franchise. The incumbent knows they've won, with industry insiders and regular passengers now widely acknowledging the whole process to be a sham.

Of course, the company has to appear to have some support to justify the DfT's imminent decision! So, once again, the PR machine is now in overdrive prior to the expected decision being made public on the next franchise. Perhaps if Stagecoach had not slashed all aspects of quality from SWT, it would not now need to be spending tax payer and passengers' money on glossy leaflets littering trains trying to convince people of how good a job it is doing nor by using misleading statistics along with competitions, newspaper advertisements, daily PR on minor events and decorative decals for train carriages. Strange how such tactics along with promises of improvements, many recycled, are limited to the end stage of the franchise cycle don't you think?

If there was any doubt as to Stagecoach's motives, let’s consider that fact that they are now using a market research company to ask if their recent promotional efforts have changed people's perception of them as an organisation. Recognition one suspects that they know what a low opinion most people have of them in the first place. This new caring approach is in sharp contrast to the indifference and contempt shown throughout most of the past 20 years. Stagecoach used exactly the same tactics in 2006 to claim that most people wanted them to retain South West Trains. Predictably it looks as though history is once again going to be repeated.

Let us consider the facts. Between 2011 – 2016 complaints regarding South West Trains have more than doubled and shamefully only 58% of complaints are currently being answered within 20 working days despite the company having the longest permitted time-frame in the industry. Cancellations have risen by 92% compared to 2011, punctuality has fallen by 6% compared to 2007 and SWT's performance is worse now than at any stage since 2004. In the past year delays due to faulty rolling stock have risen by 5% with staff shortages attributing to a rise of 18% (source ORR). Unsurprisingly none of these statistics have appeared in SWT's pre-bid propaganda magazine 'Track South West'.

I have outlined a number of remaining concerns which I hope will be considered when deciding if the incumbent is a fit and proper operator.

**NRPS vs reality: official performance measures not fit for purpose?**

When considering that the National Rail Passenger Survey is supposed to be the official method of measuring passenger satisfaction across the industry, it has a number of obvious flaws in its methodology along with its barely credible sample size. The following passage is from Transport Committee report found on the Parliament.co.uk website entitled 'The future of rail (4) Passenger Satisfaction and TOC performance measures'; “A commonly held view was that NRPS results were deliberately manipulated to produce artificially high satisfaction scores. Some witnesses were convinced that NRPS was deliberately carried out at off-peak times or on quieter routes, to avoid the mass of dissatisfied passengers on the busiest trains. Some argued that the NRPS’s “snapshot” method—surveying satisfaction with a single journey on a particular day—produced skewed results, which “rarely reflect the true picture of daily problems faced by regular commuters”. They felt that the NRPS should “look at the overall experience, and not just the last journey made.”

I raised the same concerns with the DfT and Transport Focus back in 2009. The NRPS was then, as it is now, no longer fit for purpose and its limitations in methodology and scope are creating false positives which benefit the industry who in turn continue to let down passengers.

The most recent Which? rail passenger satisfaction survey, of which SWT attracted the largest number of respondents, shows that the company is only 5% from the bottom of the table of all TOCs at 51% with the lowest performer, GTR satisfaction at 46% and the highest performer, Grand Central at 79%. Let us be under no illusion, SWT is a poorly performing operator which has exploited the lack of competition, regulation and scrutiny.

Also, back in 2009 I was assured that work was being done to measure on-time performance at intermediate calling points rather than at just the end of a journey. Seven years later, performance statistics are still producing misleading data on 'right time arrivals'. I have lost count of the number of connections that I have missed at Woking. I will use one recent example. On 9th November, both on the outward and return journeys my inbound service was delayed resulting in missed connections, yet because of timetable padding, the 57-minute delay to myself would not have been recorded as the arrival times of both services into Waterloo were within 5 minutes. Another example, perhaps of how successive governments have failed to act for the benefit of passengers, instead preferring to deny problems exist.

Despite the bold 'right time railway' slogan used by South West Trains at the start of the current franchise, the company continues to miss its own soft 'Charter Standard' targets on punctuality, and this, of course, despite operating a timetable that is in many cases slower than in the 1960s. I will use a further example which I think illustrates the continual cycle of indifference and failure which the company and official statistics hide. Due to the inability of the company to reliably operate the 20:43 Basingstoke to Woking service which resulted in me missing my connection to Guildford almost every day in Woking, I started using the 21:09 despite the expected long wait of 25 minutes (and the connecting 21:55 southbound service being full and standing). I use this later service Monday – Saturday, and the last time it left Basingstoke on-time was on 1st November (today being 24th November). Every single day since the start of the month the train has been late. Perhaps passengers intending to use this service along with many others should be warned about the sustained levels of failure in punctuality and require SWT to change their misleading slogan from 'right time railway' to 'rarely right time'.

And the reasons given for delays are not even honest. 'A problem under investigation at Exeter St David's' was the explanation given for a 30-minute delay on 18th November despite the fact that 26 minutes of the delay was encountered much further on in the journey around Yeovil. This delay was following a 50-minute delay on a service the day before. As ever, none of the delays I experience, which total several hours each week, will be compensated by South West Trains.

**One-sided Department for Transport?**

I note with interest a survey on ticket-less travel from Autumn 2015 which was not reported in mainstream media until September of this year. The findings of this survey come as no surprise as SWT's paranoia with fare evasion does not cover the periods of time when the survey identified fare evasion was most prevalent.

If the DfT has to resources to discover how many people travel without a ticket then perhaps they could survey customers who have used a TVM to see if they have been sold the correct ticket. Train companies have an obligation to sell the most appropriate fare for every journey, yet every day I see passengers selecting a ticket that was more expensive than required. This is usually but not uniquely related to peak and off-peak sales when the customer will be travelling on super off-peak services. Furthermore, stations do not advertise peak, off-peak and super off-peak restrictions, other than a warning displayed on-screen if you select a super off-peak fare on the TVM. The intention of course is to encourage people to buy a more expensive peak or off-peak fare. Unbelievably despite the large number of passengers travelling to London, most SWT stations outside the capital do not have an up-to-date map of the TfL travelcard area.

On the subject of overcharging, **most ticket machines at smaller stations** **are still offering peak and off-peak fares during super off-peak times, such as at weekends**. I have informed SWT of these discrepancies but little has been done other than to say that peak restrictions will soon be implemented at weekends, hardly relevant now and further disincentivising off-peak travel in the future. Presumably this retrograde step has been delayed until after the company is re-awarded SWT? Interestingly, I have yet to come across a scenario where the passenger could under-pay, perhaps because the intention is to protect and boost the company's revenue rather than protect passengers from paying too much.

In addition to instances such as peak fares offered at off-peak times I have listed some of the more common fares where the cheapest ticket is not even available from TVMs. There are plenty of less commonly selected destinations where discrepancies exist, and again, this is always to the detriment of the passenger.

Stations south of Woking:

East Croydon via London: £1.20 extra compared to 'Not London' fare yet only 7-day season is available.

Stations to/from South Bermondsey, Canada Water, Selhurst: a super off-peak fare via London is from 10p in addition to the 'Not London' fare yet again only 7-day seasons are available from the TVMs.

Guildford to Eastbourne via London only 7-day season

In addition to the examples above, there is plenty of anecdotal evidence online that the company is still not accepting railcards on TVMs after the time they are valid for use. In such instances the passenger is then expected to approach the guard on-board only to be told that they cannot use their railcard as no problems had been reported at the station travelled from and that a ticket should have been purchased prior to boarding And how are guards updated with the working status of TVMs and closed ticket offices? The same Journey Check app that, as I have previously informed you, is frequently not updated by the company. Every single day, without exception, passengers across the network are facing problems buying a ticket and in many cases issues are still not reported on Journey Check even when the company has been made aware of faulty ticket machines and closed ticket offices. It’s completely unacceptable and should not be happening. Why are you and your Department failing to hold the company to account? The DfT's inaction shows a level of complicity which may explain why the majority of passengers now support the renationalisation of our railways. And we can be certain that if the DfT did require South West Trains to meet basic standards, let alone its Passenger Charter 'promises', the significant amount of remedial action would require the further lavishing of additional revenue support payments.

**Cuts to capacity**

We estimate that the company has cut capacity during the current franchise by approximately 47,000 seats per day in order to save money on leasing charges. The figure was in part obtained by a leaked memo subsequently reported in the media. The 57,000 additional seats per week that the company is now claiming credit for (which along with other so-called improvements was timed to coincide with a renewed bid for SWT) still equate to a net loss of 37,000 seats per day across the network compared to at the start of the franchise. We asked for clarity from Mr Roth and received the usual non-response which didn't come close to addressing our concerns or even acknowledge the premise of the question itself. We will therefore continue to make the claim that the company has cut 47,000 seats unless you can provide us with a different figure. We have also made an objection to the Advertising Standards Authority.

**Premium priced off-peak tickets**

The fact that the company was allowed to cut capacity was surely an acknowledgement of failure even at the early stages of the current franchise. SWT has repeatedly failed to manage demand with overcrowding at peak times due to the claimed constraints on capacity and at off-peak times due to cuts in carriage lengths. Lower passenger growth was blamed on the economic climate but it could just as plausibly be attributable to an exploitative pricing policy. Many off-peak fares are now within a matter of pence of regulated fares. Rather than stimulate long-term growth the company has been pricing people off the railways altogether while relying on peak commuters to boost profits. Short-term promotions that the company cites as examples of offering value for money are in no ways comparable to encouraging regular rail travel with affordable turn-up-and-go off-peak fares. And if off-peak services are frequently found to be full and standing due to capacity cuts where is the incentive for those who can, to change to a later service?

**Filthy carriages not fit for transporting humans**

Since massively overbidding for SWT the company has slashed cleaning staff. Carriages once deep cleaned monthly are now cleaned less than twice a year and hygiene levels have plummeted. It’s not uncommon to be on a train with all toilets being out of order. Laughably services during week commencing 23/10 were being held at stations for 'toilet breaks' the situation got so bad. How much longer is this going to go on for? I understand that the DfT does not have involvement in day-to-day operational matters but why should we have to put up with filth and squalor so Stagecoach can save a few pounds? I should add, Southern deep clean their trains every 42 days. How can Stagecoach justify 210 days? I will give one specific example. On Friday, 4th November the 21:30 Waterloo – Portsmouth had litter strewn throughout its carriages on departure from Waterloo having not even be tidied (SWT's definition of cleaning that supposedly takes placed every 3 hours). Dried vomit was on two seats, along with rotting food debris between seats, soiled carpets, an overflowing toilet leaking onto the surrounding carpet with what appeared to be used toilet roll and faeces along with a taped-up window nearby. This was in the first three carriages after which the train became full & standing as is normal so I could not walk any further down the remaining two carriages.

**Understaffed ticket offices**

Each and everyday across the network ticket offices are closed when they should be open. Many stations with an open ticket office see queues exceeding the queuing standard on a daily basis. Nothing has been done to address this problem which, unchecked, has been allowed to continue without any penalty to the company. Meanwhile passengers are stopped from entry into stations with barriers, even in instances where the queueing standards have not been met and the company has failed to make reasonable endeavours to mitigate problems. Where is the protection for rail users? Why are queues not being timed? Such work used to be undertaken by Transport Focus and the now defunct SRA. Mr Maynard suggests that staffing problems are due to the transitional period while Customer Ambassadors are being trained. This is not the case, not that it would be an acceptable explanation anyway. Understaffed and closed ticket offices have been an on-going issue throughout the franchise that were reported by myself to Transport Focus several years ago, at a time when the organisation still had the resources to perform checks on waiting times and compliance of ticket office opening hours.

The queuing standards at Guildford have been breached on eight occasions during the past ten days when I have visited (at various times between 09:30-11:30). The station has also been closed early three times during the past week including 19th and 20th November. None of these closures have been reported on Journey Check. Also in the past week, Woking station has been closed early on 5 occasions and only twice have these closures been reported, the ticket office was once closed as early as 19:30. Queuing times at Woking on 20th November exceeded 20 minutes and 26 minutes on 22nd November. Basingstoke ticket office regularly closes early, on Sunday 13th it was shut when I passed through the station at 20:50. Again, the closure was not reported on Journey Check. The company's Managing Director, Christian Roth has even provided us, via Anne Milton, with false information on when he claims Guildford ticket office has closed early in the past. I know this information is incorrect because I have been at the station and reported the ticket office closed before the times Mr Roth claims. Of course, the company doesn't need to be honest due to a complete lack of regulation and oversight which is letting passengers down every single day.

**Customer Experience Visits**

It is to be welcomed that mystery shopping visits are taking place on the network, although their value is hard to measure if the results are not made public. Moreover, how many visits are actually taking place? Given the recurring issues passengers face on a daily basis, the research is either not sufficient in terms of scale, or management are ignoring the results.

Not only does it appear that the outcomes of these visits are kept from the public, but feedback from 'Tell SWT' is hidden. The rare examples of transparency are limited to SWT's webchat and on social media which of course is harder for the company to control and where the same complaints are made time and time again. Many comments are simply ignored on #TTMSWT sessions with questions the company is not willing to answer being omitted from the subsequent transcripts. Increasingly, in an attempt to stem the flow of negative Tweets, the company is asking people to call and private message them, therefore limiting their exposure to further public comments from dissatisfied passengers.

Even more worryingly, the company is not intervening where Twitter users who are employees or relatives of employees are setting-up multiple accounts to harass people and answer negative Tweets on their behalf, often by using abusive language. Whilst I acknowledge that social media doesn't always bring out the best in people, the company should be doing far more to communicate to staff acceptable forms of behaviour online, especially when they are directly answering messages sent to the company's official Twitter feed from their own personal accounts. Interestingly, SWT doesn't always apply the same standards as they had a campaigning/parody Twitter account suspended for doing exactly the same thing.

**Wholly inadequate facilities**

I will use Woking as a good example of how the current franchisee has been allowed to strip away basic facilities. The station has passenger numbers of 8 million per year and yet along with a ticket office than opens and closes at the convenience of the company, the station has lost its spacious and comfortable waiting rooms. One large waiting room was for train passengers with a separate area for those transferring to Heathrow coach services. Both had comfortable seating areas and space for luggage as well as an information desk for National Express enquiries and both were open throughout all hours of service. As soon as Stagecoach were awarded another contract, they set about demolishing the waiting room to make way for a Marks and Spencer Simply Food outlet and staff area.

Passengers for the Heathrow coach, which has seen the timetable cut to hourly (from every 30 minutes) now have to wait outside with their luggage with no shelter and no seating whatsoever. Hardly incentivising use of public transport is it? Train passengers now have one small waiting room on platform five and a slightly larger waiting room on platform 1. Both waiting rooms are now closed early and so there is nowhere for people of wait regardless of the weather conditions and the now plummeting temperatures. It’s a completely unacceptable situation repeated across the network.

When I pointed out to the company the inadequate provision for such a large station I was informed that facilities needed to be 'cleaned and maintained'. How long does it take to 'clean' a waiting room with three small metal benches? Not that it looks as though anything has been cleaned anyway. There is still dried vomit on the wall in one of the waiting rooms, despite the fact I reported this to SWT three weeks ago. Elsewhere on the station, there are filthy hard metal benches coated with grime, spillages and flaking paint which is exposing rust. If you need proof, I refer you to my Twitter page which will hopefully give an insight into the decay and dereliction that 20 years of Stagecoach control have left this franchise in.

Help-point calls continue to go unanswered with many other requests for help being met with hold music being played before either being cut off or having a NRE call handler ask the passenger to try again in the chance that a member of SWT contact centre staff will be available at the next attempt. This is perhaps not surprising given the fact that there are only two members of staff available later in the evening to cover all calls from across the network.

Crime across the network has been rising as the company has cut station staff and put no measures in place to enforce compulsory ticket areas.

Woking, as with other stations on the network sees barriers opened at 10pm (excluding on Sunday when it’s even earlier) and with no controls on who enters the station. I have recently witnessed drug taking and two physical assaults against fellow rail users. No staff were present and with the passenger assistance counter on platform 2 unstaffed and in complete darkness. Recorded violent crime has almost doubled in the past year at Woking station. And of course, with no visible staffing for much of the evening and isolated areas of the station with reduced visibility, many crimes may never be reported.

In the past year recorded crime at stations has increased by the following; Waterloo 12%, Staines 66%, Windsor (Eton Riverside) 67%. Haslemere 18%, Guildford 25%. Surbiton 70%, Weybridge 62%. So much for the 'secure stations' accreditation. Another meaningless gimmick the company can use to hide behind its own failings.

**Failure to keep passengers informed**

Despite the promises made in 2006 the company has consistently failed to keep passengers informed during times of disruption. A recurring theme on the company's own Twitter account and online forums is the total breakdown of communication between SWT, its own staff and passengers.

We can ask why core infrastructure is failing as often as it does, but a more immediate question has to be why SWT still cannot, after 20 years' experience, provide passengers with the information they need during times of disruption. Most regular travellers I have spoken to agree that information has become less useful when there are delays, with an increasing reliance of automated announcements which rarely provide the required level of detail. I ask you to look at feedback from passengers on social media from the past two weeks which time and time again cites frustrations at the complete lack of useful and timely information during significant levels of disruption.

Saturday 12th November

I will use my recent experience from 12th and 13th November to hopefully illustrate to you the problems passengers now face when key infrastructure fails. The same types of issues occur every time there is disruption on the network.

I arrived at Guildford station around 90 minutes after first becoming aware of problems. I was making a journey to Salisbury and left home an hour earlier than planned in an attempt to arrive on time. The scenes at Guildford station were as chaotic as had been posted almost two hours earlier at 11:30. As is usual when there is disruption on the mainline, SWT no longer attempts to run a shuttle service to get people at least closer to where they need to be, seemingly ignorant of the fact that Woking is an interchange station for thousands of people with connections elsewhere. The usual promises of rail replacement buses were being made, but as is normal, no buses were in fact sourced despite the disruption lasting for most of the day. The company was also misleading passengers by stating on their own website that buses were in operation.

Trains to Woking were still being advertised on platform screens, however, and staff were telling passengers to wait for the next London bound service in order to get to Woking. However, minutes before approaching the station I saw at least two trains receiving clearance to use the Clandon route via the platform-end signals. If the controller and signaller had agreed to the diversion then why were passengers not informed? In both instances there were no announcements to inform passengers that these services would be running fast to Waterloo. I suspect many boarded trains unaware of this fact and ended up in London.

After waiting for 40 minutes, I decided to board a stopping train towards Reading and walk via Farnborough North (to Farnborough Main) as departure information from Farnborough Main looked more promising. On arrival at Farnborough Main, I was able to determine that none of the information shown online was correct and the platform screens were firstly showing services as being 'delayed' followed by increases in the expected arrival time which were changing every minute. Each and every minute for the 53 minutes I was at the station, automated announcements were made highlighting the revised departure time even though this was only changing incrementally by one or two minutes. **Crucially there was not one single live announcement made at any point during the time I was at the station (almost one hour).**  Passengers and staff were unaware of where trains were positioned, even though at the very least staff further up the line towards London would have known at which stations or approximate location between stations trains were being held.

Twenty years ago such information would have been made available for passengers to get an idea as to the likely minimum length of delay in order to plan ahead and at least feel in some ways informed. But no, not with SWT. Their inability to keep passengers informed during times of disruption is disgraceful and in itself should prove to the DfT that they are not a fit and proper company to run train services. Other than the total and complete level of contempt shown to their customers, the company's ability to provide even the most basic level of information has been compromised by cuts to station staff.

SWT's indifference at dealing with delays is as deafening as the cacophony of noise from their pointless automated announcements. The only priority of the company is to minimise their exposure to fines payable for TOC attributable delays. While I was at Farnborough, two trains could have been diverted onto the slow line to pick up passengers. Of course, this didn't happen. Tellingly, both services were travelling slowly enough for me to see that they were virtually empty, as was the service I subsequently used. Why? Because when there is disruption, passengers are not informed of platform and departure information. A quick check online confirmed that many passengers were reporting that trains had left without any announcement or that announcements were made within a few seconds of the doors being locked and the train departing without them. Farcical.

Sunday 13th November

Another wait of 40 minutes at Guildford as yet another train had developed a fault. Once again approximately every minute, automated announcements were being made repeating the same unhelpful information. It was not until over half an hour of waiting that a live announcement was made which contradicted the information shown on the platform screens about which train would be arriving first on the now over-crowded platform. When the London bound train arrived it was, as is usual, a pathetically short 5 coach service that was full and standing throughout all carriages by the (extended) time boarding had taken place. I missed two connections at Woking that meant I was over an hour late to Basingstoke, which is becoming increasingly common.

Services (including those only running hourly) continued to be cancelled during the day due to staff shortages. Once again, no attempt was made to provide rail replacement services on either day due to the disruption. And on routes where rail replacement services were being paid for by Network Rail due to engineering works, passengers were again reporting that bus drivers did not know the routes they were supposed to be driving, buses were departing early and bus stops were not being advertised, especially at smaller stations. SWT appears to have given up running a reliable service at weekends. In fact, they gave up several years ago.

**Dishonesty and wilful neglect**

Along with other passengers, I have been attempting to make a claim online for the recent disruption, even in the knowledge that the company will usually cite factors outside their control to deny a payout, however small. But they have now changed tact and it’s not even been possible to make a claim due to the website displaying an error page following completion of the 'contact us' form. This has been ongoing for several weeks now and I wonder if anyone from the DfT or ORR are aware that many passengers like myself have been unable to contact the company. Hold times to speak to customer service on the phone have been exceeding one hour with many passengers reporting that after a prolonged wait the call handler as then hung-up on them when they finally get through.

Passengers requiring assisted travel have been reporting wait times of over 30 minutes to speak to someone and even then, as has been previously reported multiple times, staff assistance is not available at the station despite a request having been made. So much for 'access for all'. Shamefully lifts across SWT managed stations continue to be poorly maintained and as so often the case Journey Check is frequently omitting information on broken facilities which makes planning a journey impossible for many rail users who require step-free access.

The company's botched website relaunch continues to take payment for tickets despite failing to issue collection ID meaning passengers have to rebook at their own expense and attempt to make a subsequent claim, or call customer services in the hope that someone answers. Such issues are still bring reported by passengers today, 24th November despite the company claiming several weeks ago that problems with their website had now been resolved. Many passengers have reported multiple payments having been taken from their account following a booking requiring them to chase up SWT for a refund. It is scandalous that this has been allowed to continue for months and I wonder how many people have been overcharged without even realising? Where is the protection for passengers? Does consumer law not apply to retail sales in the rail industry?

**South West Trains Watch**

Mr Maynard may be interested to know that the social media account myself and Sam set-up only 16 months ago has the second largest number of followers of all rail passenger-led campaigns on Twitter. In the past month we've had a record number of engagements and tweet impressions exceeding five hundred thousand. Yes, over half a million, and of the Tweets we receive over ninety-nine percent are negative of SWT and almost all are of the same recurring issues. The scale of failure at South West Trains would not be tolerated in any other industry, but of course as we know, the operator is a textbook example of what happens when you have a captive market with no meaningful regulation.

A culture over 20 years has been fostered where there is no scrutiny and where rail passengers; the consumer are there to be exploited. A large number of people in the industry are paid way in excess of anything they would receive in any other sector and are therefore highly motivated when protecting their interests. Although this applies in much of the industry it is even more relevant with monolithic Stagecoach which has bought union harmony with yearly inflation busting pay increases and safeguards that no other employee in the private sector could hope for. Fair? Perhaps not, especially when considering that many passengers are spending more than a fifth of their income on travelling by rail.

As the incumbent of 20 years, the company knows how to play the system to their advantage. No opportunity to make money from passengers has been underexploited. Basic facilities have been run-down with the most recent financial report showing a cut of 32% to the maintenance budget. Problems exasperated by the company's singular focus on cost cutting resulting in too few standby crew, carriages parked up to save money and the avoidance financial penalties being the primary objective when dealing with disruption. There were even reports on 22nd November of passengers being de-trained due to the service they were on running out of fuel. Stagecoach cost-cutting has resulted in SWT being run like an amateur operation.

Why are passengers still paying the highest fares in Europe? Despite the claims from the DfT and the industry, our rail network is no more comprehensive than many other networks around Europe and our population density is higher than most other EU countries. We should be able to provide an affordable, reliable rail network. Yet, as we have seen so often, the fragility of our railways are all too often exposed. And any criticisms are either met with denial or promises of action repeated over and over again. We need change, and we need this to start now.

**Failure of government to invest in infrastructure**

Let us look at the facts. Up to 50,000 deaths in the UK each year are directly attributable to our polluted air, with most emissions a result of road traffic. 97% of diesel vehicles on our roads are emitting more NOx than the official limit. This was completely foreseeable, preventable and something central and local government should be ashamed of. There have never been more cars on UK roads yet the DfT and Ministers seem to think this is reflective of a coherent joined-up transport strategy. It isn't. The DfT's own figures show that rail transport is expected to decline relative to increases in car use from an already low base with even greater numbers of people on the road polluting the environment and causing even more needless ill health and premature deaths. Most journeys are made not in rural areas where road transport is necessary but in and between urban centres where growing levels of pollution are now becoming a serious and immediate concern. Private car use is highly inefficient in terms of energy costs and the time spent driving, especially in congestion.

We urgently need a new vision where people are actively encouraged to use trains. Our rail network could be one of the best in the world, yet government policy seems to be to allow passengers to be exploited both in terms of fares and service levels. The denial exhibited by Ministers will not help anyone and meanwhile our economic competitiveness and environmental commitments slip further. I hope the government is prepared too for the massive lawsuits expected in the next few years as pollution worsens and more stringent recording means even more areas fall outside of official air quality limits.

**RAIB report on Lamington viaduct subsidence further highlights loss of corporate memory in the rail industry (think Great Western electrification problems)**

**Extract from report:** “Our recent investigation into the partial failure of the viaduct at Lamington, in South Lanarkshire, serves as a reminder that, under certain circumstances, the scouring effect of a swollen river can undermine bridge piers to the point where the structure above starts to fail. The risk of scour is often higher for older bridges, particularly those with shallow foundations.

It is of particular concern to me that the vulnerability of this structure to scour had been identified at least 10 years previously. Despite this, insufficient action had been taken to protect the piers from scour, or to monitor the integrity of the viaduct at times of high water flow. The continued operation of trains over this high risk structure, despite a previous report from a driver of a rough ride, provides vivid evidence that the risk of scour was not generally appreciated by those involved.

Of even more concern was our finding that there were no effective scour mitigation measures in place for over 100 of the most vulnerable structures across Scotland. We discovered that a previous process for managing scour risk on Scotland Route had fallen into disuse, at least in part due to organisational change, and that this had not been recognised by Network Rail.

The railway has seen numerous organisational changes over recent decades. Although change is inevitable, and often for the better, it is vital that the railway industry finds ways to retain its corporate memory of its own assets and the associated management systems. It is my view that the safety of assets can only be assured if those responsible clearly identify the control measures that are in place, how they contribute to safety and what must be done to keep them in place into the future.

I hope that the future will see a much greater use of remote sensing equipment to monitor the condition of structures (and earthworks). Recent advances in technology make this easier to do, and I am encouraged that Network Rail is already working towards extending the use of such equipment.

I hope, and believe, that Network Rail will think carefully about what it needs to do to assure itself that any emerging gaps in its asset management regime are detected, and then corrected, long before there is a risk to the travelling public.”

History repeats itself - Stagecoach condemned for ‘absurd’, ‘inaccurate’ and ‘misleading’ evidence again

From the Evening Standard of 17.6.2014:

“A keen gardener has won a battle over a £325,000 repair bill after a train hit a tree branch that fell onto the track from her garden.

Stagecoach South West Trains had suggested that Kathleen Hind, a retired primary school headteacher, had “cheerfully let [her garden] go to rack and ruin”. But a High Court judge rejected the allegation and said Ms Hind was a knowledgeable gardener.

Ms Hind, 65, said today: “I’m just relieved that it is all over and pleased that justice has been done. In my opinion the action was vindictive, but the train company has come out worse. It’s been a blight on my life for a long time and it’s a relief it’s all over. They tried to claim I should have known the tree had something wrong with it, which I think was unrealistic. The tree expert said the same thing.”

Ms Hind was headteacher at Heston Junior School in Hounslow (now Heston Primary School) from 1988 to 2011 before retiring. She sold the early-Victorian house, Rose Cottage near Staines railway station and moved to Selsey in 2012.

No one was hurt in the accident shortly after midnight in December 2009 when the empty train, travelling at 40mph through Staines to its depot in Strawberry Hill, hit the branch of an elm tree which had snapped off and fallen on to the track in strong winds.

SWT also sued Andrew Steel, a tree surgeon who Ms Hind employed to carry out work in the garden three years before the accident. Lawyers for SWT, part of the Stagecoach group, insisted that Ms Hind had not paid sufficient attention to the state of the 150-year-old elm tree, claiming she should have spotted decay.

However, in the technology and construction court, Mr Justice Coulson attacked an expert arboriculturalist who provided an “inaccurate” and “misleading” report. He said: “Ms Hind, an intelligent woman and a keen gardener with a working knowledge of trees, was portrayed in [the] reports as someone who did not care about this tree, or any of the trees in her garden at all, and had cheerfully let it all go to rack and ruin. “I consider that this picture of Ms Hind was wholly misleading and inaccurate.”

The judge said the expert cut out a key phrase from his initial evidence to favour SWT’s case and he found his explanation for doing so “absurd”. He also rejected the limited claim against the tree surgeon. Mr Steel, who runs A S Treecare, based in Sunbury-on-Thames, said: “I can’t believe that the case was brought against me. It’s been something that has been hanging over me and my wife for over two years.””

Remember the comments of an employment tribunal in 2002? It ruled that SWT had wrongfully demoted train driver Greg Tucker, dismissing much of the company’s evidence as “incredible”, “risible” and “implausible, even absurd”. One key witness appeared to give evidence “without regard for truth and solely with an eye to where the advantage lay”. Not much change there then.

**Newsboard**

**Compensation rules which would hit Stagecoach’s SWT hard**

New, standard, compensation rules are being phased in for all train operators under the Consumer Rights Act 2015, starting on GTR. On SWT the rules will apply from the start of the new franchise in 2017. Passengers will be able to claim cash compensation for any delay where the operator fails to provide a train service “with reasonable care and skill”. Compensation is extended to consequential loss where, for example, a passenger misses a flight. The refunds will apply as below:

* 25% of the single fare for delays of 15 to 29 minutes
* 50% of the single fare for delays of 30 to 59 minutes
* 100% of the single fare for delays of 60 minutes to 119 minutes
* 100% of the total ticket cost (including if it is a return) for delays of two hours or more.

This would mean a huge culture shock for Stagecoach’s SWT, which has failed to exercise reasonable care and skill for two decades. Relevant recent evidence from Twitter:

Tweet: “Last night I couldn't get back to Guildford and spent £22 on a taxi. How do I reclaim this? Checked your website and can't see how.” SWT response: “Please contact Customer Relations who may be able to arrange a gesture of goodwill, we don't compensate for consequential loss I'm afraid.”

Tweet: 16.08 to Dorking. Platform change announcement ended with a cheery "But it's left already". Complained, but no forms at Clapham Junction!

**Split ticketing**

The Southern Daily Echo of 30.11.2016 included a substantial article on split-ticketing. A reporter who enquired at Southampton station about the cheapest peak fare to London was told £80.20 when it was £67.70 by splitting the tickets at Woking. The train needs to call at Woking (the faster peak trains from Southampton don’t), but passengers could satisfy this condition by changing at Basingstoke to a train which calls there.

**Cross Country franchise extended**

Arriva (DB)’s franchise has been extended to October 2019. The £10 ‘change of travel’ fee applicable to Advance tickets will be abolished from January 2017. There will be free and faster WiFi by April 2018. Trains will be accelerated between Birmingham and Manchester, typically by 9 minutes on Mondays-Fridays and 12 minutes at weekends. The Government has also agreed to one additional Voyager train.

Arriva is running a consultation on proposed service changes from December 2017. Those south of Reading are minimal. The daily direct trains between Guildford and Newcastle would no longer run south of Reading, but there would be an additional weekday service from Reading to Bournemouth at 06.52 (calling at the usual stations). This could help mitigate the peak crowding between Reading and Basingstoke and might attract early morning travellers from Heathrow via Paddington if suitable connections are available.

Some trains to and from Bournemouth and Southampton would be longer or shorter, in an attempt to better match length with demand on the ‘core’ sections of the Cross Country network further north. The 07.25 Newcastle-Southampton would start from Edinburgh at 05.36, giving South Hampshire a direct Scotland train in both directions, though the start time might be too early for many passengers.

The hourly services between Manchester and Bristol would extend to Exeter, but with services through to Torbay much reduced. The Scotland-West Country trains would be concentrated on the Edinburgh-Plymouth route, with Britain’s longest distance train, the 08.20 Aberdeen-Penzance, replaced by connectional services.

Great Western trains between Paddington and the West via Bristol would then generally be diverted to run via Westbury. This could usefully provide more Taunton, Devon and Cornwall connections for passengers from South Hampshire IF the the diverted trains actually stop at Westbury.

**Great Western rolling stock**

With Great Western electrification delayed, the associated cascade of diesel stock is under review. Bristol’s principal non-London services could see a mixture of Thames Turbo units, shortened inter-city 125 units, or even Wessex Electric units with diesel haulage. This could be welcome news for users of the Portsmouth Harbour-Cardiff Central trains - a generally good service marred by overcrowding.

**GTR (Southern) service changes**

From the start of 2017, the 14.33 Brighton-Southampton Central (Mondays-Fridays) will call at Eastleigh and Southampton Airport instead of Swanwick, and the 15.33 will call at Swanwick instead of Eastleigh and Southampton Airport.

Govia is consulting on the amalgamated Thameslink-Southern-Great Northern timetable from December 2018. The on-line consultation runs until 17.00 on Thursday 8 December 2016. The only significant change proposed to services which serve Hampshire is that the hourly Sunday service between Portsmouth and London Victoria would run via the Arun Valley instead of via Hove and Haywards Heath. All other services between Southampton/Portsmouth and Victoria have already beeen transferred to the Arun Valley route.

**Acknowledgements / Contact details**

As always, thanks to everyone who has been kind enough to contact us. Without your support and input, this newsletter would not be possible. The newsletter is produced in good faith, based on reports and information from many individuals and sources including information identified from press and website research. Contributions are always welcome. We aim for accuracy at all times, because our good reputation depends on it. We do not use material which could be offensive or which appears unlikely to be correct.

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