**Hogrider 156 (Mid-September 2017 - January 2018) South Hampshire Rail Users’ Group Newsletter**

**Time of change**

**Overview**

South Hampshire’s rail services are at last emerging from years of stagnation, and both the Department for Transport and the four passenger train operators have been conducting public consultations.

We are very grateful for the various opportunities to comment and the friendly and constructive meetings offered by DfT and principal operator First Group, and also for the latter’s generous hospitality at stakeholder events.

We have been represented at meetings in Southampton, Bristol and Trowbridge, and have responded at length to First’s SWR timetable consultation and DfT’s consultation on the future of the GWR franchise. From contacts with other rail campaigners, it’s probably fair to say that there is a high degree of consensus on the changes, particularly to timetables, which rail users would like. We look forward to seeing how far users’ aspirations are met.

However, not everything is positive.

Government really needs to give a lead in settling the crewing disputes which have repeatedly crippled GTR (Southern), and latterly SWR.

Fare increases have soared again, this year not because they were increased above inflation, but because of the weak post-referendum pound.

Much-needed additional capacity on the Portsmouth-Cardiff route is still awaited because Thames Turbo trains have not been released.

And Stagecoach’s penny-pinched SWT cannot be transformed overnight. A survey by Which? found 51% passenger satisfaction on SWR (joint penultimate worst of the passenger train operators). To be fair, well under half the operators scored less than 60%, and capacity, frequency, condition of carriages, toilet facilities and value for money should all improve significantly under First/MTR’s franchise commitments. Future punctuality and reliability remains to be seen, but increased capacity should reduce boarding/alighting times on peak trains. In the meantime, the swift introduction of Delay Repay was very welcome.

There are also issues about inadequate staffing of booking offices, for example at Southampton Central upside on the morning of Sunday 28th January, when a single clerk was having to deal with time-consuming requests.

**So what’s happening?**

SWR

2018-19 should see the refurbishment of the Desiro electric trains and re-introduced (on the Waterloo-Guildford-Portsmouth line) Wessex Electric trains, followed by refurbishment of the diesel trains. Within around three years, all the remaining mainland fleet should be replaced by new air-conditioned suburban Aventra stock (built by Bombardier in succession to the Electrostar trains, which are widely used on Southern). Plans for a revamp of the Isle of Wight line are under active consideration.

We don’t yet know the timescale for the substantial improvements promised at stations such as Southampton Central and Portsmouth Harbour.

**On 25.1.2018, the DfT published** **the ‘South Western Railways 2017 rail franchise agreement’ (802 pages) and the ‘South Western Railways 2017 train service requirement’ on their website.**

Pages 259-260 of the franchise agreement require the operator to submit a report to the Secretary of State by 1.2.2018 on the optimisation of services between:

(a) Brighton and Exeter via Southampton and Salisbury;

(b) Portsmouth-Southampton-Bristol;

(c) Bristol-Yeovil/Weymouth;

(d) Southampton Airport-Salisbury-Swindon; and

(e) Reading-Guildford-Gatwick.

This appears to be a very positive development. We don’t know whether a direct Brighton-Exeter train is feasible within the numerous timetable constraints. However, Southampton-Exeter looks possible, because DfT is also proposing that the token GWR services to and from Brighton should cease to run east of Southampton, leaving GTR to consider replacement capacity in its own territory (oddly, the current GWR trains – running as far afield as Great Malvern - are timed to help mitigate peak crowding in and out of Brighton). We made the point at the Trowbridge meeting that, while Southampton has a good range of services, there are no direct trains to anywhere south-west of Weymouth.

The Southampton Airport-Swindon service would be an amalgamation of SWR’s Romsey-Southampton-Salisbury service, and GWR local services between Swindon and Westbury, and Westbury and Warminster. This is strongly supported by Wiltshire County Council and local campaigners, as it would link most of Wiltshire’s principal towns and provide them with a direct airport service. In addition, DfT proposes to transfer Romsey, Mottisfont & Dunbridge, and Dean stations from the GWR to SWR franchise. The two latter stations are currently managed by GWR but served only by SWR trains.

**Having consulted widely on its timetable proposals, First intends to announce its December 2018 service after seeking approval from DfT and Network Rail during March.**

This timescale may be the reason why DfT has published the minimum service requirement in a separate document from the franchise agreement (the final service pattern is presumably provisional or the consultation would be meaningless). The document sets out minimum requirements for non-London services such as Portsmouth-Southampton (one train per hour calling at all stations between Portsmouth and Weymouth except Millbrook and Redbridge, and the new hourly service between Portsmouth and Southampton which will omit Hilsea and run fast between Swanwick and St Denys). The Romsey-Southampton Airport-Salisbury service would remain hourly, with one early service extending to Yeovil Pen Mill via Sherborne. Lymington-Brockenhurst would remain twice-hourly. These requirements reflect First’s original proposals so presumably may be subject to some modification in the light of the public consultations.

In any case, further changes are likely from the 2020 timetable, when GWR’s full electric service starts and the ‘optimised’ SWR services on the routes set out above might be expected.

Oddly, DfT’s minimum service requirement for Hampshire’s principal London trains is specified only from December 2020. The service similarly reflects First’s original proposals which it is reconsidering following consultation. The Waterloo-Weymouth faster service would call at Wool instead of Branksome, Parkstone and Hamworthy. The slower Weymouth service would call additionally at Branksome and Parkstone, and terminate at Poole. The Waterloo-Poole stopping service would terminate at Southampton Central and call additionally at Woking and St Denys. The Waterloo-Hedge End-Portsmouth service would call additionally at Clapham Junction and Fleet. (These are the standard weekday off-peak patterns, all repeated hourly). Enhancements would apply in the commuting peak. In First’s proposed timetables, the timings of these trains will in many cases differ from the current services. In particular, the London-bound services switch to the opposite side of the hour.

GWR

The Portsmouth-Cardiff service is set to become a 2+3, 2+3 route. The 3-car class 158 units are to be replaced by 5-car Thames Turbo formations, comprising one 2-car unit and one 3-car unit, with no corridor connection between the two. The trains will bring 3+2 seating, just as commuters are rejoicing that longer-distance services on SWR are to revert to the more comfortable 2+2 layout. The DfT’s line is that this is a pragmatic temporary solution to overcrowding, and trains comparable with those on similarly important regional routes, such as TransPennine, could be the next step. (TransPennine uses a variation of SWR’s class 444 units on routes such as Manchester Airport-Glasgow)

In the meantime, delays in electrification of the Oxford route are preventing the release of Turbos. Part of the problem is that the track layout at Oxford station needs to be finalised before gantries are erected, and a decision is needed whether Marylebone services should be extended southwards on to the Morris Cowley branch.

We have been plugging the point that the fastest journeys between South Hampshire and the West Country are often via Westbury, though the connections are sparse and often prolonged. It was therefore good to hear DfT’s line at the Trowbridge meeting that they want a wider range of journey opportunities in the South West besides faster journeys between Paddington and Plymouth. Unfortunately, something went wrong in GWR’s January timetable change and passengers connecting into the 08.27 from Westbury will now find their journey extended by almost 40 minutes if they are travelling through to Cornwall.

Another issue raised at the Trowbridge meeting was that the decision to retain an hourly service between Paddington and Bedwyn (using bi-mode trains) after electrification to Newbury offered the opportunity to extend some of these trains to the West via Westbury (and might also facilitate a long-discussed ‘Devizes Parkway’ station at West Lavington). This, in conjunction with the proposed Southampton Airport-Swindon service, could afford further improvements in journey opportunities between South Hampshire and the West.

Cross Country

Following comments on proposed changes from Scotland and the West of England, Cross Country has decided to retain its existing timetable with only minor tweaks. A new local service from Southampton Central to Brockenhurst and Bournemouth at 07.56 on Mondays to Fridays is now running in place of a former empty stock working.

GTR (Southern)

Upcoming changes from May were outlined in our last issue. The Ashford-Brighton service is reportedly to be cut back to Eastbourne rather than Hastings. It’s not yet clear whether this will mitigate the greatly extended journey times between Southampton and stations east of Hastings.

**Group’s responses to consultations**

The principal points raised in our responses are below.

**Interim comments to First/MTR on their draft SWR Monday-Friday timetable from December 2018**

**Waterloo-Guildford-Portsmouth**

This looks very comprehensive. Hopefully, longstanding aspirations for Sunday stopping services to serve Hilsea will be considered.

**Portsmouth-Fareham-Southampton-Weymouth**

The existing service between Portsmouth and Southampton is probably the worst between two major centres in the South East. The improved connectivity provided by the additional trains, offering (along with GWR’s Cardiff services) a twice-hourly semi-fast service, should achieve a substantial increase in custom.

Given that SWR and GTR jointly provide good service levels at Portchester and Swanwick (normally 6 departures per hour from both), there would seem to be a case for the additional semi-fast services to call at Netley and Woolston instead, giving these stations more robust London connections at Southampton and faster journeys to Portsmouth, while possibly making a greater contribution to the serious traffic pollution in Southampton (officially recognised as one of the ten most polluted cities in Britain).

Although estimated entries and exits at Netley and Woolston are smaller than at Portchester and Swanwick, demand has almost certainly been suppressed. From September 1957 both stations had twice-hourly ‘Hampshire Diesel’ services seven days a week (with extra peak trains), and this lasted until 1983 when one service per hour was ‘suspended’ because of single line working through Southampton tunnel during reinforcement work.

Higher service levels would not have been maintained for 26 years without sufficient demand. Currently, the morning peak service level into Southampton is much better than the return evening peak level. Failure to restore axed trains after the tunnel works may simply have been for convenience, as the first-generation diesel units were nearing the end of their working lives.

In recent years, there has been considerable housing development in the Netley area, and there is now similar activity on the huge Vosper Thornycroft shipbuilding site close to Woolston station. The latter station is adjacent to stops served by eight bus routes (seven of them operated by First Group) of which (even after the recent timetable changes) only two will serve Southampton Central station. So this could be a prime interchange site.

The Woolston and Netley stops would also provide some compensation for the 09.53, 15.53, 16.53 and 17.53 Portsmouth to Weymouth stopping trains missing the normal London connection at Southampton Central. We presume that the 15.53 and 16.53 from Portsmouth are delayed by peak working patterns on the main line, and the 09.53 and 17.53 are affected by the twice-daily GWR services from Brighton to Great Malvern and Bristol.

Incidentally, we understand that GWR trains don’t call at Cosham after 20.00 because of occasional incidents of rowdyism. Perhaps this policy could change now that First Group runs the station.

**Salisbury-Southampton-Chandlers Ford-Romsey**

This is little changed.

Issues:

**1.** The re-timing of the Waterloo-Weymouth fast services means that the existing connection at Southampton Airport Parkway from Waterloo to Eastleigh, Chandlers Ford and Romsey will be missed by 2 minutes. The stopping service from Waterloo misses a connection at Eastleigh by 7 minutes. This could adversely affect the economics of the route through Chandlers Ford.

In addition, the twice-hourly service from Southampton Central to Eastleigh (comprising the Romsey trains and Waterloo stopping trains) will be poorly spaced (35-past and 22-past respectively). Connectivity would be improved somewhat if the Salisbury-Romsey services could run about 6 minutes later in both directions.

Around fifty years ago, Southampton-Eastleigh was reportedly the second heaviest local passenger flow on BR’s Southern Region, outside the London suburban area, after Brighton-Worthing. Buses take 42 minutes for the journey, so there appears to be a commercial opportunity for rail.

**2.** There is an existing issue with Sunday morning services. GWR Portsmouth-Cardiff trains generally provide Portsmouth and Southampton with connections to Exeter at Salisbury. On Sunday mornings these trains run only every two hours.

Currently, passengers from Southampton have connections into the 10.51 Salisbury – Exeter off both the 09.08 from Portsmouth and the 09.35 from Romsey. This pattern is repeated two hours later. However, the 08.35 and 10.35 from Romsey call additionally at Mottisfont & Dunbridge and Dean and miss the potential Exeter connections. Possibly trains could call alternately at Mottisfont & Dunbridge or Dean, facilitating hourly connections from Southampton to Exeter. In that case, it might be preferable to reschedule the Dean stops because there is a limited summer mini-bus connection between Mottisfont & Dunbridge station and nearby tourist attractions.

It would also be good to have a Southampton connection (or even a through portion) into the 08.51 Salisbury - Exeter to serve the Sunday day-trip market.

**Waterloo-Lymington/Weymouth**

Broadly speaking, the revised structure (with London-bound trains from Weymouth, Poole, Southampton, and Portsmouth via Eastleigh moved to the opposite side of the hour) facilitates some big improvements. These recognise that people on the South Coast need to make a wide range of journeys and that footfall at smaller stations has been showing significant increases. However, some unsatisfactory features remain.

The services between Waterloo, Poole and Weymouth, and the connections between the Weymouth trains and services to and from Manchester at Southampton Central, and the Poole trains and services to and from Gatwick Airport and Brighton at Clapham Junction, apply similarly in both directions.

The direct services between Portsmouth and Weymouth will greatly improve connectivity along the coast. Currently, a journey such as between Totton and Netley involves a wait of approximately 50 minutes at Southampton Central in either direction.

In addition, passengers making longer journeys along the coast will generally be able to switch at Southampton Central from the Portsmouth-Weymouth services to the faster Weymouth trains westbound (but not in the case of the 09.53, 15.53, 16.53 and 17.53 from Portsmouth), and from the faster Weymouth trains to the Cardiff-Portsmouth trains eastbound.

While the Waterloo-Weymouth service will reduce to hourly, there are probably few London commuters living west of Poole, and Weymouth residents generally should welcome the much earlier Waterloo arrival of the first morning train and the faster journey times throughout the day.

More generally, the earlier and later services at the beginning and end of the day will help recognise the wide variations in people’s working hours and facilitate longer out-and-back day journeys.

The twice-hourly services between Southampton, New Milton and Christchurch will be much better spaced.

The doubled overall service at St Denys (to 8 departures per hour) will greatly improve travel options for people living on the eastern side of Southampton. This was the standard hourly service level in the initial ‘Hampshire Diesel’ service of 1957 and initial post-steam service of 1967. The current service is lamentable.

The re-timing of the trains from Portsmouth to Waterloo via Eastleigh means that Portsmouth and Fareham passengers, who currently have awkward connections into the Cross Country trains to Manchester at Southampton Central, will have easy ‘same-platform’ transfer at Winchester.

Issues:

**1.** If just one improvement could be made on Sundays mornings, it might be to solve the issue whereby Cross Country trains leave Bournemouth five minutes earlier than necessary in order to free platform 2 for the Weymouth-Waterloo trains. These trains ought to connect, to improve connectivity for long-distance passengers. Passengers making long journeys on Sundays often face engineering works at some stage, so there is an incentive to start early. The restoration of platform 4 at Bournemouth (currently shut off with a metal barrier) might ease congestion at the station.

**2.** A very small point, but the single remaining ‘parliamentary’ service between Millbrook, Redbridge and the Bournemouth line will be westbound only and run in the morning. Would a late evening train each way to/from Bournemouth be more logical? At that time of day, bus services in the area are severely limited, so the Millbrook and Redbridge stops would serve a more practical purpose.

**3.** The biggest issues arise in relation to the intermediate towns between Southampton and Bournemouth. Please see also the related appendix on station entries and exits.

**3a New Milton and Christchurch**

There are concerns about the extended connection times at Brockenhurst for passengers from Christchurch and New Milton wishing to switch to the Cross Country trains to Manchester. Currently, the connection is 16 minutes (19 minutes westbound). The new connection will be 38 minutes (23 minutes westbound). The best Cross Country connections for Christchurch and New Milton passengers will be with the Newcastle trains at Southampton Central, but these run only in alternate hours.

Northbound, passengers could change at Basingstoke (instead of Southampton Central) in alternate hours to connect with the local service to Reading, and then with the Reading-Newcastle trains. There is a 4-minute connection at Basingstoke with the local GWR service. Perhaps this could be eased a little, and/or the train from Christchurch and New Milton diverted to platform 4 at Basingstoke to avoid passengers needing to use the subway.

However, connectivity might best be promoted if the Manchester trains gained stops at Christchurch and New Milton, or alternately at one or the other every two hours (as happens with Cross Country trains at Chepstow and Lydney). This might be instead of, or as well as the Brockenhurst stops. The estimated combined entries and exits at Christchurch and New Milton now exceed the total for Brockenhurst, even though numbers at the latter are swollen by college students and visitors to the New Forest.

The median age of New Milton residents is about seven years above the national average, and at Christchurch the percentage of people aged over 65 is twice the national average. That suggests a good market for those who prefer direct travel without changes. Operationally, the short platforms at Christchurch and New Milton should cause no problems for Voyager trains.

**3b. Lymington**

The 3-minute off-peak connections at Brockenhurst between mainline and Lymington branch services would be optimistic even if it could be guaranteed that all mainline trains would run precisely on time in both directions. People will be using the lifts and bridge simultaneously in opposite directions. Those especially likely to lose their connections are disabled or elderly people, families with small children and a buggy, passengers with heavy luggage, and cyclists. The mean age of Lymington residents is about 12 years more than the national average, families come for day trips, and Brockenhurst is the cycling hub of the New Forest.

The desire to improve connections westwards from Lymington may appear commercially attractive, because this axis is more populous than the area eastwards through the New Forest, but is there much need? A conversation with a prominent member of the Friends of the Lymington-Brockenhurst Line in the spring of 2017 elicited the view that rail usage from Lymington is predominantly eastbound.

Westwards, daytime buses run from Lymington High Street to New Milton rail station in 30 minutes and then on to Christchurch and Bournemouth. The rail journey is therefore likely to be perceived as going around two sides of a triangle. Passengers who travel by train westwards from Lymington are likely to be making longer journeys, such as to Bournemouth, Poole or Weymouth (though the buses bypass Sway).

The Lymington branch would probably not have survived but for the need to safeguard connectivity for the 10,000 people living at the western extremity of the Isle of Wight. With 3-minute connections at Brockenhurst, and 5-minute connections with the ferry, the service for Isle of Wight residents looks anything but robust. Tight connections would appear to have little point if they just drive passengers to take earlier trains.

An hourly off-peak service running direct to/from Southampton, might be more attractive to Lymington passengers than a half-hourly branch shuttle with very tight connections at Brockenhurst. The alternative Lymington-Southampton bus service has been whittled down over the years and is scheduled to take 75 minutes, but buses can be badly delayed by road congestion. The post-Brexit local authority spending cuts from April 2019 could see the bus service further reduced.

If this approach were considered, and a consultation were positive, would it be possible to extend the Waterloo-Southampton stopping services to and from Lymington Pier? With ferry arrivals at the pier normally at 45-past, and departures on the hour, these stopping services seem perfectly timed for such a role. There would also be safe connections at Brockenhurst for Lymington/Isle of Wight passengers to/from Weymouth.

In the evening peak, the trains from Waterloo which divide at Southampton Central might be revised: front unit for Brockenhurst, Lymington Town and Lymington Pier, and rear unit for Totton, Ashurst, Brockenhurst and stations to Poole.

**3c.** **Totton**

Totton’s morning peak service will be greatly improved and there will be better connectivity with Portsmouth. In general, however, the proposed service level seems inadequate in both passenger and commercial terms. Totton will remain about the worst-served station in the South East, relative to both its own population and that of its wider catchment area.

From the first post-steam timetable in 1967, the town was served by an hourly Waterloo-Bournemouth stopping service, with a few additional peak services. The population of Totton was then about 16,000, but it has continued to grow ever since and has just passed 30,000, with the mean age of its residents close to the national average. The population is significantly larger than the combined populations of Wareham and Dorchester, and larger than that of any other intermediate town between Southampton and Weymouth except Bournemouth, Poole and Christchurch.

Totton station is also the railhead for at least another 30,000 people in Hythe and the Waterside parishes (the large and growing residential belt between Southampton Water and the New Forest). In total, therefore, the catchment area is comparable with the population of Andover or Salisbury.

From 1988, Totton’s basic service doubled, with the semi-fast Waterloo-Poole trains also calling. This was in line with General Manager Chris Green’s standard for Network South East of at least hourly services for villages, and at least twice-hourly services for towns. The original stopping service was replaced by Portsmouth Harbour-Wareham services in 1990, following electrification of the Southampton-Portsmouth route.

By 2003, Totton had an hourly semi-fast Waterloo-Poole service, an hourly stopping Waterloo-Wareham service, and an hourly local Romsey service.

In the five years from 2001-02, passenger entries and exits at Totton soared by almost 72 per cent, whilst the average growth at intermediate stations between Southampton and Weymouth was just 22 per cent.

Following Stagecoach’s severe service cuts in 2007, Totton was left with just an hourly Waterloo-Poole stopping train as its basic service, with long layover times at Eastleigh eastbound and at Southampton Central and Brockenhurst westbound. The direct off-peak journey time from Waterloo to Totton increased by 32 minutes. The time from Totton to Christchurch increased from 28 minutes to 59 minutes.

In the five years from 2006-07, entries and exits at Totton fell by 1 per cent, reflecting the service cuts, whilst at other intermediate stations between Southampton and Weymouth there was an average growth of 16 per cent.

However, the latent demand at Totton is still evident. From 2006-07 to 2015-16, entries and exits have increased by 10 per cent despite the poorer service, against a 17 per cent average for all the intermediate stations. The increasing demand appears to apply to the Totton area generally, with Redbridge and Ashurst, on either side of the town, recording significant percentage increases.

Even taking account of potential passenger traffic at Totton having been lost by timetable cuts, the town seems set to get a continuingly poor off-peak service from 2018. Pokesdown (2015-16 entries and exits of 318,958, which include supporters to/from Bournemouth football ground) will get twice-hourly services. Totton (2015-16 entries and exits of 311,406) will get hourly services. Branksome (2015-16 entries and exits of 282,650) and Parkstone (2015-16 entries and exits of 232,130) will get twice-hourly services.

In sum, Totton will have the same service frequency off-peak as fifty years ago, despite the town having doubled in population since then, and it will be left without hourly London trains for the first time since the steam era.

With serious road traffic pollution in Southampton, which is especially bad on the road to Totton (which provides access to Britain’s second-largest container port, an industrial estate and the M27), there would seem to be a strong environmental case for improved services to the west of Southampton. On the eastern side of the city, St Denys will see services doubled to 8 departures an hour for 318,044 passenger entries and exits, and 63,859 interchanges. Totton will get two departures an hour for its 311,406 entries and exits.

It appears that the only difficulty with stopping the London-Poole semi-fast trains at Totton is that the tight connection to Lymington would be lost. A Totton stop need cost only 2 minutes, because of the area’s track curves, so has little effect on end-to-end running times.

Totton rail users will welcome their hugely improved cross-Southampton services to local stations towards Portsmouth, but what about connectivity elsewhere?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Service** | **Current off-peak connection time at Southampton** | **Prospective off-peak connection time at Southampton** |
| To Brighton | 39 minutes | 40 minutes |
| From Brighton | 11 minutes | 41 minutes |
| To Cardiff | 17 minutes | 24 minutes |
| From Cardiff | 27 minutes | 57 minutes |
| To Eastleigh | Direct | 36 minutes |
| From Eastleigh | 18-minute layover | 23 minutes |
| To Gatwick/Victoria | 20 minutes | 27 minutes |
| From Victoria/Gatwick | 27 minutes | 57 minutes |
| To Manchester | About 23 minutes | About 29 minutes |
| From Manchester | About 49 minutes | About 19 minutes |

As the proposals stand, passengers travelling from London to Totton or Ashurst will have 6 minutes to make their connection at Southampton. There is currently a 6- minute connection between the 24-past arrival from London and the 30-past departure for Totton and Ashurst. This has been missed huge numbers of times under Stagecoach. Hopefully the new on-the-hour departure from Southampton will wait at least until 08-past when the train from London is late. [Incidentally, this could give a better connection for Weymouth out of trains from Cardiff and Victoria/Gatwick]

**Waterloo-Salisbury-Exeter**

**1.** In terms of connectivity, it seems preferable for Exeter trains to stop at Clapham Junction rather than Woking. Clapham Junction is the obvious route to Exeter from Brighton, Gatwick Airport and numerous other places in Sussex and Surrey. Woking-West of England passengers have good connections via Basingstoke. Passengers from Portsmouth travel to Exeter via GWR Cardiff trains to Salisbury, rather than via Woking. Guildford passengers to Exeter will probably choose to travel via Reading.

**2.** The summer Saturday service between Waterloo and Weymouth via Yeovil seems very worthwhile as it gives a direct seaside link with a number of towns which don’t have one.

**3.** Restoration of some through train portions between the South Coast and Exeter would be very welcome. Some journeys, such as Bournemouth-Plymouth require successive changes for passengers.

**Appendix**

**Estimated passenger entries and exits at intermediate rail stations between Southampton Central and Weymouth (ORR data)**

**5 years before the 2007 timetable change, 5 years after, and latest data**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Town stations (in order of population)** | Entries and exits 2001-02 | | Entries and exits 2006-07 | | **% increase**  **2001-02 to**  **2006-07** | | Entries and exits  2011-12 | | **% increase**  **2006-07**  **to**  **2011-12** | | Entries and exits  2015-16  (latest data) | | **% increase**  **2006-07 to**  **2015-16** | |
| Bournemouth | 2,020,414 | | 2,310,099 | | **14.3** | | 2,604,162 | | **12.7** | | 2,688,160 | | **16.4** | |
| Poole | 920,062 | | 1,069,639 | | **16.3** | | 1,250,636 | | **16.9** | | 1,174,922 | | **9.8** | |
| Christchurch | 322,370 | | 357,013 | | **10.7** | | 444,944 | | **24.6** | | 498,016 | | **39.5** | |
| Totton | 164,599 | | 282,542 | | **71.7** | | 278,638 | | **- 1.4** | | 311,406 | | **10.2** | |
| New Milton | 468,700 | | 560,406 | | **19.6** | | 624,628 | | **11.5** | | 619,686 | | **10.6** | |
| Dorchester South | 382,022 | | 415,067 | | **8.7** | | 533,616 | | **28.6** | | 481,015 | | **15.9** | |
| Wareham | 265,307 | | 295,262 | | **11.3** | | 354,028 | | **20.0** | | 335,818 | | **13.7** | |
|  | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Suburban stations** |  | |  | |  | |  | |  | |  | |  | |
| Branksome | 133,783 | | 189,961 | | **42.0** | | 230,688 | | **21.4** | | 282,650 | | **48.8** | |
| Hamworthy | 82,298 | | 114,505 | | **39.1** | | 160,206 | | **39.9** | | 163,854 | | **43.1** | |
| Millbrook | 10,288 | | 21,992 | | **113.8** | | 31,362 | | **42.6** | | 38,596 | | **75.5** | |
| Parkstone | 97,128 | | 139,383 | | **43.5** | | 189,928 | | **36.3** | | 232,130 | | **66.5** | |
| Pokesdown | 178,462 | | 267,815 | | **50.1** | | 312,344 | | **16.6** | | 318,958 | | **19.1** | |
| Redbridge | 14,378 | | 16,155 | | **12.4** | | 30,456 | | **88.5** | | 46,060 | | **185.1** | |
|  | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Village stations** |  | |  | |  | |  | |  | |  | |  | |
| Ashurst | 31,812 | | 71,275 | | **124.1** | | 103,642 | | **45.4** | | 129,164 | | **81.2** | |
| Brockenhurst | 857,429 | | 1,128,079 | | **31.6** | | 1,195,938 | | **6.0** | | 1,094,160 | | **- 3.0** | |
| Hinton Admiral | 92,690 | | 145,839 | | **57.3** | | 159,224 | | **9.2** | | 167,106 | | **14.6** | |
| Holton Heath | 9,493 | | 23,475 | | **147.3** | | 42,354 | | **80.4** | | 30,760 | | **31.1** | |
| Moreton | 35,822 | | 49,112 | | **37.1** | | 65,808 | | **34.0** | | 57,522 | | **17.1** | |
| Sway | 78,271 | | 88,056 | | **12.5** | | 107,474 | | **22.1** | | 111,560 | | **26.7** | |
| Upwey | 26,872 | | 33,744 | | **25.6** | | 49,500 | | **46.7** | | 44,042 | | **30.5** | |
| Wool | 133,106 | | 151,192 | | **13.6** | | 189,882 | | **25.6** | | 190,126 | | **25.8** | |
|  | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **‘Fair weather’ halt (walkers and cyclists)** |  | |  | |  | |  | |  | |  | |  | |
| Beaulieu Road | 8,393 | | 2,246 | | **- 73.2** | | 9,794 | | **336.1** | | 9,228 | | **310.9** | |
|  | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Overall** | 6,333,699 | | 7,732,857 | | **22.1** | | 8,969,252 | | **16.0** | | 9,024,939 | | **16.7** | |
| **Branch line** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Lymington Pier | | 101,697 | | 115,176 | | **13.3** | | 141,936 | | **23.2** | | 117,938 | | **2.4** |
| Lymington Town | | 140,895 | | 171,261 | | **21.6** | | 227,580 | | **32.9** | | 236,500 | | **38.1** |

**Supplementary comments to First/MTR on their draft SWR Monday-Friday timetable from December 2018**

Since we submitted comments on the proposed timetable, a number of points have been raised about services west of Bournemouth.

There are clearly concerns about the service from the smaller Dorset stations. This is probably not surprising. Before the second hourly service from Weymouth to Waterloo was introduced, the standard time from Upwey to London, for example, was about 2hrs 40. It then became about 3hrs, and will now become about 3hrs 10.

The illustrative off-peak pattern below attempts to take account of these points alongside our own. Only the proposed pattern west of Southampton is shown as amended.

**SUGGESTION 1**

Upwey, Moreton, Holton Heath and Hamworthy to be served by the London service. All these except Hamworthy to lose stops by the Portsmouth service. The Brockenhurst stop to be omitted, as Brockenhurst passengers would have only a short run on the Portsmouth service to connect into the London train at Southampton Central, and Brockenhurst is also served by the Poole-Waterloo train.

**GAINS:**

Weymouth-Waterloo still 7 minutes quicker than currently.

Smaller Dorset stations-Waterloo about 30 minutes quicker than proposed.

Bournemouth-Waterloo with only four intermediate stops.

**SUGGESTION 2**

Poole-Waterloo service to call at Totton. Totton is the fourth largest intermediate town (by population) between Weymouth and Southampton. When SWT extended the service to Weymouth they axed the existing stop. DfT were so concerned about the complaints which resulted that they called a meeting with SWT and two members of our Group. The only reason that SWT could give for the downgrade was that the extra stop would mean the down train getting to Weymouth at 02, which would conflict with the 03 departure for Waterloo (trains arrive/depart at Weymouth station via a short single track section).

**GAINS:**

More commercially attractive service for 30,000 people in Totton, and for a further 30,000 in Hythe and the Waterside for whom Totton is the nearest railhead.

Maintains reasonable connections at Southampton between Totton and Eastleigh / Cardiff / Gatwick Airport via Chichester.

Additional point

We hope that services from Waterloo to Totton will not stop earlier on Saturday night/Sunday morning than on other nights. We would also be concerned about any reduction of Sunday morning services, which would restrict the opportunities for longer-distance leisure travel.

**SUGGESTION 3**

Brockenhurst-Lymington shuttle to be replaced by extension of Waterloo-Southampton Central stopping service to Lymington Pier. This would give connectivity with the Yarmouth ferry, and with the stopping services to/from Weymouth at Brockenhurst. It is suggested that these trains call at Ashurst to maintain the current Ashurst-Eastleigh service and connections with Cardiff/Gatwick Airport at Southampton Central. The branch service is quite lightly used and is probably not commercially attractive. Despite the heavier summer traffic, the estimated passenger entries and exits at the Lymington stations suggest that average ridership on the branch is about 16 passengers per train.

**GAINS:**

Many journey possibilities for Lymington and West Wight passengers without the need to change at Brockenhurst (Lymington-Southampton in under 30 minutes)

Attractions of Lymington could be promoted in towns with direct service, to encourage ridership.

Maintains Ashurst-Eastleigh direct service and connections between Ashurst and Cardiff / Gatwick Airport via Chichester.

[Illustrative table is below]

Table 158: Proposed westbound service with tweaking between Southampton Central and Weymouth.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | M | L | P |  |  |  | F |
| London Waterloo | 12 |  | 33 |  | 42 |  |  |  |
| Clapham Junction | 19 |  | 40 |  |  |  |  |  |
| Woking |  |  | 00 |  | 07 |  |  |  |
| Farnborough |  |  | 10 |  |  |  |  |  |
| Fleet |  |  | 16 |  |  |  | < |  |
| Basingstoke | 55 | 08 | 30 |  |  |  | 30 |  |
| Winchester | 11 | 24 | > |  | 38 |  | 46 |  |
| Shawford |  |  |  |  |  |  | 51 |  |
| Eastleigh arr |  |  |  |  |  |  | 56 |  |
| Eastleigh dep |  |  |  |  |  |  | 58 |  |
| Southampton Airport | 20 | 33 |  |  | 47 |  | 02 |  |
| St Denys |  |  |  | 47 |  | < | 06 |  |
| Southampton Central arr | 27 | 41 |  | 52 | 54 | 52 | 12 |  |
| Southampton Central dep | 29 | 43 |  | > | 56 | 00 | 18 |  |
| Totton | 34 |  |  |  |  | 05 |  |  |
| Ashurst |  |  |  |  |  | 10 | 26 |  |
| Beaulieu Road |  |  |  |  |  | 14 |  |  |
| Brockenhurst | 45 | 57 |  |  |  | 21 | 34 |  |
| Lymington Town |  |  |  |  |  |  | 42 |  |
| Lymington Pier |  |  |  |  |  |  | 44 | 00 |
| Yarmouth IOW |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 40 |
| Sway |  |  |  |  |  | 26 |  |  |
| New Milton | 52 |  |  |  |  | 31 |  |  |
| Hinton Admiral |  |  |  |  |  | 35 |  |  |
| Christchurch | 59 |  |  |  |  | 40 |  |  |
| Pokesdown | 02 |  |  |  |  | 43 |  |  |
| Bournemouth arr | 06 | 12 |  |  | 22 | 47 |  |  |
| Bournemouth dep | 08 |  |  |  | 27 | 49 |  |  |
| Branksome | 13 |  |  |  |  | 54 |  |  |
| Parkstone | 16 |  |  |  |  | 57 |  |  |
| Poole | 21 |  |  |  | 36 | 01 |  |  |
| Hamworthy |  |  |  |  | 41 | 06 |  |  |
| Holton Heath |  |  |  |  | 46 |  |  |  |
| Wareham |  |  |  |  | 50 | 12 |  |  |
| Wool |  |  |  |  | 57 | 20 |  |  |
| Moreton |  |  |  |  | 03 |  |  |  |
| Dorchester South |  |  |  |  | 10 | 31 |  |  |
| Upwey |  |  |  |  | 16 |  |  |  |
| Weymouth |  |  |  |  | 20 | 39 |  |  |

M: From Manchester.

L: To Lymington Pier.

P: From Portsmouth to Weymouth.

F: Wightlink Ferry.

Table 158: Proposed eastbound service with tweaking between Weymouth and Southampton Central.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | M | F | W |  |  | P |  |
| Weymouth |  |  |  |  |  | 06 | 32 |
| Upwey |  |  |  |  |  |  | 36 |
| Dorchester South |  |  |  |  |  | 16 | 44 |
| Moreton |  |  |  |  |  |  | 50 |
| Wool |  |  |  |  |  | 26 | 56 |
| Wareham |  |  |  |  |  | 33 | 03 |
| Holton Heath |  |  |  |  |  |  | 06 |
| Hamworthy |  |  |  |  |  | 40 | 11 |
| Poole |  |  |  | 34 |  | 45 | 16 |
| Parkstone |  |  |  | 38 |  | 49 |  |
| Branksome |  |  |  | 41 |  | 53 |  |
| Bournemouth arr |  |  |  | 46 |  | 57 | 25 |
| Bournemouth dep | 43 |  |  | 48 |  | 59 | 30 |
| Pokesdown |  |  |  | 52 |  | 03 |  |
| Christchurch |  |  |  | 56 |  | 07 |  |
| Hinton Admiral |  |  |  |  |  | 12 |  |
| New Milton |  |  |  | 03 |  | 16 |  |
| Sway |  |  |  |  |  | 21 |  |
| Yarmouth IOW |  | 05 |  |  |  |  |  |
| Lymington Pier |  | 45 | 54 |  |  |  |  |
| Lymington Town |  |  | 56 |  |  |  |  |
| Brockenhurst | 58 |  | 04 | 11 |  | 26 |  |
| Beaulieu Road |  |  |  |  |  | 32 |  |
| Ashurst |  |  | 12 |  |  | 36 |  |
| Totton |  |  |  | 21 |  | 41 |  |
| Southampton Central arr | 11 |  | 20 | 26 |  | 46 | 56 |
| Southampton Central dep | 15 |  | 22 | 28 |  | 48 | 58 |
| St Denys |  |  | 27 |  |  | 54 |  |
| Southampton Airport | 21 |  | 32 | 36 |  |  | 06 |
| Eastleigh arr |  |  | 35 |  | < |  |  |
| Eastleigh dep |  |  | > |  | 42 |  |  |
| Shawford |  |  |  |  | 48 |  |  |
| Winchester | 30 |  |  | 46 | 54 |  | 15 |
| Basingstoke | 48 |  |  | 04 | 11 |  |  |
| Fleet |  |  |  |  | 22 |  |  |
| Farnborough |  |  |  |  | 28 |  |  |
| Woking |  |  |  |  | 37 |  | 46 |
| Clapham Junction |  |  |  | 38 | 57 |  |  |
| London Waterloo |  |  |  | 47 | 05 |  | 11 |

M: To Manchester;

F: Wightlink Ferry.

W: To London Waterloo.

P: To Portsmouth.

**(Consultation closed on 22.12.2017)**

**Comments to Department for Transport on their GWR consultation**

Dft proposes to extend the GWR franchise to 2020 and, subject to a satisfactory agreement with First Group, to 2022. They have been consulting on a number of issues and our comments are summarised below.

[We have not reproduced the DfT’s extensive pro-forma for comments, but please note that the following responses are generally restricted to the points on which comments were requested]

**Priorities for the objectives of the franchise which might be added or changed**

Response:

### Affordability of fares – this is not necessarily the same as value for money. Note the large numbers of empty first class seats running around the country. More consistent promotion of journey opportunities. For example, SWR produces timetables for Waterloo-Exeter with Southampton and Portsmouth connections; GWR produces timetables for Paddington/Bristol and the West Country. Bournemouth/ Portsmouth/Southampton - Torbay/Plymouth/Cornwall journeys generally involve a string of changes and no timetables are produced - the NR journey planner offers options via Reading (hugely circuitous and expensive); via Salisbury and Exeter (unreliable connections at Salisbury); via Westbury (usually the best option in terms of speed and train quality, but very infrequent service); and via Bristol (rather circuitous).

### **Geographic boundaries of the franchise**

### From DfT pro-forma:

### ‘Brighton. The current Great Western franchise operates a small number of through services from Brighton to Southampton, Salisbury, Bristol and beyond. While these services provide useful direct links to and from the south coast, they are infrequent and contribute to an irregular service pattern between Brighton, Chichester and Southampton. Transferring the Brighton-Southampton part of these services into the successor to the current Thameslink, Southern & Great Northern (TSGN) franchise, could allow a more consistent and regular service pattern to be operated on this route. Electric trains could replace diesels between Southampton and Brighton, providing more seats than the Great Western franchise provides today and releasing diesel trains to provide more space for passengers on other core routes within the Great Western franchise. If GWR services to/from Brighton were to be withdrawn, we would require the TSGN franchise to maintain sufficient capacity between Brighton, Portsmouth and Southampton. Different arguments might apply on weekdays, when these services provide a commuter service to/from Brighton, and where services beyond Southampton may be less important; and at weekends, when these services may more important for leisure passengers travelling longer distances who wish to avoid changing trains.’

### Response

This seems reasonable. Brighton passengers for South Wales and the West are likely to travel via Clapham Junction (for SWR Exeter trains) or Paddington. Passengers from West Sussex have good connections at Southampton Central between GTR Victoria-Southampton and GWR Cardiff trains.

Perhaps consideration could be given to any residual service west of Southampton being diverted to the West of England via Westbury. The Wessex franchise used to operate a very popular weekday return journey from Penzance to Portsmouth Harbour (operated as a through portion of a Cardiff-Portsmouth service between Westbury and Portsmouth). A First Great Western manager stated at a stakeholder meeting that it was withdrawn only to make way for an improved Penzance-Paddington service (at a time when part of the Cornish mainline was singled track).   
  
There also used to be a few direct SWT services between the South Coast and the West via Salisbury and Exeter. These were also well used. They might be re-introduced as through portions (detached/attached at Salisbury) of Waterloo-Exeter line trains.

### There are also aspirations for direct services between Bournemouth and the West. The First Great Western franchise included running rights between Southampton Central and Poole for this purpose. This was reportedly an industry aspiration, so commercial opportunities were presumably identified.

### **Other locations or routes which should be considered for inclusion in the franchise**

### Response

### There are aspirations for the Romsey-Salisbury and Trans-Wilts routes to be amalgamated, with an hourly service throughout, especially with a view to giving areas of Wiltshire a direct link with Southampton Airport. In that event, the Eastleigh-Romsey service would probably be served only by these trains. Though they could be run by SWR or GWR, it is likely that they would need to be diesel-operated for the foreseeable future, so could most conveniently be operated by rolling stock based at Westbury.

### If such a service could also provide roughly half-hourly services (along with Portsmouth-Cardiff trains) between Southampton and Westbury, it might improve connections at Westbury between the South Coast and West of England.

### Also, there is currently an odd anomaly that Dean and Mottisfont & Dunbridge stations are managed by GWR and served only by SWR trains. **Collaboration with Network Rail**

### Response

### There needs to be more focus on passengers when there is disruption. Too often ‘recovering the service’ means terminating trains en route, missing stops, and running trains empty so that later services run on time. This is should be minimised as it is very disruptive for passengers, especially wheelchair users.

### Demand varies not only between days of the week but also when major events are taking place. Too often inconvenience and severe overcrowding occur because engineering work coincides with such events. Many events occur at weekends when there are no peak services, so there should be a simple mechanism for introducing relief services where practicable.

### With the advent of bi-mode trains, there should still be operational flexibility to maximise diversions and minimise bus replacement services.

### **Future priorities for strengthened partnership working between the franchise operator and Network Rail**

### Response

Learn from past successes and failures. We know, for example, that the Reading station rebuild ran much more smoothly than that at London Bridge. Was that through planning, management, or leeway for unforeseen circumstances?   
  
It is also clear that some companies are unwilling to commit themselves to joined-up working. The following appeared on South West Trains’ Passengers Panel website in 2013, written in the style of the Panel’s then Chairman Sir Alan Greengross, a Stagecoach non-executive director: "The danger is the temptation by the different parties involved in running the system to, if not pass, then at least share the blame between all the others. SW Trains, Network Rail and Government can all individually suggest they’d love to help solve an issue but unfortunately it’s impossible without the other two changing how they work, which anyway would not be doable under the current franchise agreement." So ended the SWT/NR ‘Deep Alliance’.

**Routes which could benefit from improvements to train frequencies**

Response

Cardiff-Portsmouth: The route has a high concentration of regional centres, including university cities and major tourist destinations (Portsmouth-Fareham-Southampton-Romsey-Salisbury-Trowbridge-Bath-Bristol-Newport-Cardiff). There are also military families travelling from Portsmouth, Salisbury and Warminster.  
  
Earlier/later trains

The first/last Mondays-Saturdays services between Portsmouth and Cardiff are probably about right, but the last service from Portsmouth is at 21.23, terminates at Westbury and does not run at weekends. On Sundays, there is a later train from Portsmouth at 22.05, but this also terminates at Westbury. Extension of the 21.23 at least as far as Bristol, and additional operation on Saturdays and Sundays, would improve connectivity. In the opposite direction, the final service from Cardiff leaves Bristol for Portsmouth between 21.22 and 21.25 seven days a week.

The suggested additions have little effect on the overall operating hours of the route (other trains operate at those times).

Sundays

The first three trains from Portsmouth to Cardiff are at 09.08, 11.08, and 13.08. The 09.08 reaches Cardiff at 12.41 (engineering works permitting), which is rather late for day tripping. In the opposite direction, the first train from Cardiff to Portsmouth is at 08.10.

The gaps in service also mean that Portsmouth and Southampton lose potential SWR connections from Salisbury to Exeter. The position from Southampton Central is peculiarly perverse. The 10.10 and 12.10 SWR local trains run fast from Romsey to Salisbury, and duplicate the 09.08 and 11.08 from Portsmouth in providing connections for Exeter, while the 09.10 and 11.10 stop additionally at Mottisfont & Dunbridge and Dean and narrowly miss connecting with Exeter trains, leaving two-hour Southampton-Exeter service gaps. Surely the Mottisfont and Dean stops could be rearranged, possibly with trains stopping at only one in each hour?

This is a strategic route with many connectional possibilities, including for long-distance passengers.

Sunday engineering works will no doubt persist, but this is no reason not to improve the service during normal operation.

Capacity

High demand leads to overcrowding, which in turns increases station dwell times and affects punctuality. The importance and length of the route merit greater capacity and better-quality rolling stock. All that seems to be in prospect is cascaded Thames Valley units. These may increase capacity, but suffer from unsuitable 2+3 aside seating.

**Reducing journey times to destinations in the South West by reducing stops at intermediate stations**

Response

West of England inter-city services are slower than many comparable services elsewhere. However, changes need to be made sensitively. From this January, GWR introduced an earlier morning service from Paddington to Penzance, better providing for business day trips.  
  
Fine, but other passengers are considerably disadvantaged. Following timetable changes in recent years, those from the South Coast have been able to use the 06.00 Portsmouth Harbour-Cardiff on Mondays to Fridays to reach Westbury in time for the first service to the West. This was a huge improvement, as it made business or leisure day trips to anywhere in Devon and Cornwall feasible, allowing about four hours even in Penzance – long enough for a business meeting or a meal and leisurely afternoon. Presumably Great Western has an eye on the leisure market, since its ‘Freedom of the South West’ Rover tickets are valid on the service from Westbury through a relaxation in the normal time threshold.

Originally, the train from Westbury (08.26) ran to Paignton, with a 5-minute connection at Newton Abbot for Penzance (arrive 12.43). This arrangement was modified, with the 08.26 then running direct to Penzance (arrive 12.37).

From the January timetable change, the 08.27 from Westbury has reverted to serving Paignton. However, at Newton Abbot it misses a train from Exeter to Penzance (arrive 12.34) by just 7 minutes. If passengers travel instead by SWR from Salisbury to Exeter, they will miss the same Penzance train by 9 minutes.

The remaining option is the historic Great Way Round. If passengers on the 06.00 from Portsmouth stay on the train to Bath, they can connect into a train which will get them to Penzance at 13.13. For such long-distance day journeys, 36 minutes less time at a passenger’s destination is quite significant.

This is a further illustration of the problems of travelling from the South Coast to the West of England. Perhaps if there were a dedicated timetable for such journeys, as already suggested, the problems could be reduced. This example is particularly unfortunate as, on a number of trips from Westbury to the far West on the 08.26, it has been evident that the train loads very lightly east of Tiverton Parkway (passengers in most coaches in single figures, except when stopping at Castle Cary instead of Tiverton Parkway after the Glastonbury festival).

### **Locations or routes on the Great Western network where it could be appropriate to reduce station stops in order to speed up longer-distance journeys**

### Response

### If Trans Wilts services could run hourly, and amalgamate with SWR’s Romsey-Southampton-Salisbury service, Dilton Marsh stops by Portsmouth-Cardiff trains might be transferred. Stopping a major regional service at a minuscule platform on an ‘on demand’ basis seems a little anachronistic.

### **Other stations between which direct services should be provided**

Response

Since the economies of Bristol and South Wales reportedly have strong links, there would seem to be a case for extending Portsmouth-Cardiff trains at least as far as Swansea.

Direct services between Heathrow and Southampton/Bournemouth/Portsmouth are a longstanding aspiration. For this purpose, the route between Basingstoke and Reading West needs to be electrified at the same time as the western curve from the GWR main line to Heathrow is built.

There are now other options being considered for a SWR Heathrow link from Weybridge, but there might still be a case for services via Basingstoke and Reading, perhaps incorporating the Basingstoke-Reading local services.

### **Locations at which connections between different services should be improved**

Response

Connections between Portsmouth and Exeter trains at Salisbury are very unreliable, yet this is the most frequent service between Bournemouth/Portsmouth /Southampton and the West.

Ideally some direct workings are desirable.

In order to improve journeys (faster times / fewer changes) between the South Coast and the West of England: the following options are suggested:

(1) SWR Waterloo-Exeter trains to run to popular destinations beyond Exeter.

(2) More and better connections at Westbury between Portsmouth/Southampton and Paddington-West of England services.

(3) More and better connections at Castle Cary between Weymouth and Paddington-West of England services. An alternative would be Weymouth-Yeovil Junction services connecting with SWR Exeter trains.

Note the heavy road traffic on the A35 trunk route. London and Bristol are well connected with the South West by rail. The South Coast towns and cities are not.

**Seasonal train services which it is particularly important to retain or improve in the next franchise**

Response

### Any long-distance services to or from the West of England holiday areas. Rail journey times between the far West and Birmingham or London are very similar, so expecting passengers from the Midlands and northwards to travel to the West via London is unreasonable. Far West is probably Britain’s major summer holiday area. So there are economic reasons for direct services as well as passenger convenience.

### **Other desirable service improvements**

### Response

### Existing service on the Weymouth-Bristol route is very sparse. Weymouth has expanded in recent decades and Pen Mill is the only station actually in Yeovil. The Junction station is more suitable as a Parkway. Frome is the largest town between Newbury and Taunton.

**Main priorities in relation to rolling stock**

Response

The basic requirement is that passengers should get a comfortable seat. Other enhancements are obviously desirable, but little consolation for someone who is standing or suffering constricted 2+3 aside seating on long-distance journeys.

On 28.12.2017, it was disappointing to see a brand-new bi-mode departing Bath for Paddington, on an afternoon service, with large numbers of standing passengers jostling for space.

Many trains have few tables, but tables are invaluable for using computers, or playing games with children / encouraging children to draw.

**Routes which do not currently have First Class accommodation where it should be provided**

### Response

### No. Routes such as Cardiff-Portsmouth see heavy passenger loadings all day, but business traffic is usually confined to peak times. Only services with long non-stop runs really provide quiet work areas. On other services there are continual announcements so first class (or quiet areas in standard class) does not provide a quiet working environment.

### **Benefits or disadvantages which innovative technologies for rolling stock, e.g. hydrogen or battery power, could bring**

### Response

### Need to know the capability or reliability of this technology. With the current mixture of electrified and non-electrified routes, bi-mode trains or any type of sufficiently-performing traction which does not rely on polluting diesel can help promote the green agenda. Presumably battery stock would be better suited to short branch lines.

### **Improvements which could help to make rail services easier to access and use for all passengers**

### Response

For wheelchair users, a system of texting / phoning to a call centre so that there is no breakdown of communication when there is disruption, and passenger can always check that arrangements are in hand.

**Priorities for stations in the new franchise**

Response

Smaller stations have a real advantage in not having ticket barriers. So any facilities such as cafes and other retail outlets are accessible to the public generally (and are therefore likely to be financially more viable). An opposite inconvenience was created at Exeter St David’s, where the main buffet became accessible only from outside the ticket barriers.

There is also an issue that some of the ‘disused station buildings’ which could be used for community purposes may be accessible only through ticket barriers.

**Stations at which co-ordination between transport modes be improved**

Response

Bus services outside urban areas are generally in decline. Co-ordination with rail is very patchy. For example, buses don’t go near the station at Romsey. [A few miles away, at the rather larger town of Totton (served by SWR), a continual flow of buses passes the station but very few trains stop].

Given the number of small towns now without rail services in the GWR area, there would seem to be substantial scope for dedicated bus connections.

Restoration of rail services can provide new opportunities. For example, Bude is about an hour by bus from Okehampton, but two hours from Exeter.

### Dedicated connecting bus services might benefit from higher quality vehicles (as rail travel is generally increasing but bus travel decreasing, suggesting that rail is the more popular mode). We have seen the bus environment applied to railways (Pacer trains) but not the rail environment applied to buses, though Reading Buses are experimenting with things like tables and books.

### **Integrated rail/bus fares**

Response

Not sure whether the current Plusbus system is popular. Have never overheard anyone booking such a ticket. Where bus travelcards are available in major tourist areas, there might be scope for rail tickets with bus travelcard validity (mirroring London). Cardiff Bus return fares act as one-day travelcards, Torbay comes to mind, but not sure of the bus fares structure there.

**Changes to fares structure**

Response

Great Western fares away from the London area are some of the most reasonable, and there is a good ranger of Rover and Ranger tickets. It would be a great pity if these were not retained.

In general terms, fares need to be affordable. Innovative ticketing can be fine, but people also want a straightforward and comprehensible fares structure. Getting the best fare can be something of a lottery. Those who pay more than they need may be put off future travel by rail, so this becomes counter-productive. A universal railcard for off-peak travel is long overdue.

A small issue, but it is rather discriminatory that senior citizens without a passport or driving licence are prevented from booking Senior Railcards on-line, and are therefore restricted to purchasing one-year cards, so pay more over time.

**Helping the Community Rail sector increase its contribution to society and the railway**

Response

GWR has a good record in working with community rail groups (for example, Bristol area, TransWilts line, and West of England branch lines).

There are also community enhancements at stations, such as Bradford-on-Avon, on non-community rail routes.

Could the adoption of smaller stations on non-community routes be expanded?

**The end in sight for Stagecoach Rail?**

There is increasing focus on Stagecoach’s modus operandi of grabbing franchises by overbidding, and then failing to deliver. The East Coast route was doing well in the public sector until it was franchised to Stagecoach (90% interest) trading as Virgin East Coast.

Stagecoach then restricted affordable fares with the inevitable loss of revenue. In November the Transport Secretary announced the termination of the franchise in 2020, three years ahead of schedule, following the losses. This is reportedly equivalent to a £3.3bn bailout by taxpayers.

Former Transport Secretary Lord Adonis was furious that Stagecoach was being allowed to walk away from the franchise while a listed bidder for three other franchises. The peer told the Evening Standard (see edition of 6.12.2017): “We are in the early throes of a really serious business crisis. The government has bailed out Stagecoach and undermined the rail franchise system. Stagecoach shareholders need to be very careful. I would expect the government’s auditors to take a keen interest in the nature of the bailout and any other contracts the government is minded to enter into with Stagecoach in the future.” Stagecoach shares shot up when the bailout was announced.

Shadow Transport Secretary, Andy McDonald, said a Labour government would go as far as banning Stagecoach from running rail services in the UK. “The idea that Stagecoach may again bid for rail contracts following the company’s failure on the East Coast line shows that the rail franchising system is truly broken beyond repair. Labour would ban Stagecoach from running passenger rail operations in the United Kingdom”. [Source: The Herald, 6.12.2017]

By Christmas, over 10,000 people had signed a petition against bailing out Stagecoach.

In February 2018 the Transport Secretary announced that the franchise would end within a few months because it was in an even more dire financial situation than had previously been thought. Stagecoach might then run it temporarily on a ‘non-profit’ basis (clearly incompatible with Stagecoach ‘ethics’) or it might revert to public ownership.

That would leave Stagecoach with just the East Midlands franchise and a 49% interest in Virgin West Coast.

**Rail safety failures repeat themselves**

Britain’s railways have enjoyed an enviable safety record in recent years, but it’s rather alarming that serious mistakes are recurring.

On 29.12.2016 there was an incident near Cardiff Central station in circumstances which the Rail Accident Investigation Branch sees as reflecting those which caused the Clapham Junction Disaster of 1988.

On 6.11.2017, there was a derailment near Wimbledon station through failures in track checks which resulted in a section of track being out of gauge – the cause of the derailment of a charter train in Southampton on 5.11.2016.

**Rail Accident Investigation Branch warns that the Clapham Junction Disaster of 1988 could be repeated**

Extract from the RAIB’s website:

Over the Christmas and New Year period from 24 December 2016 to 2 January 2017, Network Rail carried out extensive resignalling and track remodelling work in and around Cardiff Central station. This was the final stage of the Cardiff area signalling renewal scheme, a project which has been in progress for several years. This stage involved the closure of the power signal box at Cardiff, with control of the signalling in the area moving to the Wales Railway Operating Centre (WROC), and changes to the track layout and signalling on the east side of Cardiff Central station.

Some of the new layout was brought into use on 29 December. At 08:37 hrs on that day, the driver of a train from Cardiff Central to Treherbert, which had just left platform 7, noticed that points in the route his train was about to take were not set in the correct position, and stopped the train just before reaching them.

The points at which the train stopped were redundant in the new layout, and should have been secured in readiness for their complete removal at a later date. The project works required eight sets of points in two separate locations to be secured. In the event only six of the eight points were secured, and the line was re-opened to traffic without the omission having been identified by the testing team through the normal checking processes which should take place as part of this type of work. The two sets of points which were missed were left in a condition in which they were unsecured and not detected by the signalling system, and the points at which the train stopped were set for the diverging route. If the driver had not noticed the position of these points and stopped, the train would have been diverted on to a line which was open to traffic, on which trains can run in either direction, and on which another train passed over about three minutes after the train involved in the incident came to a stop. The new signalling system uses axle counters for train detection, and in this situation the system would not have immediately identified that the train was in the wrong place.

The points had been left in this unsafe condition because they had not been identified as requiring securing by the team securing points during the works. Furthermore, no one had checked that all the points that needed to be secured during the works over the Christmas period had been. Route proving trains, a performance and reliability tool used to ensure the system was working correctly before running passenger services, had been cancelled.

The investigation also found that a work group culture had developed between long standing members of the project team that led to insular thinking about methods of work and operational risk. This meant that team members relied on verbal communications and assurances. An underlying factor was insufficiently thorough project governance and a possible underlying factor was ineffective fatigue management.

In this case, no-one was injured and no damage was caused by the event, and Network Rail acted quickly to secure both sets of points.

**Recommendations**

RAIB has identified four learning points and made three recommendations. The learning points relate to the need for testers in charge to be able to confirm that all redundant wiring and equipment has been checked; the need for each intermediate state in which the railway is to operate before completion of the scheme to have an up to date and correct signalling scheme plan reflecting the true state of the layout; the need to mitigate the effect of cancelling route proving trains at the end of commissioning works; and the need to carefully consider the value and purpose of team briefings relating to large scale works to avoid people being overloaded with superfluous information.

Three recommendations have been made, all directed to Network Rail. The first relates to the need for good project governance to ensure a project complies with guidance, procedures and processes to enable the railway to be handed back after works are completed in a safe state in order to resume operational service. The second is concerned with document management systems, and the third recommendation deals with fatigue management for people working on projects and commissioning, recognising that fatigue in the workplace needs to be managed and mitigated, not just the risk of workers suffering fatigue while travelling to and from their place of work.

**Simon French, Chief Inspector of Rail Accidents said:**

This alarming incident, in which a train came close to travelling down a track that would have put it on an unprotected collision course with other trains, serves as a timely reminder of how easily things can go wrong when railway infrastructure is being upgraded and renewed.

It happened very close to the end of a huge engineering project, to renew the track, signals and train control systems over a large area of south Wales. Thousands of people worked hard on that project, many of them over the Christmas and New Year period at the end of 2016, and they delivered the renewed railway on time – a great achievement. But over the years that the project had been in progress, some bad habits had crept in. Well-meaning people were taking each other’s word that things had been done, instead of insisting on seeing the proof. The end result, in this case, was that no-one checked that redundant points, due to be removed altogether in a few days or weeks, had been locked in the correct position. Good project governance includes making sure that the right procedures are in place and that people follow them, at all levels, all the time. We have concluded that the project governance arrangements, and the processes that should provide Network Rail with assurance that these are being followed, need a thorough review in the light of what happened at Cardiff.

It is also important, when organising intensive periods of commissioning work, to properly manage the working hours of the people doing the job. Back in 1988, the disastrous collision at Clapham Junction happened in part because working for weeks on end without any days off was part of the culture in some areas of the railway. Rightly, things have changed a lot since then. However, the events at Cardiff showed how easy it is to forget the lessons of Clapham and slip back into those habits under the time pressures of a big commissioning.

RAIB is now investigating the collision at Waterloo on 15 August this year, which also took place during the commissioning stage of a large and high-profile project involving track and signalling changes. We will again be looking closely at how such projects are managed, and whether the lessons learned from the tragedies of the past are still being applied effectively on today’s railway.”

**Derailment of a passenger train near Wimbledon on 6.11.2017**

Extract from RAIB’s ‘Safety digest 01/2018’:

**Important safety messages**

This accident demonstrates the importance of:

* ensuring that the precise boundaries of maintenance responsibility, such as those between neighbouring infrastructure owners, are correctly documented and understood by staff and managers
* providing clear signage to mark maintenance boundaries so that inspection and maintenance staff from either side are sure they are working to the same boundary

**Summary of the accident**

At around 06:08 hrs all wheels under the last carriage of the 04.54 hrs Basingstoke to London Waterloo train service derailed shortly after leaving Wimbledon station. The train, operated by South Western Railway, had travelled 348 metres after leaving the station and reached 19 mph (30 km/h) when the derailment occurred. The train continued in this derailed state for a further 185 metres causing significant damage to the track.

Although one set of doors in the rear carriage was opened by passengers using an emergency door release handle, all the passengers remained on board the train. Those in the rear carriage were moved forwards into other carriages until they were evacuated by the emergency services. The evacuation required around 300 passengers, including four with minor injuries, to walk a short distance along the track and use a specially constructed platform to bridge line side cabling. The evacuation was completed by 08:15 hrs.

Most Basingstoke to London services use the direct main line route. However some trains, such as this service, are timetabled to travel between Wimbledon and London Waterloo via Wimbledon Park. This route includes part of the District line which is owned and maintained by London Underground (LU). The derailment occurred on a short section of track that provides the link between the main line, which is owned and maintained by Network Rail, and the District Line.

**Cause of the accident**

As the train traversed the link line, the left-hand wheels of the rear carriage dropped off the rail head and fell into the space between the two rails. This happened because the distance between the rails, known as the track gauge, was greater than the distance needed to restrain the wheelset. As the train continued, the right-hand wheels of the rear carriage were forced over the right-hand rail and dropped onto the ground. The rear carriage was dragged in this derailed condition through the District line junction. As the derailed wheels of the rear carriage passed through the junction, the front bogie remained in-line with the front of the train. The rear bogie followed the adjacent track causing the rear carriage to straddle both tracks and block the District line.

The distance between the rails was greater than the permitted maximum. The condition of the track suggested that it was poorly installed and that it had deteriorated over a period of many years including an increasing distance between the rails (gauge spread). This gradual deterioration of the track should be identified by track inspection and, if necessary, corrected by maintenance. Examination of the track following the derailment found that the track gauge was in excess of 1485 mm. The normal gauge for standard gauge track is 1435 mm, but it is acceptable for this to increase to 1460 mm before corrective work is required.

Both LU and Network Rail track is inspected by regular patrols that are conducted by staff looking for various faults including gauge spread. Where such faults are identified, they are reported so that corrective maintenance can be scheduled to take place. These patrols are specified in diagrams that show the route to be patrolled and, at locations where two infrastructure owners meet, the limit of each infrastructure owner’s maintenance responsibility. In addition to the patrol diagrams, it is common practice to identify the boundary by signage on, or adjacent to, the track.

London Underground has stated that the track maintenance boundary was set in 1994 as part of a demarcation agreement between LU and Railtrack, the mainline infrastructure owner before Network Rail. However, the track patrol diagrams provided to the LU and the Network Rail patrollers were found to stop short on both sides of this agreed boundary, leaving a gap between them.

The LU diagrams state that patrollers are required to inspect the crossover and diamond associated with 736 points. Those responsible for the LU patrol inspections also referred to an internal document titled ‘Inter Infraco Track Boundaries’ dated 5 May 2009. This document defined the boundary as ‘up to and including fishplates on NR [Network Rail] side of crossover leading from 736 points’. These limits approximately align with an LU maintenance boundary sign installed alongside an adjacent track which the LU patrollers stated they had been using as the patrol limit. This was around 50 metres short of the boundary agreed in 1994. The derailment occurred on LU infrastructure around halfway between this sign and the 1994 agreed boundary.

The diagrams provided to the Network Rail patrollers state the limit of inspections are at 8 miles 38.5 chains from London Waterloo via East Putney. This is approximately 40 metres along the link line and about 70 metres before the agreed boundary. The manager responsible for the Network Rail patrollers stated that a post near this location was used as the boundary marker. Historic photographs indicate that no sign indicating this, or any other information, had been attached to the post for many years.

Patrollers from LU and Network Rail are expected to look over at the track immediately beyond the boundary of the infrastructure for which they are responsible, and report faults found to the adjacent infrastructure owner. Patrollers cannot cross over the boundary at Wimbledon due to the differing personal track safety certifications required by each organisation. Whilst patrollers may have been checking the area immediately beyond their boundary, the gap of 120 metres between patrolled areas meant that there was a significant stretch of track that was missed from inspections.

Neither LU nor Network Rail have been able to provide reasons why the boundary was different in the patrol diagrams and why these did not match the location agreed between the two organisations in 1994. The consequence of this oversight was that the track was not being inspected or maintained for many years and so degraded into an unsafe condition.

**In brief**

\* No news of Alliance Rail’s proposal to run additional services between Southampton Central and Waterloo.

\* There will be no train services between Wareham and Swanage until September. The Swanage Railway’s diesel unit is still undergoing modifications and the cost of hiring diesel locomotives (as happened last year) is prohibitive.

**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. It is produced in good faith, based on reports and information from many individuals and sources including 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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