**Hogrider 159 (Mid-September 2018 - January 2019)**

**South Hampshire Rail Users’ Group Newsletter**

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**Rail Review looks like delaying tactic**

A Rail Review chaired by Keith Williams, former Chairman and Chief Executive of British Airways, has been established ‘to recommend the most appropriate organisational and commercial frameworks to support the delivery of the government’s vision for the railway’. The review’s findings and recommendations are due to be published in a government white paper in autumn 2019, with reform of the sector to begin in 2020.

Unfortunately, most of the terms of reference look like a cut-and-paste of historic material, with some later dates substituted:

* commercial models for the provision of rail services that prioritise the interests of passengers and taxpayers
* rail industry structures that promote clear accountability and effective joint-working for both passengers and the freight sector
* a system that is financially sustainable and able to address long-term cost pressures
* a railway that is able to offer good value fares for passengers, while keeping costs down for taxpayers
* improved industrial relations, to reduce disruption and improve reliability for passengers
* a rail sector with the agility to respond to future challenges and opportunities

The review is to look at the whole rail industry, including:

* increasing integration between track and train
* how to improve transport services across UK regions and devolved nations, including exploring options for devolution of rail powers
* improving value for money for passengers and taxpayers

Excluded from the scope of the Review are:

* public investment decisions made through existing franchise agreements
* railway funding 2019-2024 commitments (Control Period 6)
* High Speed 2 and other major projects
* spending decisions made through the Spending Review 2019.

**Original aspirations**

* *We expect that the privatisation of BR will lead to an improvement in the quality of all rail services.* – Steven Norris, Under-Secretary of State for Transport, House of Commons, 10 February 1993
* *Our proposals are intended to enable the railways to provide a higher quality of service, with greater responsiveness to customers’ needs, and to offer better value for money to the public who travel by rail.* – Roger Freeman, Minister for Public Transport, House of Commons, 25 June 1993
* *The service will be infinitely better than it was under nationalised control.* – John Major, Prime Minister, House of Commons, 19 May 1994
* *Previous privatisations have consistently led to improved services for customers and greater efficiency for the industries concerned. The same will happen on the railways.* – Roger Freeman, Minister for Public Transport, House of Commons, 20 June 1994
* *The Government believe that privatisation offers the best future for Railtrack, for passengers and freight and for train operators. It will allow greater use of private sector skills in managing the network, improving Railtrack stations, delivering efficient track maintenance and encouraging investment in the upgrading of railway lines. It will provide even greater scope for private capital to be injected into better facilities. Railtrack will be better able to deliver improvements in the service that it provides to operators and, therefore, to passengers.* – Brian Mawhinney, Secretary of State for Transport, House of Commons, 24 November 1994
* *My Lords, at the moment, of course, the taxpayer pays everything for the railways. That is the historic position. As the noble Lord knows, we are now going forward to a position where we are putting the railway companies into the private sector. Once those companies are in the private sector they will be responsible for their own costs.* – Viscount Goschen, Under-Secretary of State for Transport, House of Lords, 7 December 1994
* *Each privatisation has proved a success. The initial costs of past privatisations have been more than outweighed by efficiency and benefits, and that will be the case for rail users as well.* – John Major, Prime Minister, House of Commons, 13 December 1994
* *Rail privatisation is delivering and will continue to deliver enormous benefits for the travelling public. That means new investment, extra services, better customer care, tougher passenger charters and a much better deal for the taxpayer than was possible under nationalised British Rail.* – John Bowis, Minister for Transport in London, House of Commons, 15 November 1996
* *The fares will be lower, following privatisation, than they were before.* – John Major, Prime Minister, House of Commons, 20 March 1997

**Historical reality**

In January 2002 a Commons Committee report on rail franchising and infrastructure argued that ‘The Government must restore stability to the industry with the minimum of delay’.

A further Committee report in November 2006 found that ‘The system of passenger rail franchising is a complex, fragmented and costly muddle which is unlikely to provide the innovation and investment needed for the passenger railways of the future. The system has had a decade to prove itself, but it has failed to achieve its core objectives’.

In 2018, Sir John Armitt, chair of the National Infrastructure Commission, considered that rail franchising was ‘bust’.

**Big ideas**

Following the 2010 general election, the government’s big idea was fewer and larger franchises. Hence Govia Thameslink, which became shorthand for disastrous delivery, with timetable collapse and reduction, short trains and over forty days of industrial action. It became a cliché that nothing ran on time except fare increases.

The next big idea was a deep alliance between Network Rail and franchise operators. This was trialled on Stagecoach’s South West Trains. It didn’t suit the franchisee and was scaled down, notoriously leaving the franchise without a clear line of responsibility for managing disruption. Yet the Review is to look at ‘increasing integration between track and train’.

**Brexit prioritised over dealing with the B.R. exit aftermath**

After two decades, there are probably few who won’t sympathise or agree with Sir John Armitt’s view that franchising is bust. The railways were badly broken in World War II, but had repaired themselves and were moving forward.

Franchising brought a big reversal. If it has delivered one benefit, it is surely that contractual arrangements prevent sudden service cuts when the Treasury is short of funds. This ruse caused widespread anger in 1973, when Southampton’s services were proposed for reduction to hourly Waterloo-Weymouth and Portsmouth-Salisbury trains. In the event, about 150 departures a week were axed, and Portsmouth-Bristol services became non-corridor stopping trains. Nothing as drastic was ever tried again, though there was occasional snipping at the edges.

The main purpose of the Williams Review appears to be buying time to tackle the backlog of problems following BR’s exit, while the current Transport Secretary is focused on Brexit. History suggests the Review won’t achieve anything radical, especially as the Transport Secretary has already ruled out nationalisation.

There may be one big idea, possibly greater competition such as Alliance Rail’s bid to run a competing Southampton-Waterloo service, which has just been rejected. Competition may be good in principle, but track capacity offers very limited opportunities, and greed-driven operators such as Stagecoach would be hell-bent on cherry-picking.

With 4,000 civil servants reportedly transferred to Brexit work, it seems unsurprising that action on key policy areas across the board is getting little priority. For example, drone activity at Gatwick Airport brought Christmas misery for tens of thousands of air travellers. According to The Times, legislation introducing further restrictions on drone use had been due for publication last spring, but civil servants were moved to work on Brexit instead, despite the Transport Secretary receiving multiple warnings about the risks that the devices could cause. Compensation to the airlines could be in the order of £50 million.

The horse has now bolted at Gatwick, but what about SWR’s ongoing industrial disruption? At the end of 2018, the franchise suffered its 30th day of industrial action over driver-only operation of trains when the rostered guard is not available. Incredibly, the only trains in issue haven’t even been built and aren’t due to be in service until 2020. Instead of government intervention, answers to parliamentary questions have confirmed that train operators may receive compensation for their related financial losses.

Commuters paying some of the highest fares in Europe might expect a push from the top for resolution of the dispute. The Department for Transport’s website declares: ‘We work with our agencies and partners to support the transport network that helps the UK’s businesses and gets people and goods travelling around the country. We plan and invest in transport infrastructure to keep the UK on the move’.

Really? More than 40 days of industrial action and months of timetable disruption over two years on GTR affected Gatwick Airport passengers among others. At long last GTR is starting to return to something more normal. However, some problems persist, such as short turnaround times resulting in Southampton trains not getting west of Fareham.

Commuter protests at soaring rail fares are a long-established annual event (unsurprisingly given their compound effects) even without the pain of industrial strife on top of more-routine performance collapses. The Secretary of State considers that lower inflationary increases could be applied if rail employees’ pay increases were similarly curbed. That sounds more like brushing the problem aside than seeking its resolution.

**Cross Country re-franchising delayed**

DfT has cancelled the competition to run Cross Country in the context of the Rail Review.

Arriva’s direct award to operate Cross Country, which runs to December 2019, is set to be extended by a further five years. Modern Railways (November 2018) reveals that possibly just a single company had expressed interest in bidding for the new franchise.

It seems likely that the bidder wasn’t Arriva (now part of German state operator DB) which didn’t bid even to keep its Welsh franchise. It may well have been Stagecoach which is disposing of its North American bus operations and says it sees bus and rail opportunities in the UK.

Cross Country is unique in not having a geographical territory, though all its trains (except a few early morning and late evening short-distance workings) serve Birmingham New Street station.

The danger is that direct inter-regional services may in future receive even less priority for access to inter-city trunk routes than London-focused operations. The Euston-Glasgow route north of Crewe has already lost its Cross Country services, meaning that Cross Country’s Glasgow services take an hour longer than previously, and the Kings Cross-Edinburgh route north of Doncaster could follow. NR’s long-term thinking has already mooted the diversion of Southampton trains from York, Newcastle and Edinburgh to Hull, which would keep them off the East Coast main line.

Meanwhile, from December 10 2018, two small changes have helped standardise the service between Southampton and the North East:

\* The 08.12 (Mondays-Fridays) Winchester-Newcastle train now starts from Southampton Central at 07.56, calling at Southampton Airport Parkway at 08.03. The corresponding Saturday train was already starting from Southampton at 07.47.

\* The first southbound service now starts from York (at 06.20) instead of Leeds, so becoming a reverse working of the last northbound service from Southampton. However, while this train calls intermediately at Doncaster on Mondays-Fridays, it instead runs via Leeds and Wakefield on Saturdays.

Cross Country has been one of the better operators, but the pint-pot Voyager trains it inherited from the Virgin-Stagecoach partnership have created a capacity problem which in turn has enabled the operator to charge relatively high fares. With the electrification programme virtually abandoned, trains like the new GWR bi-modes would be ideal as they could work on electric power, for example from Bournemouth to Basingstoke, Reading to Didcot, Coventry to Manchester, and Doncaster to Edinburgh. This could mitigate future track occupation on the East and West Coast main lines.

**Report on rail fares consultation delayed**

In our response to the Rail Delivery Group’s consultation on delivering simpler rail fares (See Hogrider Issue 158) we highlighted the difficulty arising from the requirement that the average fare should remain the same. It was virtually impossible to judge whether a particular group of options might produce both a similar overall average rail fare as now, and an attractive fares basket, meaning that our markings were necessarily very tentative in the absence of illustrative in-depth computer modelling.

The Metro of 29.1.2019 reported that there had been 20,000 responses to the consultation, and the RDG’s response, due during the autumn, was still awaited. Martin Abrams, of the Association of British Commuters called for clarity over what would happen next, saying that the 55,000,000 fares now available were mind-boggling. Quite!

**Cardiff-Portsmouth: gradual increase in capacity, but with smaller seats and non-air-conditioned extra carriages**

While there were no significant GWR service changes from the start of the winter timetable period, the conversion of Paddington commuter services to electric or bi-mode operation is resulting in a rolling stock cascade which should see the end of bus-bodied Pacer trains in the West of England.

As part of the cascade, Class 165/166 Thames Turbo trains are now being phased on to the Cardiff-Portsmouth Harbour route, with more expected to be available when bi-mode operation between Paddington and Bedwyn can commence.

Is this an improvement?

* The Turbos are only marginally newer than the class 158 units which they will replace, though they have been reasonably maintained and have the same top speed of 90 mph.
* 5-car Turbo trains are replacing 3-car class 158 trains, with services formed of 2-car class 165 (non-air-conditioned) and 3-car class 166 (air-conditioned) units, with no access between the two (which restricts the circulation of buffet trolleys).
* The superseded class 158 units were all air-conditioned, but occasionally had to be replaced by non-air-conditioned class 150 units. However, the additional capacity which the Turbos will provide is desperately needed at busy times, to avoid cramming and even passengers being left behind. It should also expedite boarding and alighting and improve punctuality.
* All the Turbo trains have suburban 2+3 aside seating, unlike the class 158 units which are 2+2, albeit with very limited leg room. Originally, refurbishment of the class 166 with 2+2 seating was planned for the Cardiff-Portsmouth line, which is recognised as a major regional route.

Trains which are already scheduled for Turbo trains on weekdays include:

07.30, 09.30, 15.30, 17.30 Cardiff Central-Portsmouth Harbour;

11.23, 13.23, 19.23 Portsmouth Harbour-Cardiff Central and 21.23 Portsmouth Harbour-Westbury.

Shorter Turbo trains are also scheduled on the 08.23 Southampton Central-Great Malvern (Mondays-Fridays) and 08.30 Southampton Central-Worcester Foregate Street (Saturdays) and 12.27 Southampton Central-Great Malvern. The southbound workings are the 05.17 Gloucester-Southampton Central (Mondays-Fridays), 06.49 Frome-Southampton Central (Saturdays), and 11.11 Westbury-Southampton Central.

Turbos have already been noted on some other services.

**What’s happening on South Western Railway?**

**Local performance patterns**

Few regular users are satisfied with South Western Railway, our area’s major operator. The step change in performance expected after the removal of Stagecoach has not materialised. So what are the omens for change?

The National Rail Passenger Survey for Autumn 2018 makes interesting reading, with passenger satisfaction the lowest for a decade. The overall satisfaction scores for our local operating companies (with percentage changes since Spring 2018 in brackets) are: Cross Country 81% (minus 5%); Great Western Railway 78% (minus 3%); Southern 74% (plus 5%); and South Western Railway 73% (minus 8%).

The good/satisfactory scores for punctuality and reliability are: Cross Country 76% (minus 7%); Great Western 67% (minus 4%); Southern 66% (plus 11%); and South Western Railway 61% (minus 6%)

Commentators have picked up on Southern leap-frogging SWR, but that’s not the whole story. Broken-down scores are: Southern Metro services 71%; Other Southern services 62%; South Western Metro services 54%; South Western outer-suburban and local services 57%; South Western longer-distance services 73%;

So shorter-distance services are boosting Southern’s scores, and dragging down South Western’s. This may reflect the influx of new rolling stock on Southern’s Metro routes, and South Western’s aged suburban stock having to wait until 2020 for replacement.

A similar pattern arises in relation to value for money of price of ticket. South Western has the lowest score (36%) for good/satisfactory, and highest score (42%) for unsatisfactory. It scores 31% for Metro services; 32% for outer-suburban and local services; and 43% for longer-distance services. Southern scores 41% for Metro services and 38% for other services.

Southern mainly operates air-conditioned stock (though not on shorter-distance Coastway trains), whilst South Western has a large fleet of non-air-conditioned suburban trains. Lack of air conditioning really matters in severely crowded conditions during heatwaves, and even more so when there are delays. It needs to be remembered that stopping services may have end-to-end journey times comparable with those of faster long-distance trains.

Other considerations likely to have had major influences on passengers’ perceptions are that Southern has had to recover from the collapsed new Thameslink timetable, and South Western suffers from Stagecoach’s legacy timetable and dear fares structure.

An off-peak day return from Southampton Central to Weymouth (63 miles) by South Western costs £29.30. An off-peak day return from Southampton Central to Hastings (102 miles) by Southern costs £16.60. In addition, South Western has failed to implement its inclination (expressed at an early stakeholder meeting) to increase custom by abandoning the time restrictions imposed by Stagecoach on super-off-peak weekend day return fares.

Tentative conclusion: Southern gains from being ahead of South Western in coming out of industrial action and in introducing modern rolling stock in the London area. Southern has a more attractive fares policy for leisure travel, but has suffered from particularly severe timetable meltdown.

**Tackling delays**

In the previous Issue we noted that, leaving problems with the old suburban fleet aside, SWR intended to address their unsatisfactory performance by rostering crews more effectively; designing support software for the Control Centre to help recovery from disruption; providing better support for the Desiro fleets and speeding up modifications to improve reliability.

However, this was against the Office of Rail and Road’s finding that sixty-eight per cent of delays on SWR in 2017-18 were caused by Network Rail, and contingency plans have not been updated since 2011. Since Network Rail is in the public sector, the need for DfT to promote urgent remedial action would appear crucial.

Network Rail does seem to have stepped up its work to keep trains moving punctually. Track de-icing equipment is being stored in Totton yard (and also at Effingham Junction). Lines into Southampton Docks are being improved to smooth the operation of freightliner trains, which often delay passenger services. In particular, there will be revised pointwork and signalling in the Millbrook area to allow bi-directional working on the westbound fast line. This is unfortunately resulting in major disruption, with virtually no trains in the Southampton area at certain times, especially during five consecutive weekends from the start of February (with train-less Sundays).

**Other high-profile problems on South Western**

SWR booking offices (mainly in Hampshire) have been frequently closed during opening hours, in some cases with complete closure for a week at a time. A leaked document lists Brockenhurst, Christchurch, Dorchester South, Eastleigh, Farnborough Main, Hamworthy, Hedge End, Hinton Admiral, Hook, Lymington Town, Micheldever, Netley, New Milton, Parkstone, Pokesdown, St Denys, Southampton Airport Parkway, Swanwick, Sway, Swaythling, Winchester, Wool and Woolston. SWR has responded that it takes time to recruit and train staff.

Meanwhile, a New Milton wheelchair user has highlighted failure to tackle the Stagecoach legacy in the treatment of disabled people. An article in the Advertiser and Times of 2nd November 2018 refers to 73 failures during 46 journeys made between 13th January and 15th October 2018. These include lack of ramp or delay in one being provided; communication breakdowns; rude, wrong or unreasonable staff; and accessible toilets not being available.

SWR has apologised and stated its commitment to providing a more inclusive service and improving accessibility. They are working with Network Rail to secure additional government funding to improve accessibility, have appointed a dedicated accessibility manager, made improvements to their passenger assist programme, and are trialling a new app to help make travelling easier for passengers with accessibility requirements.

It would be good if the could make the down platform at Totton accessible – replacing a short flight of steps with a ramp looks feasible. More generally, there is a feeling that South Western customer service can be too patchy. Some staff are very friendly and helpful. For example, on a recent Sunday morning it was good to see the guard of the Lymington train urgently rounding up passengers off a slightly delayed Waterloo-Poole service. Sometimes, though, things seem to go unnoticed. For example, it has been observed on a number of occasions that the passenger information system at Southampton Central doesn’t recognise the 17.05 Waterloo-Weymouth/Poole service and shows it as the 18.42 to Bristol.

**A commentary on South Western operating and service issues [see South Western Railway Watch: @swtrains\_watch]**

This gives very useful commentaries on passengers’ problems with South Western. Co-ordinator Jeremy Varns has also had some excellent letters on fare increases and related issues published in newspapers such as the Southern Daily Echo of 4.12.2018 and 29.12.2018.

As he says, pricing people off our railways and pushing others into transport poverty cannot be viewed as a tolerable position, and we urgently need a change of direction from the government. UK rail fares are some of the highest in Europe, while car drivers are paying lower fuel prices than in 2011. It seems that government prioritises polluting and inefficient road transport. [A point particularly relevant to Southampton].

**Enhancements coming into effect, but with delays**

Positive effects of the new franchise are beginning to evolve:

* A significant number of longer trains, particularly at weekends. Changes include no longer running diesel trains on fully-electrified routes.
* Better communication with users and willingness to improve timetables to meet public aspirations. However, Network Rail has been blocking timetable expansion because of its power supply problems.
* Innovations such as fare provisions to help regular travellers who travel less than daily. However, the Stagecoach legacy of confusing weekend time threshold rules remains in force.
* Ad hoc timetable enhancements, starting with the summer Saturday Salisbury/Wareham-Corfe Castle trains, and continuing with ‘flyer’ services for passengers leaving work at lunchtime on Fridays 21st and 28th December (comprising a 12-minute acceleration of several Waterloo-Salisbury trains; and additional Clapham Junction-Weymouth services at 11.57 and 13.57 calling at Brockenhurst (first stop!), Bournemouth and stations to Weymouth except Holton Heath and Upwey).
* Wessex Electric trains with comfortable two-aside seating should start to come into service between Waterloo and Portsmouth Harbour via Guildford from the end of February, with most of the 18 units in service by around May. This stock is also expected to work the 05.45 Poole-Waterloo and 21.05 Waterloo-Poole. Introduction has been delayed by the need to tackle corrosion. A source told BBC South Today that the unit originally inspected by SWR had been stored indoors, while others had been stored outside.

[Apparently the reason for not running these units on the longer-distance Waterloo-Weymouth route, for which they were originally built, is that SWR has decided that they should work only in pairs, to minimise the risk of total breakdown from having all the traction equipment in one coach. Power supply west of Poole is sufficient only for a single unit].

* The medium-distance class 444 Desiro units, the mainstay of Waterloo-Weymouth services, are being refurbished during the first half of 2019. External repainting and internal refurbishment are not always coincidental, which slightly reduces the impact. The SWR upholstery is more restful to the eyes, but the seats are still hard on passengers’ backs. The additional four seats in the area formerly occupied by the disused buffet counter are unfortunately windowless though, at busy times, sitting there will no doubt be preferable to standing.
* The blue class 450 outer suburban units are to follow. A few already have new upholstery and carpeting.
* Some enhancements are appearing at stations, such as better-quality seating on platforms.

That leaves some major issues such as promised improvements to Southampton Central station, and much needed changes to the timetable structure in Hampshire. So far, the latter have been blocked by Network Rail with support from the Department for Transport. The principal problems seem to be inadequate power supply to sustain additional services all day, and the large number of temporary speed restrictions pending infrastructure work. The May timetable change will be about 20 months into the new franchise, and it will be disappointing if there are not at least some of the promised improvements.

**News of former South West Trains operator Stagecoach**

**£2.3 million fine for two avoidable bus crash deaths**

Stagecoach’s Midland Red buses were recently given what is believed to be a record fine of £2.3m after ignoring warnings about an "erratic" 77-year-old driver who crashed into Sainsbury’s supermarket in Coventry on 3 October 2015, killing a seven-year-old passenger and 76-year-old pedestrian.

Midland Red (South) Ltd [admitted health and safety breaches](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-coventry-warwickshire-41266569). A fact finding tribunal concluded that the driver [had been driving dangerously](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-coventry-warwickshire-45561937) when he mistook the accelerator for the brake. By then aged 80, he was deemed unfit to stand trial because of dementia. He was ‘traumatised’ by the crash and now needed full-time care.

He had been warned about his "erratic" driving by the company after four crashes in three years. The company admitted allowing him to work more than 70-hours a week. It also admitted allowing him to continue working despite warnings about his driving.

The judge said "the failings of the company were a significant cause" of the crash. Warnings about the driver were "not enforced, and almost immediately ignored". The company’s Managing Director said the company was "deeply sorry" and "bears the weight of our responsibility for this tragedy". "We deeply regret the opportunities that were missed to act decisively on emerging warning signs," he said.

The company then tried to spread the blame, suggesting that age discrimination laws may have been partially responsible for the crash. They said, "Our parent company, Stagecoach, is working with our industry partners to establish a consistent approach by government on these issues”.

**Warning signs before the deaths**

Stagecoach was found guilty of “dramatic and worrying” safety breaches, with incidents of wheels falling off buses “risking death and injury and also damage to property”. There was an engine fire and eight incidents of wheel loss on Stagecoach buses between May 2009 and January 2010, which resulted in Stagecoach Perth, Stagecoach Glasgow and Stagecoach Fife receiving formal warnings. Stagecoach Strathtay, which covered large areas of Perth, Aberdeen and Dundee, was banned from expanding its services for four months.

History was to repeat itself: Stagecoach suffered sanctions after two ‘upsetting and alarming’ safety incidents involving its vehicles on the road in the Highlands. It avoided being banned from operating in the region but was instead restricted from expanding its operations for the next year. The firm was allowed to run no more than 180 vehicles, and was also fined £20,000 following a public inquiry in Inverness. Stagecoach was fined a further £10,000 after a wheel fell off a bus in Caithness.

Stagecoach bus fires became endemic in Britain, with some 9 in 2011; 11 in 2012; 10 in 2013; 10 in 2014; and 6 in 2015. Early in 2015 a horrified motorist flagged down a blazing bus with school students on board. One of the incidents occurred on a fast guided-busway in Cambridgeshire. In Cheltenham, a shaking bus driver was told to continue his journey, leaving local residents to clear up the debris from the bus shelter he had smashed. A bus demolished part of a home in Harold Wood. Nine people were injured when a bus smashed into a house in Liverpool, and the roof of a double-decker was sliced off in Birkenhead. Another double decker had its roof sliced off in Basingstoke.

Two incidents involving buses jeopardised the safety of rail passengers. A potential major rail disaster was narrowly avoided when a bus smashed through level crossing gates in Devon 15 seconds before a high-speed train passed. Another caused chaos when it smashed through level crossing gates in Canterbury.

The extremely serious Devon incident in particular raises questions about whether the driver was competent. In 2016 a whistle blower revealed that possibly as many as 20-40 Stagecoach bus drivers in Devon were behind the wheel illegally because their Competence Cards had been faked, with trainers using training time to go shopping or drink coffee.

Various other incidents illustrate failure to operate a duty of care. A 60-year-old wheelchair user, who fell asleep during his bus journey, was found by a cleaner in a Manchester bus depot at 02.50. An 89-year-old great grandmother had to have a foot amputated after a bus ran over it as she was boarding. The driver was convicted of careless driving for failing to apply the handbrake, but neither he nor Stagecoach bothered to offer an apology. Bus manufacturer Alexander Dennis, part-owned by Mr Souter, was fined £50,000 in September 2012 for a safety offence, while Stagecoach Yorkshire was fined for an accident in which a bus dropped on a garage apprentice.

In Illinois a Stagecoach Megabus crashed into an overbridge support, with one young woman killed, and 38 passengers taken to hospital, five of them by helicopter. The US Department of Transportation warned prospective passengers that Megabus Northeast scored 75% for unsafe driving – it was worse than three quarters of all comparable firms. In addition, there were a number of lawsuits (at least one alleging corner-cutting with safety to maximise profits) following the deaths of 4 passengers in a Megabus incident near Syracuse.

In December Stagecoach disposed of its US bus operations, where profits were disappointing, in order to ‘focus more closely on the significant opportunities for growth in the UK’.

**Two damehoods**

Former Virgin Money boss Jayne-Anne Gadhia has become a Stagecoach non-executive director, and has also been appointed an external member of the Bank of England’s Financial Policy Committee.

Ms Gadhia and Stagecoach co-founder Ann Gloag were both made Dames in the New Year’s Honours list.

**Second official warning on the lessons of the Clapham disaster of 12.12.1988 not being heeded**

Rail travel in Britain has become much safer in recent decades, but good records count for little when someone dies avoidably.

In Issue 156, we reported that the Rail Accident Investigation Branch had found that an incident near Cardiff Central station on 29.12.2016 arose from the kind of failings which led to the Clapham tragedy.

It has now found that the collision at Waterloo on 15.8.2017 arose from similar failings. Uncontrolled wiring was added during signalling works without testing standards being observed, and it remained in place when the line was returned to service. This should serve as a ‘wake-up call’ for Network Rail and their contractors, and ‘highlighted that we can never afford to be complacent when it comes to keeping our passengers and workforce safe’.

**Level crossings also continuing to present dangers**

Early on 11.1.2018, a freight train automatically braked on a level crossing near Doncaster after the driver failed to hear an audible warning, probably because of noise in his cab. The crossing barriers rose and a car hit the train. The car driver suffered only minor injury, though the car was a write-off. The crossing equipment was about forty years old and had not been identified as posing a risk. Nonetheless, this is yet another reason to treat level crossings with caution.

At the end of January Network Rail left Wareham geographically divided after 6pm, by closing the level crossing because of staff shortage. This leaves just a steep footbridge which is inaccessible to disabled people. BBC South Today reported allegations of pedestrians almost being hit by trains because of the barriers not being closed soon enough.

**Waterside line on YouTube**

YouTube offers a roughly 40-minute driver’s eye view of the Waterside route between Southampton Central and the former Fawley oil terminal, taken from a tour train on 13 May 2017. Full title of the film is: ‘Southampton Central to Fawley Esso – Hastings DEMU cab ride – 13 May 2017’.

Let’s hope this useful environmental asset isn’t allowed to deteriorate. With SWR’s timetable enhancements reportedly delayed by power supply problems, one wonders whether the much-needed additional hourly service between Portsmouth and Southampton could be worked by bi-mode trains running through to the Waterside, initially on diesel power, and later with electric operation between Portsmouth and Southampton.

Such trains (converted from former Thameslink class 319 units) are already planned to take over the Reading-Gatwick Airport route, which has intermittent electrification used by other services. The Hampshire route would reflect that of the abandoned proposals for a phased construction of a South Hampshire Rapid Transport line linking Portsmouth with the Waterside.

Realistically, we can be pretty sure that the infrastructure South of Marchwood will deteriorate considerably before passenger services arrive, if they ever do.

**Integration with heritage lines - Minehead to follow Swanage in link with national rail?**

The West Somerset Railway is seeking funds to trial a Taunton-Bishop’s Lydeard train service on 60 days next summer – Bishop’s Lydeard-Minehead is the longest private heritage line in Britain. The ultimate aspiration is restoration of direct trains between Taunton and Minehead.

This clearly reflects the Swanage Railway’s strategy. Swanage-Wareham services operated successfully in the summer of 2017, but the earmarked heritage diesel train was not ready for running on NR tracks, and the high cost of hiring locomotives precluded a similar operation in 2018. Fortunately, SWR provided three return services between Wareham and Corfe Castle on some summer Saturdays, and Swanage-Wareham heritage trains should run in 2019.

**Acknowledgements / Contact details / GDPR**

As always, thanks to everyone who has been kind enough to contact us. Without your support and input, this newsletter would be much less comprehensive. It is produced in good faith, based on reports and information from individuals and sources including the press and news websites.

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.

We do not process information of a personal nature and, in view of GDPR, we will maintain our approach that the names of those who contribute news items or articles will be acknowledged in newsletters only where they have indicated that they consent to this. **So, when submitting articles or items for collation, please indicate if you would like them to be attributed to you**.

Railways are a public service and our Group is open to any interested parties. This newsletter is available on-line. It is e’mailed to recipients involved in the Group, and individuals or organisations who have asked to be included in the circulation list or otherwise have close links (for example, through HCC’s New Forest Transport Forums). **If you receive the newsletter and do not wish to do so, please let us know and further issues will not be sent.**

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