

**Response to South Western Railway's Consultation  
'Developing a more sustainable future for Island Line'  
December 2017**

**Railfuture is the UK's leading independent organisation campaigning for better rail services for passengers and freight. Our Wessex branch covers Hampshire, Dorset and the Isle of Wight (where we have several members, including two on our committee). We hold an annual meeting on the IoW and actively participate in conferences and meetings regarding the Island Line.**

**Our response below addresses the numbered questions in the SWR consultation document, and was prepared by an Isle of Wight committee member with contributions from others on our committee.**

### **Strategy**

1a.... The Island Line is important to the Island economy, particularly on the eastern side of the Island. It serves the towns of Ryde, Brading, Sandown, Lake and Shanklin and conveys not just commuters and Island residents who are travelling to the mainland, but also tourists. Island Line enables access to bus, ferry and hovercraft and mainland access to the rail and coach network. A significant number of Islanders travel by rail from Portsmouth Harbour to Gatwick Airport. The Island tourist trade is all-year-round and much increased during the summer months.

1b.... It is vital to the transport network as it helps to reduce road congestion along the main A3055 road which links Ryde with Shanklin and beyond. This road runs through the narrow Brading High Street and through the Sandown - Lake corridor which is becoming increasingly congested. The congestion is exacerbated in the summer season, with the increase in holiday traffic.

2.... The Island has a growing population and Island Line could make a significant contribution. For example, the planned Pennyfeathers development of 900+ dwellings with associated community infrastructure on the southern outskirts of Ryde, is adjacent to the existing Smallbrook Junction station site; a railway halt here would provide easy, uncongested access to/from Ryde and beyond. This could play a part in regeneration. There is the potential for other housing developments in the future. Brading has some nearby

attractions (for example, the Roman Villa) and Sandown has a 'run-down' look about it. By working with the local agencies, regeneration of the local economies could be achieved.

3a.... The current route should be maintained.

3b.... Access at Ryde Esplanade could be improved, especially access to the hovercraft terminal (access to the hovercraft entails crossing a footbridge). Perhaps the disused platform adjacent to the hovercraft terminal could be reinstated. Ryde Pier Head facilities for rail passengers are very basic and require improvement. Although the bus terminal at Ryde Esplanade is adjacent to the railway station, the facilities are basic. A plan to completely upgrade the transport interchange has recently been shelved.

There appears to be no mention of improved access for the requirements of cyclists – some travel to/from the Island as part of the daily commute as well as cycling tourists who wish to access the many Island cycle paths.

3c.... The link between Island Line and the Island Steam Railway is very important. Should the Isle of Wight Steam Railway gain access to Ryde St John's and the existing Smallbrook Junction station be demolished, provision should be made for a new halt to service the Pennyfeathers development. Joint promotion of the two companies should continue.

3d.... It is very important that the disused routes to Newport and Ventnor should be safeguarded in such a way that future housing developments should be refused along them. The current thought to restore services to Newport and Ventnor should become a reality (with possible extension to Cowes).

4.... The term 'more sustainable' should embrace both financial and environment by striving to minimise the cost/revenue imbalance and reducing the carbon footprint.

In addition, any spending on infrastructure and rolling stock should realistically be future-proof, long-lasting and low maintenance.

5.... Revenue protection is currently poor. It should be easier to buy tickets. An increased train frequency would have the potential of attracting more passengers, as would improved promotion of Ryde St John's park and ride. Island Line would benefit from improved marketing at London Waterloo and major stations on SWR. There should be special promotions and the local residents' discount card should have better publicity.

6.... These have probably been already implemented.

7.... Passengers would probably tolerate a modest increase in fares but any such increase must be competitive with buses.

### **Franchise Management**

8.... Is this really necessary? This would suggest that Island Line is a special case. As it stands under the current franchise process, there is provision for investment compensation for the outgoing franchisee.

## Infrastructure

9.... We favour national railway standards, acknowledging where necessary the use of lightweight rolling stock, reduced loading gauge and the isolation of Island Line from the mainland rail network. Eventual elimination of the third rail should be considered when the equipment comes to the end of its useful life.

10.... Incremental signal upgrade. A passing loop at Brading, but not north of the station as (i) there is only width for a single line (ii) the ground is unstable and (iii) it is on the edge of Brading Marsh. (see comments under 15e).

11.... Generally speaking, apart from some operational aspects, the current 25 year lease has not been right for the Isle of Wight. It would be better to fully transfer the lease of the infrastructure to Network Rail, in line with the UK network.

12.... Keep the Island Line as 'heavy rail', using lighter-weight rolling stock, but with cost-saving derogations to take account of local conditions.

13.... We advocate independent power supply and our reasons are:-

- i) the existing traction current equipment is life expired (over 50 years old).
- ii) the Island Line could be used as a 'test bed' for innovation.
- iii) there are new technologies for rail vehicles now, for example ...
  - a) on board battery power that can coast over un-supplied sections,
  - b) on board battery power flash-charged at station stops,
  - c) diesel only/diesel battery eg Vivarail Class 230,
  - d) fuel-cell powered rail vehicles
  - e) flywheel powered vehicles (John Parry People Mover).

Elimination of the third rail would enable easier integration with the Isle of Wight Steam Railway working to Ryde St John's Road and future Island Line working to Newport (see item 14).

## Rolling stock

14.... We advocate re-engineered units such as the Vivarail Class 230 which has a choice of traction power, has different interior configurations available, is economical to run (and hopefully to lease) and does not require a specific facility for on-line maintenance. In the case of Island Line, the diesel-powered or diesel/battery option should be considered initially. A future vehicle could be introduced to enable operation into Newport town centre where some on-street running would be cost effective.

Converting the existing route to tramway operation would be very expensive and would require extensive track work, power supply and signalling, whereas retaining the 'heavy rail' requires only incremental work.

We consider guided busway a non-starter because of the narrow, largely single-track route and formation problems. Guided busways have a poor reputation: Cambridge to St. Ives comes to mind. And, of course the Gosport to Fareham non-guided busway which, although

has a fair ridership, leaves Gosport as the largest borough in the country off the national rail network.

## Stations

15a.... Ryde Pier Head has very basic facilities for waiting passengers which requires improvement.

15b.... Ryde Esplanade requires upgrading and improved access to/from the hovercraft terminal.

15c.... Ryde St John's requires better access for the disabled and cyclists using the platform 2 to Shanklin. The footbridge is in dire need of repainting. The ticket office needs to be open for longer intervals. The car park should be advertised as a 'park and ride' facility.

15d.... Were the Isle of Wight Steam Railway to operate into St John's, Smallbrook Junction would cease to be the terminus and could be closed. However, as previously mentioned, provision should be made for a facility to service the Pennyfeathers development.

15e.... We would like to see the Brading passing loop at the station itself and not north of the station for reasons already mentioned. The disused platform 2 is currently leased by Network Rail to Brading Town Council, the lease expiring in 2019. Currently it is impossible for cyclists and the disabled to access this platform, in any case the existing footbridge can only be crossed by one person at a time because of structural problems. Currently, the bridge is the only means of access to the restored signal box (run by Brading Town Council) which, during the months it is open, is visited by a fair number of people who arrive by train. Brading station also provides walking access to the nearby RSPB reserve and Morton Roman Villa.

A few years ago there were plans to reopen the cattle creep at the end of platform 1 and provide disabled/cyclist access to a new footpath which, linking up with existing footpaths would improve access for all users. If this plan were to be revived, then access to platform 2 could be provided. This would also enable possibly two foot crossings to be closed. The agencies involved in this project were 'Down to the Coast' (Isle of Wight Council), Network Rail, Brading Town Council, IWCRP and the RSPB.

15f.... Sandown station could be made a gateway for the town which is rather run down, The beaches of the Sandown Bay area could be promoted in order to attract more rail passengers. Sandown Academy is close by and attracts ridership of schoolchildren.

15g.... Lake station is fairly well used by passengers, including schoolchildren at Sandown Academy.

15h.... Shanklin is the end of the line and has a ticket office and other facilities. The station looks rather tired and could do with some attention.

16.... Some of the station improvements could be carried out by volunteers (ACoRP 'adopt a station' comes to mind. There are already good working relationships between the TOC, NR,

IoWC and the IWCRP. Some funding should be sought from central government by way of Infrastructure Commission endorsement.

17.... The CRP already works hard in projects such as events at Waterloo as well as Island station events. Perhaps it needs to work more with groups such as the Isle of Wight Bus and Rail Users Group. It should be possible to set up a 'Friends of Island Line' group.

18.... There should be more intensive involvement in LEP, IWC objectives and development plans in order for Island Line to be part of them.

### **Ticketing**

19.... With regard to ticketing, revenue collection/protection requires improvement. Too many fares (and therefore stats on line usage) are being missed.

### **Timetable**

20.... A '20/20/20' service at least during peak times and the holiday season should be provided. A later train service (at least on Saturdays) to Shanklin and return to Ryde would be well accepted.

### **Funding**

21.... Island Line managers need to be aware of any government grants/initiatives that could be tapped in to. Is there any surplus railway land that can be sold? Would it be possible to obtain infrastructure levies on any commercial/housing developments along the line? Is there any way that Island Line can tap in to 'getting people back to work' schemes which would attract funding?

22.... Would it be possible to utilise trackside/embankments for linear solar farms? Is there any spare capacity at Ryde St John's works for outside general mechanical repairs to be undertaken?

### **Other areas**

23.... Island Line sometimes appears as a 'poor relation' when it comes IWC transport plans. The railway must form an integral part of the transport network, particularly the areas it serves.

24.... Railfuture (Wessex Branch) wishes to fully support Island Line and wish to participate in follow-up meetings to this Consultation.

### **Conclusion**

We have a vision for Island Line. We wish to see Island Line a fully integrated part of the national rail network and remain part of the SWR franchise.

The Island's railways are a visitor attraction in their own right and have a 'heritage' draw. They are also a means of accessing tourist attractions. Island Line provides a good service for

commuters and plays a part in reducing traffic congestion in some of the busiest towns on the Island. It also caters for the many holiday makers and day trippers who choose to visit the 'Sunshine Isle'

We recognise that Island Line could be a leader in rail innovation for future generations.

We look forward to Island Line returning to Newport (with the potential eventually to serve Cowes again). It has been said that Ventnor died the day it lost its railway. Let's hope that one day trains will once again emerge from Ventnor tunnel.

And finally, let's make the aspiration to have a fixed rail link connecting the Island with Portsmouth, a reality.

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