

Network Rail Wessex Route
Waterside Line consultation

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Dear Network Rail Wessex,

Re-introducing passenger services on the Waterside Line

Railfuture is Britain's leading and longest-established independent voluntary organisation campaigning exclusively for a better railway across a bigger network for passenger and freight users, to support economic (housing and productivity) growth, environmental improvement and better-connected communities. We seek to influence decision makers at local, regional and national levels to implement pro-rail policies in development and transport planning.

The purpose of this letter is to give our full backing to the re-introduction of a passenger service on the Waterside Line in Hampshire.

Railfuture Wessex Branch has long campaigned for passenger services to operate over the Waterside Line (the "Wessex Branch" area of Railfuture covers Hampshire, Dorset and the Isle of Wight).

We have a few observations which we hope will be helpful as the scheme is taken forwards:

- 1) We do not have any preference between the two sites for **Hythe Station** in the proposed scheme.
- 2) We see the restoration of a passenger service on the Waterside Line as a key element of a **regional metro** for the Solent area. The proposed shuttle service terminating at Southampton Central will be sufficient initially but, as patronage builds, there is likely to be the need for a cross-city metro service of at least two trains per hour between Hythe and Winchester, or between Hythe and Fareham / Portsmouth (which would help meet aspirations for improved services between Portsmouth and Southampton).
- 3) There should be passive provision for extension of the line to a **park and ride station** at Hardley at a later date, which would be particularly useful for residents and employees at the new Fawley Waterside development. A further extension of the line around the refinery site to Fawley Waterside should be considered in the fullness of time.
- 4) Although diesel motive power is to be used initially, there should be a firm commitment to the introduction of **electric traction** (battery or third rail) at a later date to assuage residents' concerns about noise and air pollution. Battery-Electric hybrid trains could be considered for the branch line service, but line electrification at least to Marchwood is likely to be necessary in the longer term due to the high power requirements of freight traffic.

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- 5) An enhanced rail service for **Totton** has been correctly identified as a major benefit of the Waterside Railway project. This cannot be overstated, since the train frequency at Totton has been poor for many years and has undoubtedly led to suppressed rail patronage.
- 6) With three automatic-barrier **level crossings** in Marchwood and a further three in Hythe, we suggest there is scope for cost savings by closing one or two of these crossings, especially where there is to be a replacement overbridge nearby. Local residents may welcome closure of a crossing and consequent loss of through traffic. Of course, when considering LC closures, due account should be taken of essential traffic such as buses and emergency services.
- 7) The cost of **replacement overbridges** should be borne by the highways budget and should not form part of the railway infrastructure costs since overbridges would primarily benefit road users. At most, only the cost of upgrading level crossings to modern standards at these locations should be shown against the railway project. The upgrade cost (from manual gates to modern level crossing) could then be transferred to the highways budget should replacement by overbridges be deemed necessary.
- 8) Railfuture's experience with rail reopenings elsewhere in Britain is that there is an uplift in public transport usage across all modes wherever new rail passenger services are provided. There is considerable scope for **connecting bus services** to call at Marchwood and Hythe, especially to / from New Forest destinations.
- 9) **Hythe ferry** would benefit from the general uplift in public transport usage mentioned above, especially if there is a "Solent Travelcard" offer encompassing all modes. Furthermore, there are other destinations which could be usefully served by ferries from Hythe pier, for example Woolston and Netley.
- 10) **Secure cycle parking** is an important element of the station design at both Marchwood and Hythe. Modern e-bikes greatly extend the catchment area of stations, and leisure cycling is particularly strong in the New Forest national park.
- 11) We trust that any **disturbance to residents** during the railway upgrade will be mitigated by using the branch line itself for bringing in construction materials (since it already exists as a freight line). Furthermore, a temporary freight siding could be provided for the transshipment of construction materials associated with the Fawley Waterside development.

In conclusion: we give our full backing to the low-cost scheme being proposed by Network Rail, and we are confident that enhancements will follow in the light of strong passenger growth and as funds permit.

You are assured of our continued support in seeing this project through to completion for the benefit of residents and businesses in the Waterside area.

Yours sincerely

Tony Smale

A D Smale
Railfuture
Secretary, Wessex Branch

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