

Focus on West Coastway

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Photo: GTR media

CHARLES BURNS R.I.P.

It is with great sadness that we report the death of Charles Burns, a former Secretary of Railfuture Wessex Branch and long-serving committee member.



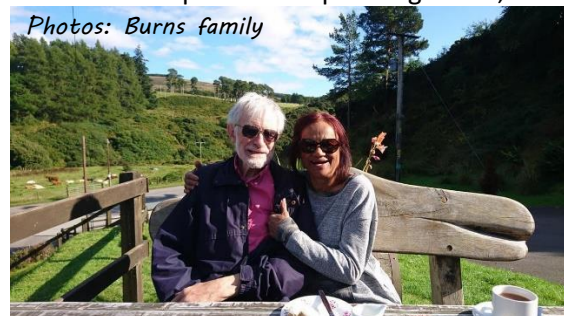
Charles had a varied career in the Civil Service, commuting to London by train. Before retiring, he ran a convenience store near Fratton station and was active in his local branch of the Federation of Small Businesses. One of his last reports to us was after he had represented the FSB on the Welborne Community Forum (the minutes say he put forward an alternative way of funding the proposed new station at Welborne).

On top of all that, he was also a Trustee of Portsmouth Street Pastors, and was often out giving a helping hand to late night revellers when most of us were tucked up in bed.

Charles was a strong campaigner and passionate supporter for rail and public transport in general, particularly in the Portsmouth area and the Isle of Wight. He was a follower of local politics and commerce and always had an eye for the detail many of us could miss. We will miss his wit and contributions.

The chairman of one of the many Portsmouth organisations that Charles was involved with said this by way of tribute: *“He provided the grease that made things happen. If the City stops working as a result of his death, it will not surprise many of us.”*

After we learnt of his death, Wessex Branch chair Mike Southgate sent a message of condolence to his wife, Betty, and to his daughter Allison Jane. [Charles had been instrumental in persuading Mike to stand as Chair of Wessex Branch ... twice!]



Photos: Burns family

Charles and Betty

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Chairman's Message



I hope you've had a good summer and managed to get out and about. There's been no shortage of issues to exercise the minds of your committee over the summer months, and here's a flavour of what we've been doing...

Proposed Ticket Office Closures - members of your committee made a significant contribution to the Railfuture response to the ticket office closure consultation. We also submitted our own specific comments about SWR's proposals whilst referencing the Railfuture document. We quoted many local examples of passenger assistance provided by ticket office staff at a number of our smaller stations. Our position is that we want to build on these good examples. Releasing staff from the confines of a physical ticket office should be a benefit to passengers, continuing to provide vital travel and ticket advice but also passenger assistance in other ways. Our primary concern notably for medium and smaller stations were the reduced hours the replacement service would be provided for. This would impact other facilities such as waiting room and toilet opening hours. We proposed that no change in hours should be made for the new arrangements, which should be implemented on a gradual basis. We await the outcome and hope common sense will prevail. The process has also illustrated the complexity of ticket arrangements available to passengers which are not always clear on TVMs or apps, notably split ticketing. Railfuture's national submission and our Wessex Branch response can both be found at <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/Ticket-Offices>

Waterloo Barriers - our campaign for common sense to prevail for rail card checks at Waterloo barriers continues. As a result of our intervention Transport Focus paid a visit to the barriers and some improvements have been made. However, I am told it is still a challenge to find a customer friendly member of the gateline staff to open gates speedily - queues then build up creating further delay. We have previously suggested posters alerting passengers to these checks and guiding them to the appropriate manual barrier, yet nothing has happened. Furthermore, I have never been asked to show my railcard during such checks, so what is the point? We believe that, for long distance services, ticket checks on the train remains the best option.

To encourage the use of rail, making it easy to get to and from the station easily is crucial. Therefore we are bewildered by the replacement of the taxi rank at Winchester Station by a pre-booked private hire arrangement. The traditional taxi rank has been moved to the other side but there is no signage to help passengers. The SWR website information for Winchester station says: *No, this station doesn't have a taxi rank.* Winchester is a key tourist destination, so how does this arrangement benefit rail passengers and encourage them to travel by train? Also at some stations 20-min parking zones now appear to be enforced by ANPR cameras which don't seem to take account of late running trains.

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Train Operator exchanges - We are fully aware that the DfT/Treasury are now in control and are strictly controlling railway expenditure. However, there appears to be a difference in approach between operators. All the data and feedback we receive confirms that post pandemic and passenger travelling patterns have changed. There is less need to attend an office either to work or for meetings. This has changed commuting patterns and the desire to get away at the weekend to have a break from working from home. We have recognised this by pushing for either reinstatement of the off peak timetable or producing a fresh timetable reflecting these changes.

As you will read in the longer article below, we welcome the consultation GTR have undertaken for recasting their West Coastway timetable and other services as well. Committee member Alan Mayes has been particularly involved reflecting the views of Railfuture Wessex into these discussions.



We have raised our disappointment that GWR are still not able to provide the largely four coach service they planned for this summer on the Portsmouth to Cardiff route.

They have quickly responded: they are aware of the problem which is caused by stock shortage and maintenance issues. There will be additional stock released from December; they are working on improved maintenance and with the DfT to provide extra units. They have agreed to look at ticket easements via Reading in certain circumstances when trains are cancelled. From December the Basingstoke

to Reading service is scheduled for three coach units. We received a presentation from GWR about how they are adding additional services throughout their network to reflect overcrowding and changed passenger needs. It's encouraging to see a TOC reacting to passenger demands and commercial opportunities.

XC has secured a new National Rail contract, which includes the hourly South Coast to Manchester service. We continue to express concern about the existing rolling stock and the lack of hybrid replacements, although again this is more a DfT issue. We have had a constructive response from Cross Country and are told there will be some extra services and units available from 2024, details to follow. We have suggested that ordinarily most services should be made up of five coach units and that any refurbishment of the Voyager Fleet should look to provide additional seating notably in the old cafe area of coach D.



South Western Railway

In "SWR land" progress has been slower, bit like their reinstatement of off peak services. We have finally received confirmation that the Salisbury services will once again run to and from Waterloo restoring a half hourly service (largely pursued by committee member Bruce Duncan on behalf of his local rail group SERUG). On the Portsmouth direct line SWR's second hourly service remains a slow service and does not make connections with the IoW Fastcat. We still have the ex Bournemouth/Poole to Waterloo terminating/starting from Winchester. This increases overall travel times for some passengers and reduces the number of services and connections to Basingstoke, Clapham Junction and Waterloo. This also removes the second fast service from Farnborough to Clapham Junction which was well used for leisure and business. Perhaps Hampshire and Dorset are not showing the same economic bounce back and desire for leisure as Wiltshire, Berkshire, Sussex and Kent? We will continue to pursue these matters with SWR including the speed up of Alton line services. If off peak passenger requirements and opportunities have changed, we have urged SWR to follow the example of other TOCs and recast the entire timetable rather than just dropping services.

Finally, we continue to support Nick Farthing and his team at Hampshire CRP in their efforts to get the Waterside line reopened. It's a shame we can't find a low cost option to provide a simple service just to demonstrate how popular it could become. We only have to look at other examples such as the Borders Railway in Scotland, the Okehampton Branch and our very own Chandlers Ford station where passenger numbers have all exceeded original predictions. There also appears to be concern about the impact the railway could have on other forms of public transport, the bus and ferry. We should be looking at how public and sustainable transport can work together to create a viable proposition to encourage a modal shift for road users.

Mike Southgate

===== NEWS FROM AROUND OUR REGION =====

Solent Transport Leads the Way

At the end of August, an announcement from the Dept. for Transport heralded the introduction of smarter travel apps that offer cheaper, safer and more accessible journeys across Britain. The DfT's new Mobility as a Service (MaaS) code of practice for app developers and companies aims to ensure they offer more streamlined journeys for travellers and commuters while ensuring the technology is accessible to all.

It's interesting to note that Solent Transport has been at the forefront of the development of a multi-operator ticketing scheme. Solent Transport's Breeze app allows people on the south coast to plan, book and pay for all journeys, including trains, buses, cycling, e-scooters and ferries. Breeze is proving popular across south Hampshire and the Isle of Wight with over 7,000 users in its first 10 months of operation.

West of England Line

Bruce Duncan, Chair of the Salisbury-Exeter Rail Users' Group, sent us this report:

After some very bad running, and with help now that the Class 158/9 units have no fuel issues, there are occasional signs of improvement in services, although they are in the minority ... but improving.

SWR responded to a "push" from SERUG to appoint a new Director with responsibility for this line (only). The silo approach does not work for the West of England line (WOE) as it does not fit into the SWR portfolio of electrified services - this has long term planning and investment issues for track, signalling and rolling stock. SWR responded by advertising for this role and are keeping us informed of progress. We have asked that the appointee has railway knowledge and experience, and that Network Rail are also involved - they are!

Bruce also laments that strikes, ticket office closures, and DfT interference have become the norm.

The West of England line is still running on a reduced timetable, with one train each hour in the off-peak starting and terminating at Salisbury instead of running through to Waterloo. Bruce says the resultant overcrowding on remaining services is getting worse. SERUG understandably wants to see progress towards restoring the full timetable. ...more at <https://sites.google.com/view/serug>

LATE NEWS: the full two-trains-per-hour service throughout the day between Waterloo and Salisbury (with one each hour extending to Exeter) is to be restored from December.

Island Line

Stuart George, Chair of IoW Bus and Rail Users Group, reports...

Efforts to achieve a reliable timetable are still continuing. With the addition of the passing loop at Brading (costing £1m), we were promised a regular half-hourly service running the whole length of the line between Shanklin and Ryde Pier Head. Instead we currently have an hourly service running between Shanklin and Ryde Pier Head which often fails to connect with the FastCat from Portsmouth, and an hourly service running between Shanklin and Ryde Esplanade, at intervals of 33 mins and 27 mins. There are strong hints that the clockface timetable will be abandoned in favour of a 40 min interval service with all trains running to Ryde Pier Head, but this compares unfavourably with the previous service (without the Brading loop!) of a 37/23 min interval.

Bus connections at Shanklin are appalling but the bus company can hardly be blamed for this with the Island Line timetable changing so frequently. But at least arrangements have been made so that onward journeys to Ventnor are now possible after the last train arrives at 22:14.

Freight Renaissance



Solent Stevedores has been named Business of the Year at the annual Rail Freight Group (RFG) Awards. The judges commended the company for the risks it had taken to steer the drive for rail freight growth at the Port of Southampton, attracting new services and leading a significant shift from road to rail. They said: "The company's £17.5m investment in a revamped rail terminal has involved lengthening and redesigning track and developing 12 acres of laden container storage space. This is the third major investment in the terminal in the last ten years and it has already increased daily capacity from five to eight rail freight services. This is now set to rise to 12 a day by the end of the year."

Meanwhile, it's reported that port operator **DP World** has launched a new programme in the UK to help cargo owners reduce their carbon emissions by shifting from road to rail. The Modal Shift Programme, which is being trialled at DP World's Southampton Logistics Hub, offers customers a financial incentive to move their imported goods off the road and onto rail. Southampton has traditionally moved more containers by rail than any other UK terminal.

Over the last few years however, there has been a gradual decline in rail share – a consequence of the wider nationwide challenges facing rail freight at present. Through the Modal Shift Programme DP World aim to increase the rail share up towards 40% by the end of 2025.

Robin's Freight Roundup

Robin Attwood sent us this summary of freight movements in the South:

- Eastleigh Yard - remains busy all day.
- Fareham and Botley Aggregates - regular traffic from Somerset quarries.
- Hamworthy Branch - although there is a regular pathway from Whatley, there is no service.
- Ludgershall MoD - very rare traffic despite pathways from Bicester and Kineton MoD, Mon – Fri.
- Marchwood MoD - occasional traffic from Bicester/ Kineton and So'ton W. Docks. Also empty coaching stock from Eastleigh for storage pending entry in to service.
- Micheldever Oil Sidings - used for Departmental trains.
- So'ton Docks - remains busy for boxes, automotive, gypsum and scrap but no cruise traffic.
- So'ton Eastern Docks - sees at least one train from Morris Cowley and return on Thurs/Fri and regularly Mon/Weds/Sat as well. Halewood traffic is infrequent.
- Winfrith Sidings - sees infrequent low-level radioactive waste to Crewe Coal Sidings.

Other News in Brief

Following the Shadow Cabinet reshuffle in September, the Shadow Minister of State for Rail is now **Stephen Morgan MP, the member for the Portsmouth South constituency**. Stephen was a guest speaker at the Railfuture Wessex Branch meeting in Portsmouth on 6 April 2019 – we recall that he showed a keen interest in all things rail and he took the time to stay and listen to our other speaker, and to answer questions.

Sheffield MP Louise Haigh remains the Shadow Transport Secretary. In the run up to the next general election, Railfuture will be in contact with all political parties, including the Labour Party, on rail policy issues.

At a public meeting of the Boscombe Forum in September, representatives of Network Rail and SWR gave an assurance that progress was being made on the project to install lifts at **Pokesdown station**. They said that some associated upgrade works were already under way, and plans for the new lift shafts will be presented by November. If the cost comes within the £5.7m budget, the design will be finalised and made ready some time next year. Work will then commence with completion expected for mid 2025. But that's a full eight years after SWR gave a commitment to install the lifts in their franchise agreement!

Swanage Railway report that, from an operational point of view, the trial service this summer between Swanage and Wareham using their heritage diesel unit was very successful. However, in view of the cost of hiring in West Coast personnel with the necessary main-line accreditation and the eye-watering insurance premium demanded by Network Rail, SR is unlikely to see a profit and could not contemplate repeating the operation without subsidy. They've applied to the Dept. for Transport for funding under the Restoring Your Railway scheme, and they had constructive talks with the Rail Minister and with the CEOs of both Network Rail and SWR during their visits to the line during the summer season. So, fingers crossed for a positive outcome which will secure the service for future years!



Photo: Purbeck CRP

Network Rail CEO Andrew Haines (centre) meets SR managers and volunteers at Wareham station

A key proposal of Network Rail's **Dorset Connectivity Study** is the implementation of a 'Dorset Metro' service, the idea behind which is to provide better connectivity from rural Dorset into Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) conurbation through several service changes. These changes included new shuttle services between Wareham and Brockenhurst in addition to extensions to current services to Wareham (Poole terminating service). A Draft Report has been produced by Network Rail and will be shared with stakeholders.

Restoration of a public right of way to Poole Harbour foreshore is underway at **Holton Heath**. The footpath, to be known as "Cordite Way", will start from the trading estate on the north side of Holton Heath station and cross the main line on a replacement footbridge. From here, it will follow the course of the former

military branch line to Rockley Jetty, where cordite was once loaded onto barges for use in naval shell production. Cordite production began at Holton Heath during WWI and production ceased in 1957.

It's payout time for the latest round of grants from SWR's **Customers and Communities Improvement Fund**. One project in Dorset has already benefitted from the fund: the forecourt remodelling at Weymouth station. There's money for eight projects on the Isle of Wight, one of the largest being improvements to passenger facilities at Smallbrook Junction. Nineteen projects in Hampshire receive grants totalling £500,000, ranging from a pocket park at Fratton to a bicycle-repair workshop in Basingstoke.

...and finally...

Congratulations to **Hampshire Community Rail Partnership** on winning the "Outstanding Contribution to Society" award at the National Rail Awards held at the Grosvenor House Hotel, London on 14th September. Hampshire CRP Chair, Nick Farthing (pictured), was on stage to receive the award. As many of you will know, Nick is a Railfuture activist and former Chair of Wessex Branch.

SWR's manager Claire Mann said "Hampshire CRP thoroughly deserve their award following the years of dedication to the many local communities they work with, and the fantastic work they have done to give old station buildings a new lease of life and inspire more people to travel on our network."

Whatever happened to the 7 day railway?

Older readers will recall a time when the passenger railway did operate on a 7 day per week basis. It was a time when of course there were more diversionary routes, most maintenance and renewal activity work was carried out whilst trains ran with single line working, and most work was done by human muscle, not big yellow machines. There is no doubt that the safety record of this activity was well below what is expected in today's world and it was very labour intensive. However, for rail users it was a long forgotten golden age: the advertised timetable ran every day.

Move to the 1970's and mechanisation of track maintenance and renewals (and associated work) had really become the norm. The standard weekend possession was then 28 hours from 23.59 Saturday night to 04.00 Monday morning, so Sunday became increasingly a "substitute bus service day", but importantly, not Saturday. Because of the laborious way we take and give up track possessions in Britain (in contrast to many other railways around the world) engineers quickly understood that you got more productive time as a proportion of the total, if possessions were longer and gradually the standard weekend possession grew to 52 hours, normally 23.59 Friday to 04.00 Monday. So increasingly Saturday became a second day of the week where bus substitution was frequent. However, in the "joined up" railway before privatisation, the revenue impact of longer possessions was understood and on Inter-City routes weekend possessions finished at 14.00 on Sunday to cater for the growing importance of the weekend leisure market. In other words, there was a balance struck between the need to get work done, and the revenue impact caused by closing the railway.

Fast forward to today's railway. We are now increasingly moving to a "zero day" railway. In our own local Wessex area this Autumn we have engineering work over periods of 10 days, two weekends and the whole intervening week, on the Portsmouth Direct line, on the Salisbury Exeter line and on the Bristol Weymouth line. The impact of this on people who need to go to work or school/college cannot be overstated. So how has the rail industry arrived in this situation where rail users (i.e. the people who pay for the rail industry) are the last consideration?

We now have the crazy situation in Britain where nobody is responsible for the "bottom line" of the rail business. Network Rail are under pressure to achieve what the ORR calls "efficiency savings". One obvious way to do this is to use labour and plant more effectively on a 7 day per week basis. So, if we close the railway more often for longer we can deliver unit cost savings. Well done Network Rail, "gold star".

TOC's (not what they are called now but everybody knows what that means) have contracts where essentially they have no revenue risk, so in terms of their bottom line they actually don't care whether passengers choose to travel or not. So TOC's do not challenge N.R. when they propose to take these extended possessions as there is no financial downside for them or their shareholders.

This situation is a direct result of an industry structure created by government and until it changes and brings back together revenue and cost in one set of accounts at a devolved level, nothing will change. Railfuture and others have been on this issue now ever since the start of Covid. Any normal business looks after its customers. Despite all the warm words this simple truth does not seem to apply to the railway.

- *Stewart Palmer, Railfuture Vice President, former Board member and life-long railwayman.*

===== FOCUS ON WEST COASTWAY =====

Proposed Changes to West Coastway Timetable

Govia Thameslink Railway published their draft proposals for changes to Southern services on the West Coastway route from 2024, including services from Southampton or Portsmouth to Brighton, Littlehampton or London Victoria. GTR's aim is to improve reliability, especially over longer distances, and to provide additional capacity.

Their consultation period which ran until 27th September provided Railfuture with an opportunity to discuss the changes with a GTR representative at a special meeting held in Brighton, and to submit detailed comments. Alan Mayes represented Wessex Branch at the Brighton meeting and has since sent our comments to Neil Middleton of London & South East Branch, who coordinated the Railfuture response.

The main proposal affecting our end of the Coastway route is to construct a more regular service pattern, with half-hourly trains between Southampton and Brighton, and between Portsmouth and Victoria, instead of the current pattern whereby alternate trains from Southampton (or from Portsmouth) go to Brighton or to Victoria. The obvious drawback would be that Southampton will lose its hourly direct service to Gatwick Airport and Victoria (and Portsmouth will lose its direct connection to Brighton, although passengers will be able to join at Cosham or Havant). We can see that this makes for a more resilient timetable, not the least because there will be extra time to turn services around at Southampton and Portsmouth.

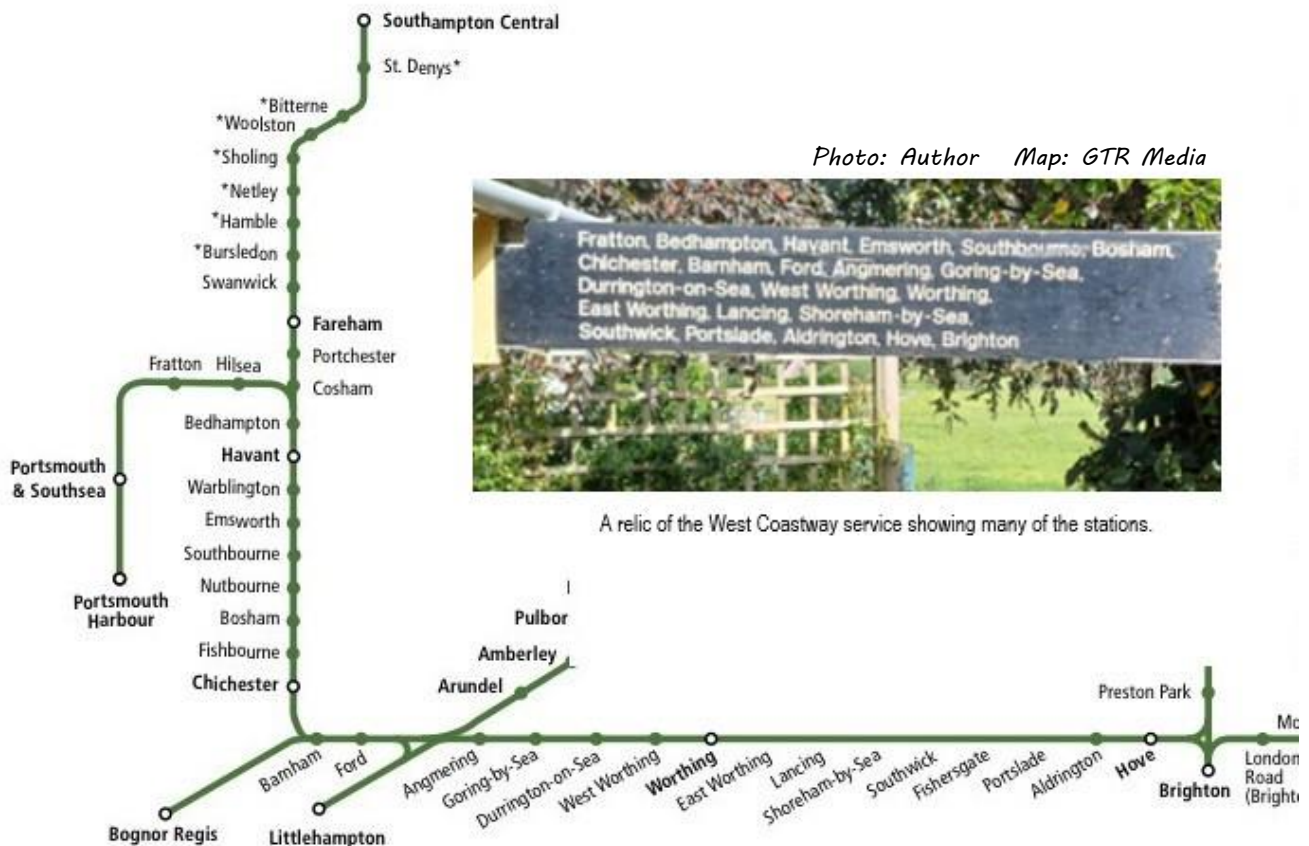
There are other positive aspects to the proposals, such as adding a station stop at Woolston (which has a good bus interchange), and enabling all "Pompey" trains to terminate at the Harbour station instead of some stopping short at Portsmouth and Southsea. Obviously, there will be a lot more people having to change trains at somewhere like Barnham, and we expressed concern that some connections will involve fairly long waits of up to 25 minutes. There is also general disappointment that GTR has no ambition to improve the sparse Sunday timetable.

- You can see the full details of GTR's West Coastway proposals here: <https://www.southernrailway.com/about-us/our-commitments/west-coastway-timetable-changes>
- Railfuture's combined response to GTR's consultation is here (under "Train Operating Companies"): <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/Consultation+responses>

The West Coastway Conundrum

Govia Thameslink Railway's latest attempts to fine-tune the West Coastway timetable highlight once again the difficult balancing-act between serving all stations on the two-track route (37 in total from Brighton to Southampton) while minimising end-to-end journey times.

The population densities along the Sussex coast and in the Solent region undoubtedly justify a "metro" level of service, with stopping trains at least every 20 minutes. But that simply isn't possible on a railway which also seeks to whisk passengers from coastal towns to London and between major centres along the coast. We generously refer to the Southampton-Brighton service as "semi-fast", but even those trains take a leisurely 1hr 55min to complete a journey of just 55 miles.



Some timetabling considerations: Planners need to allow a time penalty of up three minutes for every additional station call – that's time to decelerate, come to a stand, then accelerate back up to line speed. So, if a stopping train is sandwiched between two semi-fasts 15 minutes apart, it only has time to make four or five stops before the following semi-fast is snapping at its heels.

One way to increase throughput is to run several "fasts" in succession then allow a 30-minute gap each hour for stopping trains. But that doesn't give urban stations anything like a "metro" level of service, and it also means long gaps between "fast" trains at the major stations. In any case, trains originating from London face a myriad of timetabling constraints before they present themselves on the Coastway route, so the chance of optimising the fast/slow mix remains slim.

And that's not all. Other problems on the route include: the large number of level crossings, an inadequate power supply to support additional services and some short platforms which need lengthening.

So, what's to be done?

Firstly Network Rail needs to upgrade the signalling with a view to shortening signal sections, especially on the line via Netley, thus allowing train frequencies to be increased.

A second, rather more controversial step would be to assess whether some of the least used stations on the Coastway route are still worth serving. Bedhampton and Warblington are each only 15 minutes' walk from Havant station which has a far superior train service. Network Rail's West Sussex Connectivity study of 2020 includes the option of closing Warblington along with some other low-footfall stations further east. Could users of Bedhampton and Warblington be persuaded to use Havant station instead?

The next intervention to consider is the provision of additional places where fast trains can overtake slow. Currently, this is only possible at Hove, Worthing and Barnham (each has 3 platforms). Network Rail suggests providing a third through platform at Fareham by extending the track that currently terminates in platform 2, although they admit that this would probably involve a rebuild of the road bridge just to the south of the station. Havant is another obvious contender as there appears to be space through the middle to add a third track and platform. In an ideal world, major stations would all have four platform faces to accommodate slow up/down and fast up/down trains. Where space is tight, there may be the possibility of an unconventional station layout, for example: a double-length platform with turnouts half way along onto a through track (as Bournemouth platforms 3 & 4).

Another way to shunt a slow train aside is through the provision of a turnback siding as at West Worthing. This has obvious operational constraints, but could be useful at places where additional stopping services might usefully terminate such as from the west into Chichester. Of course, the branch lines off to Bognor Regis and Littlehampton are effectively long turnback sidings where trains divert away from the main Coastway route.

Additional passing loops and turnback sidings would certainly give more flexibility for timetable planners and improve operational resilience, but stopping trains would be subject to inefficient layovers. There's no getting away from the conclusion that the only satisfactory way to speed up fast services and accommodate metro-style all station trains is to upgrade the route to a four-track railway. That would be hugely expensive and unacceptable in densely-populated areas, but long dynamic passing loops could be contemplated in more rural locations such as either side of Barnham. One idea that has been suggested for our end of West Coastway is to divert all fasts onto the line via Botley and use the Netley route for stopping trains. But that can't be achieved without considerable costs: the single-track section between Fareham and Botley would need to be re-doubled (perhaps with the sole exception of Fareham Tunnel), there would need to be an east-to-south chord at Eastleigh, and we're told it can't be done without additional tracks on the main line southwards through Southampton Parkway.

Transport for the South East (TfSE) has suggested a cross-Itchen rail tunnel from central Southampton to Woolston. Well, good luck with getting that into Network Rail's yet-to-be-published investment pipeline! In any case it would do nothing to solve the fast/slow mix on the two-track railway stretching away to the east.

Looking to the future

Network Rail in conjunction with TfSE continues to develop its recommendations for upgrades to the West Coastway route. The section between Southampton and Havant is covered by NR's Solent Connectivity study, and Havant to Brighton by their West Sussex Connectivity study. A stated medium-term aspiration is the move toward a consistent two-minute headway and 90 mph line speed to reduce journey times and potentially improve service frequencies – this is likely to be consequent on the introduction of digital (in-cab) signalling.

At Railfuture, we need to maintain our long-term vision of a “Solent Metro” with frequent services on all routes in south Hampshire. We would like to see the restoration of some of our lost “inter-city” connections such as direct trains from Brighton to Bristol and to the South West. But for the present, we need to ensure that GTR's West Coastway service is the best that can be achieved with the resources to hand, and that it adequately meets the needs of rail users.

- Tony Smale

Decarbonised Future for the Waterside Line?

If and when a passenger service is re-introduced on the branch line to Hythe, it's likely to be with diesel units like the Class 158s used on the "Romsey Rocket" (Romsey-Eastleigh-Southampton-Salisbury) service. But



with the development of battery-electric multiple units (BEMUs) progressing rapidly, it should be possible to decarbonise the operation soon after the service has been established.

For the latest technology, we look to GWR's trials with their ex-Vivarail Class 230 D-trains (similar to the one pictured here) on the 2-mile branch line between West Ealing and Greenford. For the latest developments, watch this video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5izy_ZU986g

Using fast-charge technology, their demonstration train with a range of 45 miles can be fully charged in 5 minutes – but the technology doesn't come cheap. At the charge station, you need a pair of special rails between the track that only become live when a compliant train is correctly positioned above. Furthermore, to supply the high current needed, you need a lineside bank of batteries which are themselves trickle charged from the local power supply.

It's not unlike the early days of the railway when steam trains rapid-charged their water tanks from a lineside water tower. A hosepipe from an outside tap would take far too long!

The situation on the Waterside Line is somewhat different, and fast charging may not be necessary. About one third of the ten-mile route between Hythe and Southampton is along 3rd-rail electrified line where slow charging of the batteries would be possible. Layover time at Southampton would provide a further opportunity for charging. Moreover, the 3rd-rail electric elements of a D-Train, namely the pick-up shoe and motors, have already been developed for our Island Line trains.

A sensible addition would be a short section of 3rd rail at Hythe to top up the batteries during layover there. However, the supply to the rail may have to be interlocked to the arrival of the train if permanently-energised rail is prohibited for safety reasons. We can argue that it's no different from the electrified 3rd rail on the main line, but the outcome will depend on how strictly the Rail Safety and Standards Board applies their moratorium on new 3rd rail schemes.

With a successful introduction of BEMU technology on the Waterside Line, we could look forward to the swift decarbonisation of other routes. An obvious candidate is the Romsey Rocket, which would integrate well with the Waterside Line to provide a cross-city service from Romsey to Hythe via Eastleigh, perhaps supplemented by a new service between Fareham and Salisbury.

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