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Railfuture response to Gloucestershire Rail Study Report (LTP Consultation)

These comments are in addition to those I made yesterday in the electronic Survey in response to the Draft Freight and Draft Rail Strategies.

1. Whilst there is much in the Report which Railfuture would support, it is very largely a defence of the status quo and appears to take its cue from Network Rail's Western Route Study. Presumably this is why the Rail Study Report favours electrification from Swindon to Kemble only, despite the much larger populations served by Stroud, Gloucester and Cheltenham stations; by contrast, it supports electrification of the whole North Cotswolds line, which serves a smaller intermediate population than Swindon-Cheltenham. The Report's conclusions could be summed up as "a bit more of the same".
2. We welcome the Report's examination of the strengths and weaknesses of existing stations, with a view to improving access, facilities and service frequencies. We were represented at two of the recent Station Development Plan meetings (for Cam & Dursley and Ashchurch for Tewkesbury stations) which invited feedback on how to make stations more relevant to their localities. We strongly support the County Council's efforts to overcome factors which inhibit greater use of the stations. In some cases these are problems of success, such as parking space at Kemble. We are therefore pleased to see that 330 additional spaces are to be created near the station.
3. The strengths and weaknesses of individual train service routes (eg Cheltenham-Paddington, Great Malvern- Bristol) need to be examined more critically with a view to upgrading them, not just increasing frequency. We would favour a serious revision of train services, as follows:
 - (a) Gloucester (pop. 122,000 in 2011) deserves faster trains to Bristol and beyond. It is unacceptable that it should have little more than a local stopping service, often formed of only two vehicles, to the regional capital. The Report failed to consider either a semi-fast service or reinstatement of stops by Cross Country. If MetroWest were extended to Gloucester (which we would support), there would be a case for half-hourly trains to

call alternately at the smaller intermediate stations. Skip stopping (at either Lydney or Chepstow) is already employed on some Cardiff- Nottingham trains (see (d) below).

(b) We hope the proposed hourly service between Cheltenham, Gloucester and Paddington will provide later services than at present, as the current final connection (from 22.15 SX, 21.30 SO Paddington) is too early for people returning from concerts and plays in the capital.

(c) Further redoubling on the North Cotswold Line would allow a more frequent Worcester- Paddington service. Better connectivity at Worcester between this route and Great Malvern- Bristol could be achieved with an hourly service on the latter following the cascade of rolling stock from the Thames Valley. This would also meet aspirations for hourly trains at Ashchurch for Tewkesbury.

(d) The Gloucester- South Wales route needs a major revision. The existing Cheltenham- Maesteg service operated by Arriva Trains Wales needs better rolling stock and could serve an additional station in the Newnham area to cater for Cinderford and the eastern Forest. The Cross Country Cardiff- Nottingham service should be extended to York to transform long distance travel between Gloucester and the North of England.

4. We must point out the inconsistent use of data in Section 3.1.4 (Growth around Stations), particularly for the five possible new stations, which is carried into Section 5. The forecasts of population growth used to calculate Benefit Cost Ratios have created an unfair bias in favour of Charfield because the Report has applied housing growth for the whole South Gloucestershire unitary area, most of which would be on the northern fringes of Bristol. By contrast, the BCRs for the other four potential stations are based only on growth in their immediate localities, eg one development to the west of Stonehouse has been factored into the BCR for Stonehouse Bristol Road, even though the station would link the Stroud and Stonehouse urban areas more directly with Bristol.

5. The methodology in Sections 5 and 6 used for forecasting demand at stations is not presented in a way that is easy for lay persons to understand. It would appear that the marginal cost of accidents and air pollution has been calculated as a disbenefit of a new station. Surely the whole point of additional stations is to reduce dependency on cars and hence the incidence of road accidents and pollution ?

6. Loss of fuel duty as a result of passengers transferring from car to rail used to be a key element in the DfT's New Approach to Transport Appraisal until 2009. This perverse incentive not to improve the railways had meant that the more likely a scheme was to attract people from their cars, the greater was its perceived disbenefit to the Treasury. It is good to read (6.2.3) that such a bizarre approach to transport policy was not taken into account in the Rail Study's calculations but disturbing to see that it would be in any detailed Business Cases for stations. We would prefer to see a case

made on the basis of proven local experience, ie the growth in usage of reopened stations in or near Gloucestershire.

7. Specific points

2.8.5 We agree with Cotswold Line Promotion Group that skip stopping by an enhanced North Cotswold Line service could make a reopened Chipping Campden station viable. We support reopening of Honeybourne- Stratford-upon-Avon as a step towards eventual complete reopening of the Cheltenham- Stratford route linking major centres of tourism.

3.1.3 Ashchurch station is about 1 ¾ miles from the centre of Tewkesbury, not one mile as stated, but buses do now enter the station forecourt following a revision of Service 41 in November 2015.

3.1.4 Lydney also has three direct trains to Birmingham and/or Nottingham in the afternoons and evenings.

4.3 Upgrading the freight loops at Haresfield and Charfield for passenger trains would enable expresses to overtake trains serving Hunts Grove, Stonehouse Bristol Road and Charfield.

6.6.3 The implication that a station at Stonehouse Bristol Road is unnecessary because “Cam & Dursley is only a 15 minute drive on uncongested local roads” ignores the current pressure on parking at Cam & Dursley, where the station car park is often full at 08.00. It is also at odds with the LTP strategy of encouraging sustainable access to stations, something far more easily achievable at Stonehouse Bristol Road because of existing bus routes serving Stonehouse and Stroud. Very few bus services call at Cam & Dursley. The comment that a train operator would not favour calling at both Cam & Dursley and Stonehouse Bristol Road is a red herring. A half-hourly service provided by an extension of MetroWest would allow skip stopping if necessary.

Yours sincerely,

Nigel Bray,
Hon. Secretary, Railfuture Severnside.