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please reply to:

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Dear GTR,

West Coastway timetable proposals

Railfuture is Britain's leading, longest-established, independent national 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 transport and development planning.

This consultation response is on behalf of the two regional branches of our organisation - London & South East and Wessex - which have a direct interest in your proposals. We welcome the re-designed timetable with its re-allocation of more-or-less finite resources which these proposals represent. We are pleased to acknowledge that they are based on the successful approach adopted for development of the East Coastway / MarshLink timetable, not just most recently with the May 2023 timetable changes but going further back to the innovative and highly-successful 2018 East Coastway / MarshLink formulation, based on strong and detailed stakeholder engagement with local rail user groups in particular.

On the West Coastway proposals more specifically, we support the proposed Monday to Saturday timetable change to half-hourly services at even 30-minute intervals between Southampton Central and Brighton and between Portsmouth Harbour via Gatwick Airport and London Victoria. Longer turn-around times at Portsmouth Harbour and at Southampton Central will, we trust, mean that the services will operate more punctually and reliably. The regular 30-minute intervals between services will in our view be better for passengers, especially those connecting at Southampton Central to and from west of Southampton and for Gosport and Isle of Wight passengers connecting at Portsmouth Harbour.

Although the downside is that there will no longer be direct trains between Southampton Central and Gatwick Airport, which are also used by passengers connecting at Fareham and others connecting at Southampton Central from and to places west of Southampton, we nevertheless support the proposed timetable change as the current direct hourly service between London Victoria and Southampton Central via Gatwick Airport is not as punctual as it should be, sometimes resulting in curtailments short of the final destination. We accept that passengers will still be able to travel between Southampton Central and Gatwick Airport, by changing at Barnham. We hope that in due course it will become possible to restore some direct train services between Gatwick Airport and Southampton Central, as airport passengers are known to be more deterred than others by enforced changes en route.

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www.railwatch.org.uk



Railfuture welcomes the extension of all London Victoria-Portsmouth services to Portsmouth Harbour station as this will provide a far better service for passengers connecting at Portsmouth Harbour with the ferries to and from Gosport and the Isle of Wight. We also welcome the Portsmouth Harbour services calls at Hilsea, and the Southampton Central services calls at Woolston, both made possible by the longer turnaround times at Portsmouth Harbour and at Southampton Central. We note that passengers travelling between Brighton and the Portsmouth area will be able to use the half-hourly Brighton-Southampton services at Cosham station which is in north Portsmouth, as well as at Havant station. Interchanges between the Brighton-Southampton and London Victoria-Gatwick Airport-Portsmouth trains at Barnham would however work better we feel if the connection times between these trains at Barnham could be more balanced.

We are particularly pleased to see the proposed re-balancing and simplification of West Coastway services in and out of Brighton, responding to changing patterns of passenger demand in the new post-pandemic world. Reduced journey times in a regular service pattern between two of the South Coast's principal economic hubs - at Brighton and Southampton - are vital ingredients in realising the improved connectivity considered in Network Rail's Spring 2020 Modular Strategic Study "West Sussex Connectivity" and in Transport for the South East's Transport Strategy and Strategic Investment Plan.

Railfuture would very much like to see improvements to West Coastway, and East Coastway / MarshLink, Sunday timetables especially as they serve an area heavily dependent on its visitor economy and in a post-pandemic era of revitalised leisure rail travel, so that a more consistent service offer is available across the whole week and rail could thereby continue to grow its market share. We understand however that modernisation of some working practices will first be required.

Thank you for the opportunity to engage with and contribute to this evolution of the rail service to support the future of the economies and communities along the West Coastway.

Yours faithfully,

Roger Blake BA, MRTPI (Rtd), MTPS
Railfuture
Vice-Chair, London & South East regional branch
National Board liaison Director, Wessex regional branch