Connecting Communities:
framework assessment of new station opportunities on Western Route

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CONTENTS

Executive summary

Many opportunities have been identified for new stations at various locations across Western Route, including through submissions to the Restoring your Railway programme.

Assessment of opportunities typically follows a bespoke process, with each opportunity reviewed in isolation. Insights emerging from the data generated for the Restoring your Railway programme provide the opportunity for a consistent and integrated approach.

This report develops a framework for assessing new station opportunities at a strategic level, and applies this framework to the largest population clusters without stations on Western Route.

The report is intended to inform future strategic advice and engagement with third parties on new station proposals. The framework created can be used to assess any new proposals to provide a high-level, comparable assessment. It does not imply Network Rail support, or lack of support, for any particular opportunity.

The largest population clusters greater than 5 kilometres from a railway station are assessed against categories resulting in a score for 'strategic case' and 'likely complexity'. A ranking for each population cluster is presented, representing the strength of the opportunities relative to one another.

Case studies are presented for each of the five highest scoring clusters:

- Plympton, Devon
- Corsham, Wiltshire
- South of Gloucester, Gloucestershire
- Royal Wootton Bassett, Wiltshire
- Bideford, Devon

The case studies describe the scoring for each of the categories, including analysis of previous development work undertaken and a description of challenges and strategic alignment. Case studies were consulted with local stakeholders to augment the information available and understand the strategic fit of any development of this work.

This report concludes this workstream, which does not include recommendation of further actions or development of specific interventions for any of the population clusters identified. Instead, this report and the framework developed is intended to inform discussions with third parties considering investment in the rail network to address strategic transport issues.

Purpose of this document

In January 2020 the Department for Transport (DfT) launched the Restoring your Railway (RyR) programme to reopen former stations and railways. Promoters were invited to submit ideas for funding under the programme. Submissions were assessed by the DfT-led RyR programme team using a range of quantitative and qualitative measures, which yielded a large dataset offering insight into population clusters lacking connection to the national rail network. This document makes use of that dataset and considers the 29 largest clusters on Western Route for their potential suitability for further investigation.

The document does not represent a recommendation to progress development of any of the findings and does not indicate Network Rail support for any referenced new stations. Rather, it is intended to inform discussions with third parties considering investment in the rail network to address strategic transport issues.

This document aims to:

- Create a common framework to assess new station opportunities at a high level on the basis of connectivity benefit and likely complexity
- Establish a high-level position on the relative status of the new station opportunities on Western Route identified by the RyR programme population cluster analysis
- Consider the key features of the highest-scoring new station opportunities through case studies.

This document is split into three sections:

1. An account of the method by which unconnected clusters are ranked
2. Lists of the unconnected clusters and the ranking scores
3. Case studies for the five highest ranked unconnected clusters

Introduction

There is a, now centuries-old, recognition that connection to the rail network has a role in growing prosperity and improving social mobility. Rail sits alongside other modes to deliver these agglomeration benefits and has particular advantages in the ability to travel large volumes of people long distances, at high speeds, and into urban areas.

However, railways can have higher capital and operating costs than other surface transport modes, and there are competing demands for finite system capacity, and opportunity costs associated with new services or new stops in existing services.

As such, new stations and lines must surpass revenue and economic impact thresholds, and they must be compared to the impacts of alternative options. There are many instances where a new station or line may be beneficial but is likely not efficient, where rail is not the right mode for the majority of journeys being made, or where improving existing connections to the railway is likely to provide a more beneficial outcome.

This study takes an objective approach to identify where communities that are currently unconnected, or only poorly connected to the railway network could benefit from new stations. This includes - but is not limited to - areas where stations and access to the rail network were subject to the Beeching cuts in the 1960s and subsequent closures.

Opportunities are ranked relative to each other. They are not assessed against a pre-determined threshold such as a positive benefit-cost ratio. It may be that some, few or none of these stations could deliver sufficient value for money to cover both their capital and operational costs over the relevant appraisal period.

New stations must also be affordable against funder priorities and obligations. Recent new stations have contained elements of third party funding, reflecting the benefits conferred on these third parties. The high level view of the promise the identified opportunities show will inform conversations with potential funders and provides a platform for future strategic advice to stakeholders.

Background

The RyR programme team – led by DfT and including Network Rail - created a dataset detailing 'unconnected clusters' and potential future markets for the railway to serve. A settlement or population cluster was included where the total population within a connected settlement cluster living more than 5km away from a railway station was greater than 10,000 people. This dataset included the names of towns and villages included within a cluster, population cluster size and a nationwide ranking based upon this.

Of the hundreds of clusters identified nationally 29 are on, or closest to the infrastructure of, Western Route. Five of these – Cowley Branch Line, Oxfordshire; Wellington station, Somerset; Cullompton station, Devon; Portishead Branch Line, Bristol and Tavistock station, Devon – are already subject to advanced business case development (at least Outline Business Case (OBC)) led by or involving Network Rail. A sixth – Devizes station, Wiltshire – has recently been subject to detailed industry-led business case development.

These six projects were included in the framework for reference and to help guide the weightings and percentiles calculated for each category. However, they were not considered for case studies to avoid work duplication and to ensure new information and opportunities were being identified.

Method

This work is based on the RyR programme unconnected clusters dataset, which was further developed in agreement and collaboration with the RyR programme team as follows:

1. RyR dataset filtered to Western Route populations clusters only;
2. Common assessment framework developed and applied, using data provided from previous RyR programme team Economic Analysis work, augmented by strategic analysis.
3. Potential locations of new stations identified using online data and mapping software to understand the geographic, transport, and population characteristics of the area it might serve.
4. Infrastructure and train service requirements assessed, including fit with the current network, including workshop with industry experts to review findings and yield additional insights
5. Initial scores against two summary categories of *strategic case* and *likely complexity*, with individual categories weighted;
6. Final scores and ranking of the 29 clusters after review and agreement with wider industry audience;
7. Case studies created for the five highest-scoring opportunities (that are not currently subject to business case development by Network Rail), in discussion with expert local stakeholders;
8. Final overview report completed, including case studies.

Feasibility Categories

Feasibility is considered under two principal categories. The first focuses on the strategic case for connection to the network, the second on the likely complexity of connection – in terms of provision of both required infrastructure and a train service. The strategic case assessment uses the quantitative data provided – specific to the clusters – by the RyR programme team. Both principal categories use qualitative insights provided by consulted experts.

Table 1 describes the full list of categories and how they score. Individual categories are weighted to reflect their importance to a potential station opportunity.

Category Name	Description	Rationale	Scoring
Strategic case categories			
Population	Population of the cluster identified, using ONS 2019 data	Directly influences the size of the potential market for rail	1-10 (Percentiles High-Low)
Employment	Number of people within the cluster identified who are employed, using ONS 2019 data	Influences the size of the potential commuter and business market for rail	1-10 (Percentiles High-Low)
Unemployment Rate	Unemployment rate of the population within the cluster identified, using ONS 2019 data	Influences the potential social mobility impact	1-10 (Percentiles High-Low)
Public Transport Usage	Proportion of the cluster identified who said that they use public transport to travel to work, using 2011 Travel to Work Census data	Indicates the propensity of the local population to use public transport	1-10 (Percentiles High-Low)
Index of Multiple Deprivation	The Index of Multiple Deprivation for the cluster identified, based on 2019 IMD data	Influences the potential social mobility impact	1-10 (Percentiles Low-High)
Features in Network Rail Strategic Study	Reflects if the cluster is in the same area as a new station opportunity identified in a current or previous Network Rail Strategic Study	Demonstrates strategic alignment with current rail industry strategic plans	0 – No 1 - Yes
Nationally Significant Attractor	Reflects if the cluster is in the same area as a popular attraction or tourist hotspot	Indicates a specific market for rail not apparent in other categories	0 – No 1 - Yes
Improves Access to Regional Hub	Reflects the degree of improvement to journeys to/from regional hub, based on approximations of Generalised Journey Time.	Indicates the likely desirability of a rail service	0 – No Improvement 1 – Regional hub access via interchange at station with <2tph 2 – Regional hub accessed via interchange at station with 2tph+ 3 – Direct access to regional hub

Likely complexity categories			
Service Requirements	Assumption on how the service will be provided	Recognises the operational and opportunity costs of a new service	0 – Call in current service 1 – Extension of current service 2 – New strategically recommended service 3 – New specific service
Track Requirements	Assumed scope of any new track required, multiplied by an approximation of distance	Recognises capital cost of new infrastructure, using track as a proxy for all assets	0 – No new track required 1 – Upgrade of heritage/freight line 2 – Part upgrade/part new line 3 – New line required Multiplied by: 1 - <5km 2 – 5-10km 3 – >10km
Station Requirements	Assumed scope of new stations required, multiplied by the assumed number of stations	Recognises capital cost of new stations, including delivery impact, and operational costs	0 – Upgrade of old station 1 – Simple 1 platform station 2 – 2 platform station 3 – Complex station Multiplied by: Number of stations

Table 1: Description of categories used in assessment

As an example, the population cluster around Calne, Wiltshire would require a new specific service (scoring 3), <5km of new track (scoring 3) and one simple one platform station (scoring 1). When multiplying each of these by the agreed weighting of 5 you get the likely complexity score of -35. With regards to the strategic case categories *not* provided by the RyR programme team: a station at Calne does not feature in any Network Rail Strategic Studies (scoring 0), would not serve any significant attractions or tourism hotspots (scoring 0), and would improve access to regional hubs at Bristol and Swindon by interchange at Chippenham – which has a minimum of two trains per hour to these hubs (scoring 2). When combined with the previous data this results in a strategic case score of 36 for Calne.

Clusters

The 29 largest unconnected clusters, with the high-level, untested, assumptions of service and infrastructure interventions required, on Western Route are shown in Table 2:

National cluster size ranking	Cluster name	Assumed service	Assumed infrastructure
18	Plymouth: Plympton	Stop in current Cardiff - Penzance	New 2 platform station
19	West Oxfordshire: Witney	Stop in new Oxford - Witney	New 1 platform station and new line from North Cots Line to Witney
20	Torridge: Bideford, Northam	Extension of Exeter Central – Barnstaple to Bideford	New 1 platform station and new line from Barnstaple to Bideford
37	MENDIP: Street Village, Glastonbury Town, Glastonbury West & Street South,	Stop in new Highbridge & Burnham - Glastonbury	New 1 platform station and new line from Highbridge & Burnham - Glastonbury
38	TEWKESBURY: CHELTENHAM: Bishop's Cleeve, Prestbury & Racecourse, Cleeve Hill, Gotherington & Apperley,	Extension of Maesteg - Cheltenham along GWSR	Reconnection to GWSR and upgrade of heritage line and station(s)
43	WILTSHIRE: Calne South, Derry Hill & Hilmarton, Calne North,	Stop in new Calne - Chippenham	New 1 platform station and new line from Calne to Chippenham
45	WEST OXFORDSHIRE: Carterton South, Carterton North, Burford & Brize Norton,	Stop in new Oxford – Carterton via Witney	New 1 platform station and new line from North Cots/Witney to Carterton
46	MID DEVON: Tiverton East, Tiverton North & Outer, Tiverton West,	Stop in new Tiverton - Tiverton Parkway	New 1 platform station and new line from Tiverton to Tiverton Parkway
48	STROUD: GLOUCESTER: Upton St Leonards & Hardwicke, Quedgeley North, Quedgeley South,	Stop in current Gloucester - Westbury	New 2 platform station
53	WILTSHIRE: Royal Wootton Bassett Outer & Lyneham, Royal Wootton Bassett Town,	Stop in Swindon - Westbury	New 2 platform station
54	NORTH SOMERSET: Clevedon Central, Clevedon North & Walton,	Stop in new Yatton - Clevedon	New 1 platform station and new line from Yatton to Clevedon

62	WILTSHIRE: Corsham, Bowerhill & Lacock, Box, Colerne & Rudloe,	Stop in new Bristol - Oxford	New 2 platform station
69	CORNWALL: Helston, Porthleven, Breage & Praa Sands,	Stop in new Helston - St Erth	New 1 platform station and new line from near Hayle to Helston
74	EAST BRISTOL: Mangotsfield, Pucklechurch & Westerleigh, Emersons Green, Kingswood North East, Staple Hill North,	Stop in new Mangotsfield - Bristol Temple Meads	New 1 platform station and new line from Stapleton Road to Mangotsfield
75	CORNWALL: Bude & Stratton, Poundstock & Kilkhampton,	Extension of Exeter Central – Okehampton	2 new 1 platform stations and new line from Okehampton to Bude
82	VALE OF WHITE HORSE: Wantage Town, Grove,	Extension of London - Didcot to Grove	New 2 platform station entering loops on high-speed route
85	COTSWOLD: Cirencester South, Cirencester Central, Cirencester East & Stratton,	Stop in new Kemble - Cirencester	New 1 platform station and new line from Kemble to Cirencester
88	MENDIP: Wells Town, Draycott, Westbury & Wookey,	Stop in new Yatton - Westbury	New 1 platform station and new line from Yatton to Westbury via East Somerset Railway
89	MENDIP: BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET: Stratton, Holcombe & Highbury, Westfield, Midsomer Norton Redfield, Peasedown & Bathavon West, High Littleton & Paulton, Radstock, Midsomer Norton North,	Stop in new Radstock - Westbury	New 1 platform station and upgrade/extension of freight line from near Frome
105	NORTH DEVON: Woolacombe, Georgeham & Croyde, Braunton,	Stop in new Ilfracombe - Barnstaple	New 1 platform station and new line from Barnstaple to Braunton
122	SOUTH SOMERSET: South Petherton, Seavington & Kingsbury, Martock,	Stop in new Taunton - Yeovil Pen Mill	New 1 platform station and new line from Taunton to Yeovil Pen Mill

127	EAST DEVON: Sidmouth Sidford, Sidmouth Town,	Stop in new Feniton - Sidmouth	New 1 platform station and new line from Feniton to Sidmouth
134	NORTH DEVON: Ilfracombe East, Ilfracombe West,	Stop in new Ilfracombe - Barnstaple	New 1 platform station and new line from Barnstaple to Ilfracombe
	Oxford: Cowley		Cowley Plus project
	North Somerset: Portishead and surrounding area		MetroWest (Portishead) project
	TAUNTON DEANE: Wellington South, Rockwell Green & West Buckland, Wellington North,		Wellington station project
	MID DEVON: Bradninch, Silverton & Thorverton, Cullompton,		Cullompton station project
	WEST DEVON: Horrabridge & Mary Tavy, Tavistock, Bere Alston, Buckland Monachorum & Yelverton,		Tavistock Line project
	Wiltshire: Devizes		Devizes Gateway interim feasibility study

Table 2: Population clusters assessed, alongside assumed service and infrastructure

The geographic distribution of the central point of the listed population clusters is shown in Figure 1.
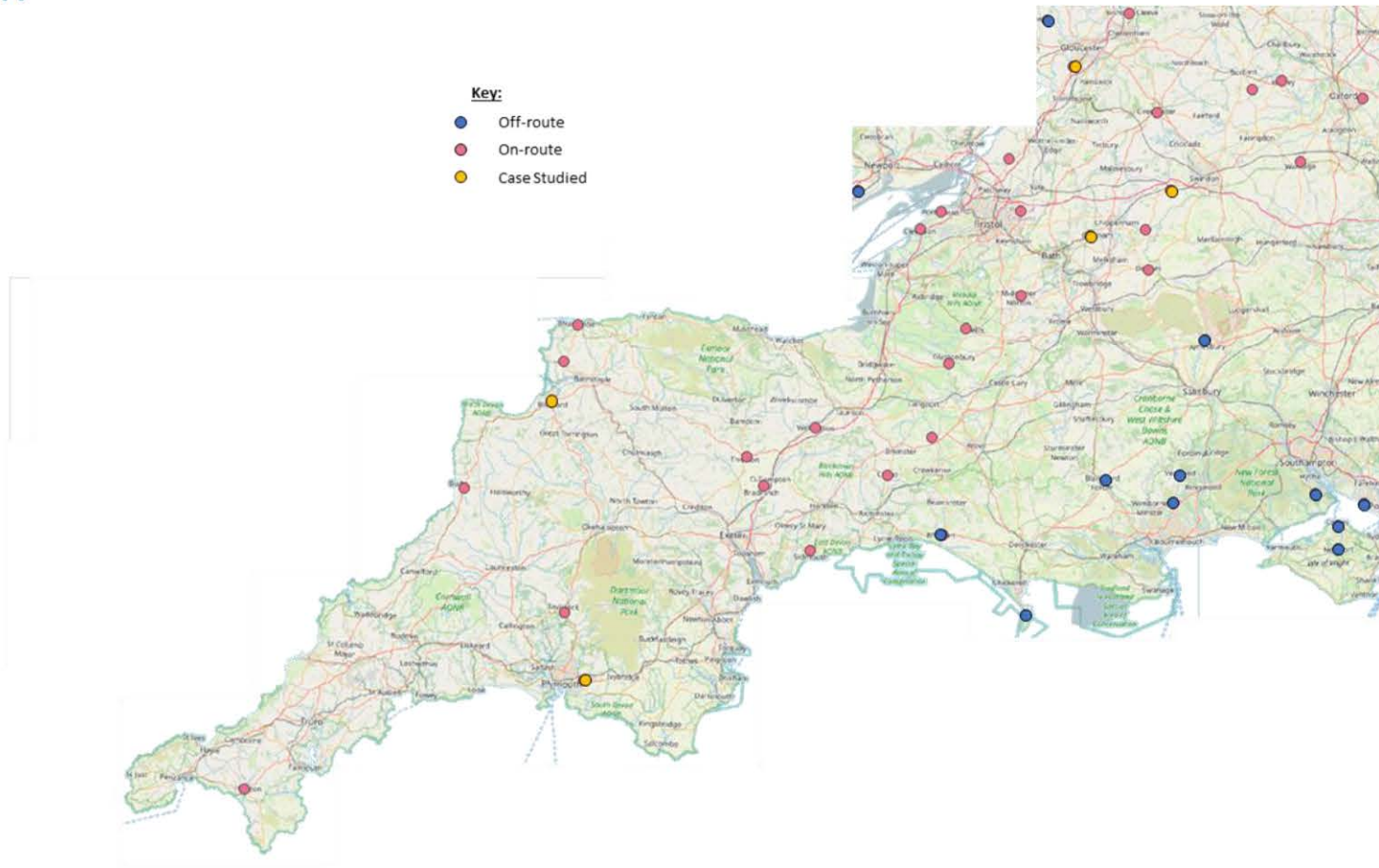
Figure 1: Distribution of population clusters across Network Rail's Western Region

Assessment

Table 3 presents the score for each population cluster against the strategic case and likely complexity analyses, and the total score. Clusters are ranked by the total score. Figure 2 plots the strategic case and likely complexity scores for each population cluster.

Rank	Cluster	Strategic Sub-Total	Complexity Sub-Total	Total
1	Plympton, Devon	56	-15	41
2	Corsham, Wiltshire	52	-20	32
3	South of Gloucester	37	-10	27
4	Royal Wootton Bassett, Wiltshire	48	-25	23
5	Bideford, Devon	52	-35	17
6	East of Cheltenham	31	-20	11
7	Tiverton, Devon	43	-35	8
8	Witney, Oxfordshire	46	-40	6
9	Wantage, Oxfordshire	26	-20	6
10	Calne, Wiltshire	36	-35	1
11	East Bristol	35	-40	-5
12	Woolacombe and Braunton, Devon	37	-45	-8
13	Helston, Cornwall	27	-35	-8
14	Clevedon, Somerset	31	-40	-9
15	Bude, Cornwall	30	-40	-10
16	Cirencester, Gloucestershire	20	-30	-10
17	Glastonbury and Street, Somerset	34	-45	-11
18	Ilfracombe, Devon	34	-45	-11
19	Martock, Somerset	31	-45	-14
20	Wells, Somerset	20	-35	-15
21	Carterton, Oxfordshire	48	-65	-17
22	Sidmouth, Devon	23	-45	-22
23	Midsomer Norton and Radstock, Somerset	19	-45	-26

Table 3: Overview of scoring for the clusters
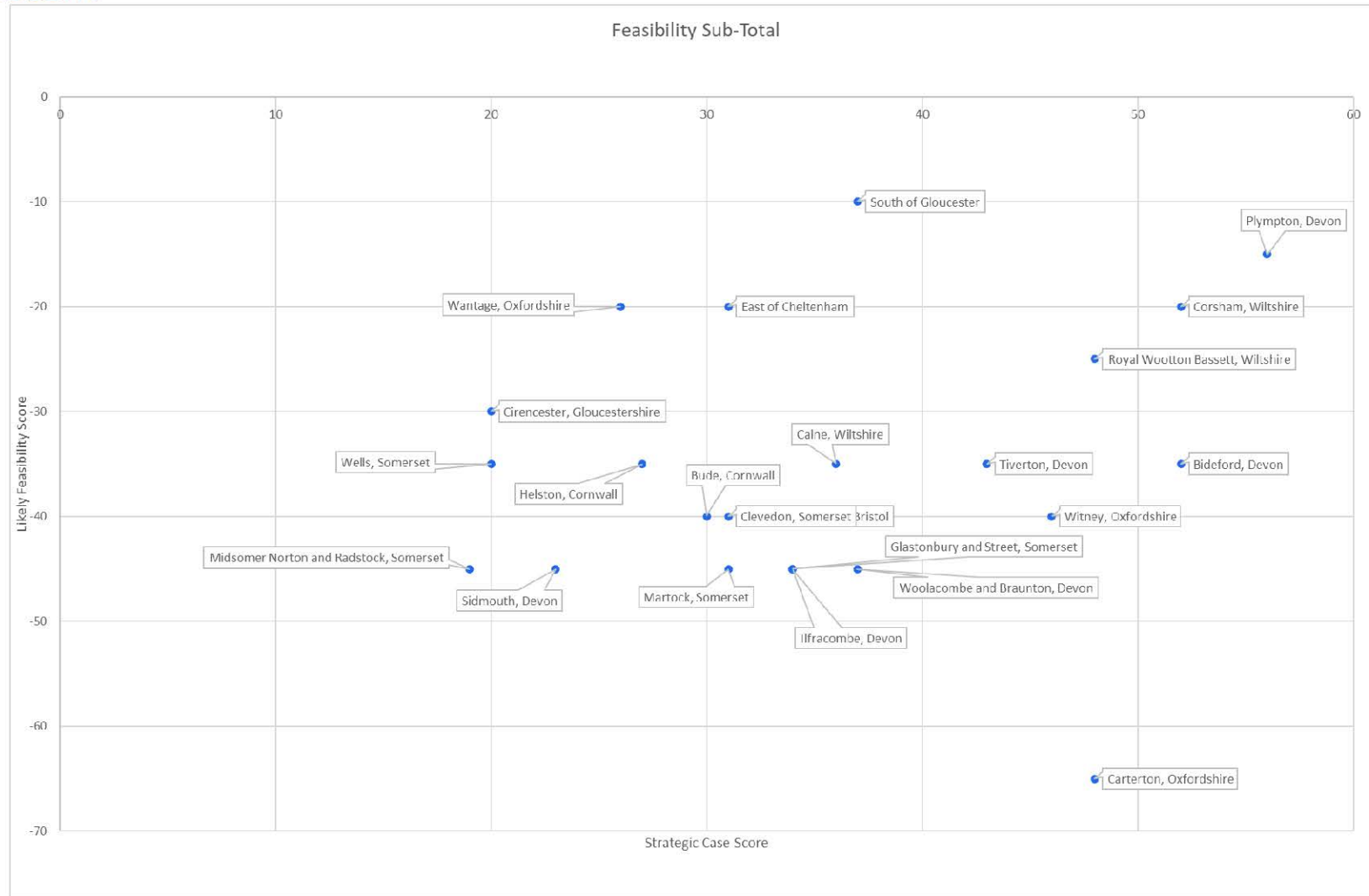
Feasibility Sub-Total

Figure 2: Scatter chart of scoring of new station opportunities

Figure 2 evidences two important and intuitive principles relating to likely complexity:

1. The need for new track significantly impacts the score. This is intuitive given the fact that capital costs for infrastructure tend to run into the tens or hundreds of millions and requiring very strong economic benefits to offset.
2. The assumption on service is significant. Where a new station would require a new service it must carry the large operational costs associated with this. Where the need for a service to provide calls aligns with established strategic recommendations in the area this impact on the scoring is reduced (e.g. Plympton).

Whilst in general there is clearly a correlation between population size (which is a close proxy for station catchment) and potential demand this is far from the only relevant factor in the strategic case score. The largest clusters, such as Plympton and Carterton, have commensurately high strategic case scores, but employment catchments, likely links to regional hubs, and demographic factors strongly influence strategic case scores.

It is notable that the large majority of the highest scoring clusters have previously been proposed or developed in some form, suggesting alignment between this framework and existing approaches to identifying new station opportunities

The population cluster with the highest scoring strategic case is Plympton, which has strong employment, population and public transport usage statistics, as well as featuring in a Network Rail Strategic Study and greatly improving access to the regional hub from the area. Relative to some of the other highest scoring opportunities, such as Corsham and Royal Wootton Bassett, Plympton scored slightly better in complexity, due to the ability to add calls in an existing service.

The next highest scoring population clusters in terms of strategic case are Corsham and Bideford. Bideford has a poorer likely complexity score due to new track and service requirements. Bideford's strategic case suitability is driven by opportunities to level up (from the Index of Multiple Deprivation) and population numbers.

The lowest scoring population clusters in terms of strategic case include Sidmouth, Wells, and Midsomer Norton and Radstock. Overarching issues for all of these opportunities include: low population, employment and public transport usage figures, as well as insignificant levels of improvement to access of the regional hub (based on the assumptions made), often due to requirements to change trains in order to access them.

Carterton, in the bottom right-hand corner of Figure 2, presents an interesting case. Its strategic case score is among the highest, but it scores lowest in likely complexity (i.e. it is the most complex of all opportunities studied). This reflects the need for a long section of new railway and a new service. It should be noted that the proposal for Carterton includes a station at Witney (a separately identified cluster) so the Carterton strategic case and likely complexity scores include Witney.

Exclusions

The criteria for the RYR dataset mean that a number of opportunities will have been excluded from assessment. Just as this work does not claim to give a definitive answer on the new stations that are identified neither does it mean that opportunities for new stations that are not identified could not have a case.

The method excludes:

- Clusters with a population under 10,000 people but nonetheless a potential rail market, such as parkway stations, where the catchment is very large by design, and stations serving seasonal and leisure destinations.
- Population clusters less than 5km away from existing stations. This criterion rules out most of the Thames Valley, and suburban areas of Bristol, Exeter, Plymouth and Reading, as well as branch lines on the route. The existing network proves that, in urban areas in particular, stations may be closer than 5km and still serve a distinct and economically sustainable purpose.
- Population clusters that are within 5km of an existing station that does not have an attractive service (e.g. poor or irregular frequency, or not reflecting dominant journey flows).
- Clusters which may be expected to have a strong case for a new station in future but do not currently, for example where significant housing or employment growth is allocated or proposed.

Case Studies

To demonstrate both the value and potential limitations of the assessment framework case studies are presented for the five highest-scoring clusters:

- Plympton new station, Devon
- Corsham new station, Wiltshire
- Royal Wootton Bassett new station, Wiltshire
- New station south of Gloucester, Gloucestershire
- Bideford new station and line, Devon

The case studies examine, at a high-level, the key features of each cluster, providing further insight into the *strategic case* and *likely complexity* categories by bringing together information and insight from a range of sources. Further consideration is given to the location – both geographical and railway – of each cluster and its population characteristics, as well as the operational and infrastructure factors going into the complexity scoring. Case studies were shared with a representative local stakeholder for fact-checking and guidance on strategic alignment with local plans and policies.

Moving forward

The production of the following case studies marks the conclusion of this workstream, which does not include recommendation of further actions or development of specific interventions for any of the population clusters identified.

This document does not represent a recommendation to progress development of any of the findings and does not indicate Network Rail specific support for any referenced new stations. Instead, it is intended to inform discussions with third parties considering investment in the rail network to address strategic transport issues.

The value of this work is in developing a common framework with which to assess new station opportunities at a high level on the basis of connectivity benefit and likely complexity and establishing a high-level position on the relative merits of the new station opportunities on Western Route identified by the RyR programme population cluster analysis.

Network Rail remains committed to working with any party wishing to invest in the rail network – including on new stations – regardless of the findings set out in this document. However, we recommend using these findings as an initial basis for consideration of new station opportunities on Western Route.

Case Studies

Bideford

Location

Bideford is a port town on the estuary of the River Torridge in North Devon, situated roughly 8 miles south-west of Barnstaple and 35 miles north-west of Exeter. The town is at the crossroads of the A39 and A386 roads connecting it to other regional towns such as Barnstaple, Tavistock and Bude.
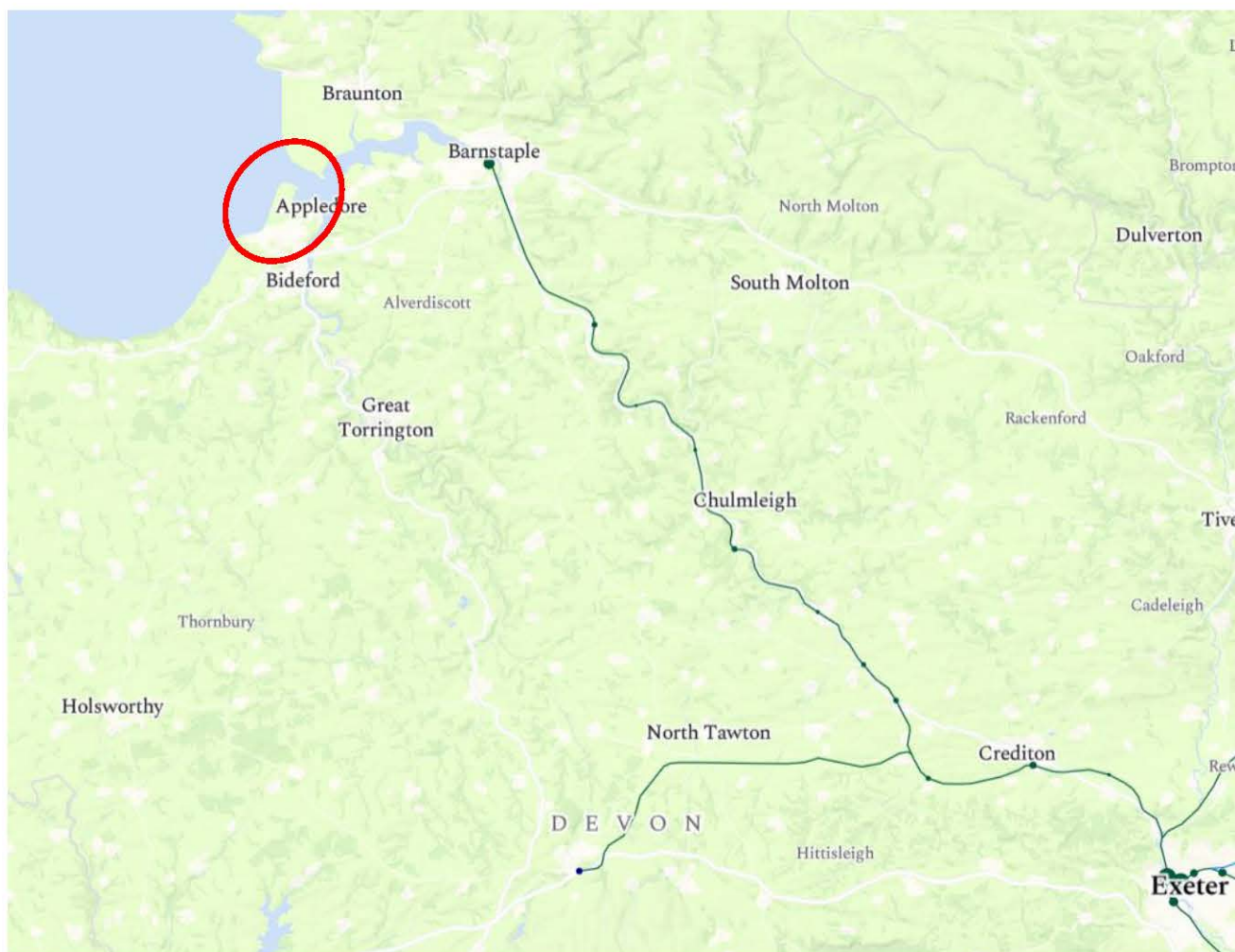

Figure 12: Map showing the location of Bideford, relative to Barnstaple and Exeter and the railway in the area. (Source: Merritt Cartographic British Railways Maps)

Population

According to ONS 2019 estimates, the cluster around Bideford that is greater than 5km away from the nearest mainline railway station has a population of 31,000. Of these, only 11,000 are in employment, with an unemployment rate of 3.1%, suggesting a large proportion of the population are outside of working age and potentially a more leisure-focussed rail market.

Previous Work

The group ACE (Atlantic Coast to Exeter) Rail, supported by Bideford Town, Torridge District and North Devon councils has been investigating and campaigning for the reinstatement of the line and service since it was established in 2021.

The route was mentioned in a nationwide new stations study in 2009 by the Association of Train Operating Companies, which concluded that it was likely to have a Benefit-Cost-Ratio of less than one at the time.[7]

The original Bideford Station, which closed to passengers in 1965, was located on the current site of the Bideford Heritage Railway Centre. Most of the work to reopen the station so far has assumed the reinstatement of the line in the original location, with a new station to the north of the original, which has been retained by the Bideford Railway Heritage Centre. The former rail alignment is now part of the Tarka Trail, an important regional active travel route.

Existing Transport Options

Bus Route	Regularity	Journey Time to Barnstaple (minutes)	Journey Time to Exeter (minutes)
21	every 30 mins	32	
5B	7 per day	31	112

Table 16: Relevant bus services in Bideford

As demonstrated in Table 16, existing bus routes between Bideford and Barnstaple are reasonable, with at least two services an hour and journey times of just over half an hour. There are also other local services, to destinations that aren't connected to the rail network and for which some of the commuting flows align. However, services to Exeter are limited and slow. It should also be noted that the lack of alternative road options outside of the A39 between Barnstaple and Bideford, means buses regularly get caught up in congestion alongside cars on this key road artery. As a result, a rail service would likely offer competitive journey times compared to the bus offering.

Journey Flows

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[7] Rail Delivery Group (2009) Expanding access to the rail network. Available at: https://www.raildeliverygroup.com/about-us/publications/archive/299-2009-06-connecting-communities/file.html (Accessed: 05 October 2023).

Commute datashine (based on 2011 travel to work census data) shows dominant commuting flows from Bideford to Barnstaple, with a small number of longer distance flows to Crediton and Exeter. These could all be served by a railway service, albeit with not particularly competitive journey times compared with cars. The train service would be more likely to open opportunities for employment, education and leisure activities as well.
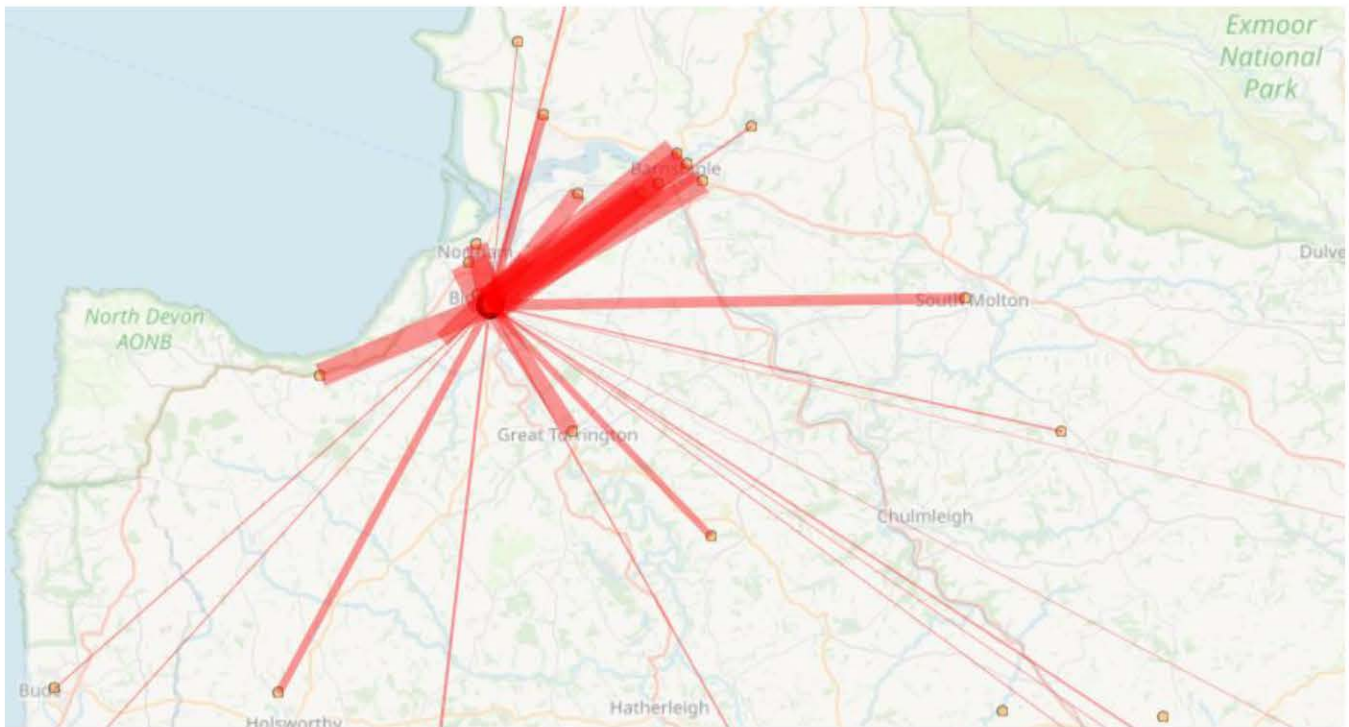

Figure 13: Map showing travel to work flows from the Bideford Lower-Level Super Output Area. (Source: Commute Datashine)

Existing Rail Access

The closest station to Bideford is Barnstaple, around 10 miles away by road. The journey takes roughly 20 mins, both by car or by bus and involves mostly following the A39 between the two.

Based on latest research on commute time, people in the South West would on average be willing to commute 42 minutes to work.[8] No other hub than Barnstaple could be reached in this time, nor even if relaxed to one hour. Barnstaple can already be reached by public transport within this threshold, which may limit the effectiveness of the reinstatement of the rail link to improving commuting opportunities.

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[8] Jackson-Stops (2023) The reverse race for space: 38 Minutes is the new golden hour commute: Jackson-stops. Available at: https://www.jackson-stops.co.uk/articles/the-reverse-race-for-space-38-minutes-is-the-new-golden-hour-commute#:~:text=While%2038%20minutes%20was%20the,for%2015%20minutes%20or%20less.

Existing Rail Services

Operator	Service Type	Origin	Destination	tph	tpd	Call Before	Call After
GWR	Local	Exeter Central	Barnstaple	1	17	Terminates	Terminates

Table 17: Existing rail services on the section of line closest to Bideford

The closest line is the Barnstaple Branch, which has services between Exeter and Barnstaple, as shown in Table 17. The assumed train service to Bideford would be an extension of the current Barnstaple service from Exeter, along a new or reinstated section of line from Barnstaple. Without massive changes to infrastructure and service patterns this is likely the only option. Potential enhancements on the Barnstaple Branch could see an increased service level, potentially including extensions as far as Axminster or even London Waterloo.

Development work is currently being undertaken to understand the case for investment on the Barnstaple Branch, with the line currently suffering from poor performance and significant capacity issues at certain times of day. Extension to Bideford would result in further sections of single line which would likely not deliver acceptable performance given existing constraints.

With the assumption of an extension of the Barnstaple branch service, speculative journey times to the local and regional hubs are shown in Table 18.

Destination	New Journey Time (mins)	Existing PT Journey Time (mins)
Barnstaple	15	31
Exeter	81	112

Table 18: Speculative and existing journey times by public transport

Indicative Complexity

Given the assumed service for a new station at Bideford, a new station would be a simple one platform design, recent examples of which have cost around £3m. Whilst, much of the former station infrastructure is still in place, which could allow for a lower cost assumption, the desire to retain this means assumptions around cost do not reflect a specific site. Recent inflationary pressures would also likely see a higher cost to any scheme than previous examples.

The cost for the reinstatement of the roughly 9 miles of track has not been estimated at this stage. However, it is assumed that this, alongside any associated signalling interventions, would account for the majority of the cost of scheme to reconnect Bideford to the railway network. Any track reinstatement work would entail significant engineering to forge a new alignment from Barnstaple station under the A361 Barnstaple Western Bypass roundabout to join the previous (or a new)

alignment beyond.

In addition to the civils and railway systems costs there may be costs associated with securing all necessary land and consents, including providing replacements for current functions elsewhere.

Strategic Alignment

One of Peninsula Transport's goals (from their 2021 Vision statement) is the improvement of connections between people, businesses and places through the enablement of more people accessing public transport options across the Peninsula.

Devon County Council list one of their priorities as improving rail and bus connections from the towns into the main urban areas, a new station at Bideford with a service into Exeter via Barnstaple would provide a more efficient method of transport to access these employment and leisure centres and the rest of the country than currently exists with the current bus offering. However, it is recognised that improving the service offering on the Barnstaple branch is a key driver of this and should be prioritised over the extension of a rail service to Bideford.

As already highlighted, the former rail alignment is now occupied by a strategically important active-travel route and it should be noted that the MP for North Devon, Selaine Saxby, has emphasised the need to retain this, advocating for a new track alignment.

Now, more than ever, the importance of consensus on local support, including funding, is paramount. Parties most likely to be interested in, and benefit from, a new station at Bideford include:

- Devon County Council
- Peninsula Transport
- ACE Rail

There may also be opportunities for land value capture, and any potential future Restoring Your Railway or specific funding schemes focussed on addressing regional disparities.

Key Challenges

Any new station proposal faces the challenges of demonstrating value for money, financial affordability, and alignment with industry strategic plans. The analysis for this case study identifies the following specific challenges for Bideford:

- Costs
- Service capacity
- Role alongside existing public transport provision
- Relationship with Barnstaple Branch enhancements
- Choice of alignment including relocation of existing land use

Appendices

Simplified Framework for Station Opportunity Assessment

A copy of a slightly slimmed down final framework table is shown overleaf.

Wales and Western — **NetworkRail**

Western Ranking	Cluster name	Population	Employment Number	Unemployment Rate	PT Usage	IMD	Strategic Studies	Attractor	IoA to Hub	Service Requirements	Track Requirements	Station Requirements	Total
1	Plymouth: Plympton	9	10	6	7	4	1	0	3	1	0	2	41
2	WILTSHIRE: Corsham, Bowerhill & Lacock, Box, Colerne & Rudloe,	5	7	8	9	3	1	0	3	2	0	2	32
3	STROUD: GLOUCESTER: Upton St Leonards & Hardwicke, Quedgeley North, Quedgeley South,	6	4	5	2	5	0	0	3	0	0	2	27
4	WILTSHIRE: Royal Wootton Bassett Outer & Lyneham, Royal Wootton Bassett Town,	6	7	8	9	3	0	0	3	2	0	3	23
5	Torridge: Bideford, Northam	8	8	6	5	10	0	0	3	1	5	1	17
6	TEWKESBURY: CHELTENHAM: Bishop's Cleeve, Prestbury & Racecourse, Cleeve Hill, Gotherington & Apperley,	8	4	0	3	1	0	0	3	1	3	0	11
7	MID DEVON: Tiverton East, Tiverton North & Outer, Tiverton West,	6	7	8	3	9	0	0	2	3	3	1	8
8	West Oxfordshire: Witney	8	8	5	8	2	0	0	3	3	4	1	6
9	VALE OF WHITE HORSE: Wantage Town, Grove,	3	0	6	7	0	0	0	2	1	0	3	6
10	WILTSHIRE: Calne South, Derry Hill & Hilmarton, Calne North,	7	5	2	6	6	0	0	2	3	3	1	1
11	SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE: Mangotsfield, Pucklechurch & Westerleigh, Emersons Green, Kingswood North East, Staple Hill North,	4	4	0	7	5	0	0	3	3	4	1	-5
12	NORTH DEVON: Woolacombe, Georgeham & Croyde, Braunton,	1	5	3	5	3	0	1	3	3	5	1	-8
13	CORNWALL: Helston, Porthleven, Breage & Praa Sands,	4	3	7	0	8	0	1	0	3	3	1	-8
14	NORTH SOMERSET: Clevedon Central, Clevedon North & Walton,	6	2	1	5	2	0	1	2	3	4	1	-9
15	CORNWALL: Bude & Stratton, Poundstock & Kilkhampton,	3	5	7	0	10	0	1	0	1	5	2	-10
16	COTSWOLD: Cirencester South, Cirencester Central, Cirencester East & Stratton,	2	8	0	1	4	0	0	1	3	2	1	-10
17	MENDIP: Street Village, Glastonbury Town, Glastonbury West & Street South,	8	8	4	1	8	0	1	0	3	5	1	-11
18	NORTH DEVON: Ilfracombe East, Ilfracombe West,	0	2	3	4	10	0	0	3	3	5	1	-11
19	SOUTH SOMERSET: South Petherton, Seavington & Kingsbury, Martock,	0	0	10	0	6	0	0	3	3	5	1	-14
20	MENDIP: Wells Town, Draycott, Westbury & Wookey,	2	6	4	2	6	0	0	0	3	3	1	-15
21	WEST OXFORDSHIRE: Carterton South, Carterton North, Burford & Brize Norton,	10	9	5	7	2	0	0	3	3	6	4	-17
22	EAST DEVON: Sidmouth Sidford, Sidmouth Town,	0	2	5	4	2	0	0	2	3	5	1	-22
23	MENDIP: BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET: Stratton, Holcombe & Highbury, Westfield, Midsomer Norton Redfield, Peasedown & Bathavon West, High Littleton & Paulton, Radstock, Midsomer Norton North,	2	2	2	3	5	0	0	1	3	5	1	-26