railfuture

**Promoting Britain's Railway for Passengers and Freight**

Wessex Route Study Consultation
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15th February 2015

Dear Sir,

**Response to Network Rail's draft Wessex Route Study**

Railfuture is the UK's leading independent organisation campaigning for better services for passengers and freight. A voluntary organisation to which many rail user groups are affiliated, the organisation is independent both politically and commercially.

This response is made by Railfuture and the Wessex route runs through the area served by our Wessex, and London & South East branches, touching the Devon & Cornwall branch at its western end. The comments made are not confidential, and we would be happy for them to appear on your website and you are welcome to use them in discussion with funders and other stakeholders. We would be happy to enlarge on any of the points made above or to work with you to identify the best options for the future.

***Scope and Objectives of the Study.***

Railfuture endorses the approach adopted in Network Rail's Passenger Market Study with its long-term view and strategic outcomes-based approach. We are pleased that this is followed through in this draft Route Study, looking ahead over a 30 year period which is the lifespan of many industry assets and reflects the lengthy lead-times necessarily involved in planning, funding and delivering significant development of the railway. In that context we also welcome the more focussed view over the next decade and the needs and opportunities arising in Control Period 6. The study is comprehensive and we welcome the inclusive process, including the helpful meeting of 10 February, which has allowed a wide range of stakeholders to contribute, and our comments are offered in that positive spirit. We express some reservations below, and we suggest some additional outputs. In particular, we would underline the need to look at meeting demand in major towns other than London, and we would like to see a more determined approach to meet latent demand on both the Salisbury – Exeter and Brighton – Cardiff lines. However, these comments are offered in the spirit of creative, constructive challenge between fellow advocates of shared strategic goals and aspirations.

We like the joined-up approach in the study, which reflects the benefits of the alliance between NR and South West Trains, and this has produced some strong proposals. It may also explain why the study is a


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bit light on the development of Arriva Cross Country services as well as on the important FGW Cardiff – Portsmouth/Brighton corridor, both of which we comment on below.

We understand that a separate piece of work is being undertaken on the Isle of Wight and would suggest a cross reference between the two, given the integrated nature of the Waterloo – Portsmouth – Isle of Wight service.

***Making the Case for Rail.***
We are keen to see the delivery of most of the ideas contained in this draft study and will be making the case to opinion-formers, decision-makers, and funders for sustained investment across the routes described. The benefits in economic, environmental and social as well as in transport terms require this and Railfuture will be communicating the benefits in support of the case for that sustained investment. The draft study understandably focuses on creating the capacity needed, but the final version should perhaps make more of the economic and environmental case in the introduction.

***Forecasts.*** We note that the growth forecasts are lower than for the other route studies we have already examined – Western, Sussex and Anglia, and we have a concern that they may prove to be too low, projecting just half the annual growth level of the last 20 years in an area of buoyant economic development. Our concern arises from the fact that previous forecasts of demand have generally proved to be underestimates, with the consequent shortfall in capacity and overcrowding that we see today.

We understand that the growth in commuting demand to London is the driver for most of the outputs proposed and that this is dictated by the high numbers of additional passengers involved. However, we would urge that this London focus should not demote the needs of routes that serve the regional centres of Portsmouth, Southampton, Bournemouth, Salisbury, Basingstoke and Guildford which are also important and where the solutions are likely to involve fewer resources than that those required for London. In particular, we would have liked to see recognised the concept of a “Solent Metro” which would provide a coherent context for the development of local services around Southampton and Portsmouth.

***Electrification.*** The electrification of the North Downs line gaps is endorsed and, as we said in the response to the Sussex consultation, we believe this would be carried out more cheaply and efficiently if it were at 750v DC with third rail supply.

We also support the electrification of the Reading – Basingstoke – Salisbury/Exeter/Southampton via Laverstock lines at 25 Kv overhead. We believe this should be planned as a single scheme covering the whole of the line to Exeter, even if it is phased. The significant growth on the Waterloo – Exeter line and the latent demand for more and faster trains is evidenced by the recent Government decision to commit very substantial funding to improving the parallel A 303. It follows that we would not regard a split service with electric trains to Salisbury requiring a change to diesel services beyond as acceptable because of the significant numbers of passenger using the through service. Any staging period requiring a change of traction should be kept to a minimum.

***Rolling stock.*** Whilst we understand the reasons for wanting to move to higher density rolling stock we would underline your recognition that this is both unpopular and in some cases impractical and turns rail into a distressed purchase, rather than being the mode of choice.

On suburban services the adoption of 0.25m² only works properly with metro style rolling stock such as the class 378. However, this has fewer seats and means more standing passengers. This may be acceptable for short distance inner suburban services (with similar characteristics to the Underground) but does not work if it involves passengers standing for longer than 20 minutes. It needs to be recognised that crowding at this level precludes much movement inside the vehicle to allow passengers to reach empty seats when others alight. Where this 20-minute limit is breached, additional capacity needs to be planned where physically possible. In the case of Wessex, the issue should be resolved by Crossrail 2 (Main Suburban Line) and by exploiting the full capacity of the Windsor lines as described.

In the case of longer distance trains, we do not believe the 2+3 seating layout is acceptable and rolling stock of this configuration should not be used for journeys of more than around 60 miles. The suggested conversion of units used on longer distance services to 2+3 seating (Table 5.6) would be quite impractical in the case of class 158 and 159 units, as the narrower body width would preclude this. Where levels of patronage require the higher seating density for outer suburban journeys, it would be preferable to have a mixed formation, so that on the Portsmouth Direct line, for example, a unit with 2+2 seating could be coupled with a unit of 2+3 configuration for use by those joining from (say) Haslemere or Guildford.

On both the West of England line and the Cardiff – Portsmouth route where journeys in excess of three hours occur, high density seating is quite inappropriate and the replacement for the class 159 and 158 trains needs to be more appropriate for the long distance passengers they carry, with particular attention to luggage space.

***HS2.*** Whilst many passengers will want to access HS2 via Waterloo and Euston, others will be able to join at Old Oak Common via the West London line. This will impact on WLL train formations and line capacity, covered in the Sussex Study, but for Wessex, it also needs to be reflected in the plans for Clapham Junction, given the need for easy interchange to and from South Western services.
In the longer term, Heathrow Southern Access may provide a better alternative from Guildford and Woking in particular, if the service were integrated with Crossrail serving Old Oak Common directly.

***New lines, stations and depots.***
No new lines are proposed in the study, nor any new stations. We believe that there is a case for a passenger service between Hythe and Southampton serving new development at Marchwood, and that the initiative of the Swanage Railway in reaching Wareham should be recognised in the study. By the same token, there is likely to be a case for encouraging rail access from Alresford and Medstead to Alton in conjunction with the Mid Hants Railway, and this should be considered during the study period. Our specific proposals listed below would also envisage restoring a passenger service between Yeovil Junction and Pen Mill.

Possible new stations at Ampress (for the Lymington New Forest hospital), Marchwood, Hythe, Paulsgrove, Copnor, Farlington, West Leigh and Wilton would all improve access to the railway for these communities through which it runs without stopping, and should be reviewed by 2019.

Some of these proposals have been mooted for many years and we are concerned that they have not been listed for evaluation in a forward looking document such as this, although we accept that in some cases they have not yet been strongly advocated by the local authority of other potential funder.

**Level Crossings.**
We note and endorse the proposals to reduce the risk at level crossings and to eliminate a number of them. In particular there is a need to close or replace the crossings controlled from Barnes as far as possible if the full capacity of the Windsor lines is to be realised. The same is true of the level crossings at Feltham together with the four at Egham. We believe, however, that this is a shared responsibility between the rail industry and highway authorities, and indeed road users. We are concerned that the great efforts being made by Network Rail to reduce risks and eliminate problems are not matched by equivalent commitments from the other parties, and that the high cost of the level crossing programme may squeeze out other important investments which would encourage a shift from road to rail, with significantly higher safety benefits. In the case of the Barnes crossings both the Borough and TfL should be prepared to part fund their removal given the traffic benefits this might bring, apart from safety improvements.

**Southampton/Weymouth Main Line.**
The study sets out clearly the intractable problems of capacity faced along the whole of this route between London and Southampton, and the interventions proposed in terms of grade separation of junctions at Woking and Basingstoke and the additional loop capacity options between Micheldever and Eastleigh as well as the longer term and ambitious expansion at both Winchester and Southampton. The ability to carry longer (775m) freight trains is also a way of making better use of each train path, but the longer clearance time at junctions may work in the opposite direction. The capacity constraints between Surbiton and Wimbledon are covered in ‘Suburban lines’ below.

The study is relatively light on the requirements for cross country passenger services, but does refer to an additional train every two hours being provided to run to Hull. It is not clear at this stage where the lead responsibility for cross-country is and there is probably a need for a single route to take ownership of this. There is some discrepancy between this and the Western route study on the destination of these trains (see below).

On the other hand, we regard the proposed Southampton to Paddington via Heathrow and Old Oak Common as innovative and potentially valuable and believe that this idea should be developed.

We understand that the concept of double deck trains has been introduced for consideration in case the infrastructure enhancements proposed prove to be undeliverable in time. However, we are also aware of the difficulties and cost involved in a small number of bespoke trains with very restricted route availability, and would regard this as something of a high-risk strategy in terms of addressing the overcrowding problem in the timescale required.

We believe that growth will require the strengthening of power supplies to allow full length trains to operate between Bournemouth and Weymouth within the period of the study and that the timetabling constraint and performance risk of the single line section between Moreton and Dorchester South may require restoration of the double line.

Poole station will need rebuilding to accommodate growth and provide more appropriate facilities for this important regional centre, possibly associated with a property development on the railway land adjacent. We endorse the need to provide greater capacity for passenger access to platforms 2/3 at Basingstoke in CP5.

**Portsmouth Direct Line.**
We would like to see some journey time improvements on this long, but relatively slow route, although we recognise this this is not straightforward, given its alignment. We would endorse the proposals for a grade separated junction at Woking, additional platforms at Guildford and additional loops between Guildford and Havant, and would press for these to be followed by some journey time reductions, rather than all the benefit being ascribed to resilience. We would support the addition of a faster service with fewer stops to the current quantum of services. We would want to see more suitable low-density rolling stock available on Portsmouth services and have dealt with this under “Rolling Stock” above.

We would support the need for improved access to the high level platforms at Portsmouth & Southsea.

**West of England Route and Castle Cary – Weymouth line.**
We note that the improvements at the west end of the route which will provide two trains an hour between Exeter and Axminster form part of the Western route study, which also refers to improving capacity between Exeter and Yeovil Junction for diverted First Great Western services when required. However, in terms of infrastructure planning, we believe that this should be compatible with extending the second train east from Axminster every hour to Yeovil Junction then alternately to Yeovil Pen Mill for Weymouth line connections and on the other hour to pick up the path at Gillingham or Salisbury of the second train to London each hour.

Given the performance characteristics of the electric trains that will replace the class 159 units, more dynamic loops are likely to be required and this would also be true if further capacity increases were required for resilience, given the higher frequency of service and the role of the western end of the line as a diversionary route. This suggests that in the long run, it may be that the additional capacity is best achieved through providing more sections of double track. This might also allow consideration of accelerating some services, with calls focussed on the busier stations, although we accept at this point, the need is for capacity for more trains rather than significant journey time reductions.
As a tactical point, the opportunity to consider extending Tisbury loop into the station, for both resilience and journey time reductions, should be taken now, while the adjacent site is disused. The time saving of extending the Tisbury loop would absorb much of the additional time that would be needed to serve a new station at Wilton

The good work done by the Heart of Wessex Community Rail Partnership on the Bristol to Weymouth route has increased passenger use on this line and is expected to continue to do so, particularly as

towns along the route, such as Yeovil and Dorchester, continue to grow. We agree with the first step, of making the service hourly to Yeovil, although this should run to the Junction rather than terminate at Pen Mill. However, we believe that this should quickly be expanded to cover the whole line to Weymouth as an hourly service at minimum is really required to encourage full use to be made of this route as an alternative to the A37. We recommend that this should be reflected in the infrastructure capacity planned between Yeovil Pen Mill and Weymouth and that the enhanced service should be delivered during CP6. At the same time, the opportunity should be taken to consider how better connections with Waterloo - Exeter trains could be provided at Yeovil Junction via the Pen Mill link as well as future provision of a west to south chord line.

**Brighton – Southampton – Portsmouth – Bristol – Cardiff line**

This section is perhaps the weakest in the whole study. We are disappointed that the ITSS for the Cardiff/Bristol/Salisbury/South Coast corridor remains at broadly the present level, given the level of overcrowding that is already endemic on the route. We accept that some of this could be overcome by running longer trains, but would prefer to see a specification of at least 2 tph on the core route section between Bristol and Fareham, with most trains running from beyond Bristol to Cardiff or Worcester/Great Malvern and on to Portsmouth, or Brighton. Given that the route corridor is relatively slow, we should like to see some suggested interventions to reduce journey times, although we accept that the physical nature of the route and the number of sections the trains share with other services mean that this is no easy task. However, it is inconceivable that the present service level, capacity and journey times would meet the needs of passengers over the next 30 years in this busy corridor where the railway's importance is strengthened by the poor quality of the A36. The Sussex route study considers the possibility of journey time reductions on the route between Brighton and Bristol and clearly this is an area for concerted action between the Western, Wessex and Sussex Routes and for some clear leadership focussed on the route as a whole. We believe that this corridor has considerable potential and that further plans to meet this latent demand should be prepared in the context of this study.

We believe there is also considerable potential for the development of services from the coastway line via Fareham to access Southampton Airport, and for passengers from Botley and Hedge End to have direct access to Southampton. This could be achieved by reversal at Eastleigh or via a new spur line. The single track section between Botley and Fareham will be a constraint as demand develops on this route, and doubling should be considered, perhaps initially between Botley and Fareham tunnel.

***North Downs Line***

We endorse the need to move to 3 tph on this route, but would be concerned that the value of the third train would be diminished if it had to be recessed at Guildford for 15 minutes. We would support the additional platforms at Guildford required to accommodate the more frequent service, but would also press for this to be linked with reduced signalling headways required to allow more trains to be run, recognising the different speeds of the faster and stopping services, particularly between Ash and Guildford.

***Suburban Lines***

The key issue here is Crossrail 2, and we would firmly support the 'regional' rather than the 'metro' option in the interests of both meeting the capacity needs and also of connectivity.
Between Surbiton and London, an additional track appears to be needed, unless Crossrail 2 provides this additional capacity. This section of route is so busy now that any solution to the problem will be extremely expensive and needs to be recognised by both Government and ORR in reaching future settlements on NR's investment programme.

***Windsor Lines***

The level crossings issues are covered above. We believe that there should be some journey time improvements for the longer distance services to Reading and Aldershot/Guildford. This might be a combination of easing some permanent speed restrictions and adjusting stopping patters as service frequencies are increased. There are also opportunities to improve journey times through better connectivity, for example by scheduling better connections at Ash Vale for passengers from Camberley using this route to Waterloo. With the resignalling of the Feltham area, passive provision should be made for Heathrow southern access. Planning for southern access to the airport needs to be synchronised with the Western Route Study proposals for the Western spur to ensure a coordinated

approach to serving the airport. We would also suggest a turnback facility at Feltham in preference to Hounslow.

***Relation to Western Study.*** Looking at the detail of the report, we have noticed some discrepancies between this and the Western Route Study, and the significant variances are listed below with the intention of helping to reconcile them before the next stage of the process.

1. Electrification. The Western study does not cover electrification to Exeter St David's via Salisbury as an addition to the electric spine. Apart from the benefit to South West Trains passengers, this would also benefit FGW passengers in terms of diversion of Paddington services once the Berks & Hants line has been electrified.
2. Boundary points: We understand that the line from Southcote Junction to Basingstoke is being dealt with in the Western route study, but for clarity, it might be worth confirming which route director is in the lead for this section of line. There is some overlap on other cross boundary services between the two studies on routes from Warminster to Salisbury, Castle Cary to Dorchester and Yeovil Junction to Exmouth Junction. Discrepancies on the Reading – Basingstoke corridor are shown below, but it would be worth clarifying these overlaps in the final version of the study.
3. Paddington service. The Wessex study refers to proposals to route 1 or 2 tph from Southampton or beyond to Heathrow, while the Western study refers to a Basingstoke to Heathrow and Paddington service. Clearly a service routed to Paddington via Heathrow would be preferable because of the additional interchange opportunities offered at Old Oak Common for HS2.
4. Freight. Between Basingstoke and Reading, 3 tph is proposed by the Wessex study and 4 to 5 by the Western one.
5. Cross Country. The Western route study refers to the current service to Newcastle, supplemented by an additional train per hour via East/West Rail to Manchester, while the Wessex studies refer to cross country trains to Manchester and Hull.

***Corrections.*** We have also identified a small number of errors, understandable in a document of this size and complexity, and list these below in order to ensure that any revised paper can be completely accurate.

Page 20, table 146. The platform number ('0') at Redhill has been omitted.

Page 24. The map is potentially confusing as the colour coding is not consistent (see Frimley to Ash Vale, for example) and the difference between single and double track sections is inconsistent and partly inaccurate.

Page 45, table 3.10. The total number of high peak services leaving passengers behind should be 24, not 12.

The maps should show the line leading off at Worgret Junction as 'Swanage Railway' rather than 'Furzebrook.' The link to the Mid Hants railway at Alton should be shown.

Page 150. In the Option 4 summary table, the cost should be - £4.8m

We trust these comments will be of use.

Yours faithfully,

*CAustin*

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for Director of Policy