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please reply to:

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Dear Sir or Madam

Draft Taunton Transport Strategy Consultation

I write on behalf of Railfuture Severnside Branch, which covers Somerset, Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and the Greater Bristol conurbation. I am pleased to respond to the above Consultation with the comments overleaf, referenced to the relevant sections and page numbers in the Consultation document.

If anything requires clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Nigel Bray

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Railfuture
Secretary, Severnside Branch

Chapter 4 (Context and Opportunities), page 13.

Railfuture agrees that bus services need to be better in the evenings and that bus/ rail coordination in Taunton is poor. The proposed transport hub at the rail station ought to be an opportunity to radically improve the situation but we understand that the actual proposal is for three bus stops on a one-way loop, between the multi-storey car park and the station canopy at the east end of Platform 2.

If this is the case, there would not appear to be room to start/ terminate bus routes at the rail station by extending them from the bus station. At present, many combined rail and bus journeys at Taunton, eg to /from Chard and Ilminster, involve a walk of about 15 minutes to /from the bus station or catching a second bus.

If the ticket office is moved to the 'down' (Platform 2) side of the station, then station bus stops also need relocation to that side. Otherwise, bus users would have to alight at the 'up' (Platform 5) side of the station and walk to the 'down' side to book their tickets.

Unless the current plans for the rail station transport hub are changed, bus/ rail connectivity may become less convenient than at present.

Chapter 5 (Our Vision for Transport in Taunton), pages 16 and 17.

A major reason why people do not make more use of public transport is that they do not know their way around the public transport system. Therefore we welcome the objective of people being better informed about transport choices. There is still a need for printed timetables at bus stops as not everyone has a Smartphone. Also, Onward Travel posters at railway stations need to be visible and updated as necessary.

Whilst we certainly support the objective to manage demand on the highway network in order to reduce the need to travel by car, this would seem to be undermined by another stated objective to increase the capacity of highway networks.

We agree with the Key Outcomes, although we would add Improved Health, resulting from cleaner air and reduced dependence on car travel. This is implied in the section on Active Travel on page 22.

The points made about the transport challenge from new housing developments are 'spot on.' Enhancements to public transport need to be in place before these developments are occupied, otherwise the new housing will reinforce the habit of driving everywhere.

Proposals and Policies 2 (Parking and park & ride), pages 20 and 21.

We support the ongoing proposals for special events. However, there is also a role for rail to cater for Somerset County Cricket home fixtures because trains can move large numbers of people quickly to specific destinations. The County Cricket ground is within walking distance of Taunton station and the Council should work with GWR to strengthen train services on home match days.

Proposals and Policies 3 (Active Travel), pages 22 and 23.

The document makes an excellent point about the spending by walkers and cyclists being underestimated. This is also true for tourists arriving by public transport as they cannot bring provisions on the scale which can be carried in a car. It is therefore likely that regular train connections between Taunton and the West Somerset Railway would boost the economy of West Somerset in particular.

Proposals and Policies 4 (Bus and Coach), pages 24 and 25.

We support the aspiration for cross-town bus services linking the railway station with Musgrove Park Hospital. Sunday morning buses are needed from Taunton suburbs, eg from Bishops Lydeard via Cotford and Staplegrove, to enable people to work, shop or catch trains and coaches.

Proposals and Policies 5 (Rail), pages 26 and 27.

Railfuture supports all the ongoing proposals, shorter-term commitments and longer-term aspirations listed. In particular we support the proposed station at Wellington as it would greatly improve the town's travel opportunities.

We recommend that Somerset produces Station Travel Plans for each national rail station in the county, on the lines of those introduced in Gloucestershire. The aim would be to remove barriers to accessing rail by bus, cycle or on foot. Whilst we support provision of additional car parking at stations, that cannot be the only way to attract people to rail travel.

As well as flood prevention measures to safeguard main lines across the Somerset levels, a station at Langport would reduce the isolation of that area when floods occur. During the 2014 floods, the main line via Castle Cary to Taunton was closed for only one day. Langport could be served by the Exeter-Paddington semi-fast services which call also at Castle Cary, Westbury and smaller towns towards Reading.