

Somerset West & Taunton Council
West Somerset House
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please reply to:
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GLOUCESTER
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nigel.bray2@railfuture.org.uk

4th January 2021

Dear Sir or Madam

Somerset West & Taunton Council Public Transport Task and Finish

Please find attached the Railfuture response to your Council's Task and Finish exercise for Public Transport. Our response discusses Taunton, Wellington, the West Somerset Railway and freight.

If anything requires clarification, please let me know.

Yours sincerely

Nigel Bray

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Railfuture
Secretary, Severnside Branch.

Taunton station

Railfuture welcomes the improvement works in progress at the station but there needs to be a greater degree of interchange with bus services. If more space could be found for buses to turn at the railway station, more routes (eg from Chard and Ilminster) could be extended from the town centre. As the new car park adjacent to Platform 2 may make the Kilkenny car park superfluous, the latter site could be used to create a transport hub incorporating a new bus and coach station.

Wellington station

We strongly support the proposal to reopen Wellington station as part of the extension of the Devon Metro Network. We welcome the Government's award of Restoring Your Railway funding towards a feasibility study. With a population of about 14,500, Wellington is the largest town on the main line from London to Penzance without a station and reopening it would give the town fast public transport to Taunton, Bridgwater, Bristol, Exeter and many other destinations.

Although a new local service calling also at Cullompton is proposed, there are a number of existing semi-fast trains which could serve both Wellington and Cullompton, for instance the 08.00 Cardiff-Paignton.

West Somerset Railway

We consider that the WSR has the potential to improve regular connectivity between West Somerset, Taunton and the wider world. The shuttle trains operated on eight Saturdays in 2019 between Taunton and Bishops Lydeard were a great success, attracting passengers from both within and beyond Somerset. We believe there is a strong case for the shuttles to run on a greater number of days in 2021, once Covid restrictions on travel have been lifted.

In the longer term, a regular, all year train service is needed between Minehead and Taunton to improve access to jobs for West Somerset residents, reduce congestion on the A358 and revitalise West Somerset's economy.

Freight

We are not sure whether your Council's definition of public transport includes freight but rail is not just a passenger mode. In recent years GWR has carried light freight such as seafood by passenger train, in conjunction with InterCity RailFreight Limited, exploiting rail's advantage of time over distance. The fast trains serving Taunton would be ideal for transporting time sensitive goods such as medicines and high end perishable foods.

We wish the Council to safeguard the Network Rail sidings at Fairwater, as these could also accommodate bulky rail freight. The WSR has received trainloads of stone for sea defence work for several periods since 1997 and could well carry freight again in the future.