

NOTES OF PRESENTATION BY CHRIS LODER
SOUTH WEST TRAINS HEAD OF SERVICE & PRICING STRATEGY
FOR RAILFUTURE WESSEX BRANCH MEETING
WINCHESTER CLUB, WORTHY LANE, WINCHESTER, SO23 7AB
SATURDAY 12th MARCH 2016

“DIRECTION OF TRAVEL”

Chris started his address tracing from when he left school in Sherborne and joined the recently privatised rail industry training to be a South Western Trains (SWT) guard on West of England line services moving onto Abellio Greater Anglia, Deutsche Bahn, Arriva then Great Western Railway and coming back to SWT as Head of Business projects then as Head of Service and Pricing Strategy since October 2015.

The audience was told that Chris believed privatisation had facilitated passenger traffic growth from 800m journeys per year to the current 1.6bn which is still growing.

In 1997 (pre privatisation) UK railways were running with a £2bn operational cost deficiency which for 2014 had shrunk to £0.1bn (£9.5bn income £9.6bn expenditure) which Chris suggested showed the privatisation concept was working.

The SWT network covers 643 miles of track, has 1375 sets of points 4394 signals and on the 20th anniversary (4th February 2016) operated 1449 carriages providing 1689 services/day up from 1022 vehicles and 1580 trains per day in 1996. Revenue has doubled to £1bn/annum in the last 10 years with £400m being returned to the UK Treasury which Chris stated should be the basis for calling for increasing investment in the network's infrastructure.

SWT's busiest stations are Waterloo, Clapham Junction, Vauxhall, Wimbledon and Putney. The company is reviewing how they classify stations by usage as well as income.

Waterloo is the busiest station in Europe (108m journeys/annum) being used by more travellers during the 0800 to 0900 morning peak than use Heathrow on an average day.

Chris said that whilst 'significantly delayed' services can cause embarrassment with delays cascading across the network the reality is that this is only an average of 5 out of 1700+ daily services.

The company's big news in 2015 was the creative review of the West of England service diagrams to provide more capacity on Exeter services out of Salisbury providing Frome & Castle Carey with direct links to London and connecting the Yeovil stations by regular service for the first time in many years albeit only in the afternoons. Salisbury had Sunday services increased to 2 per hour with one running nonstop from Clapham Junction to reduce overcrowding and balancing loadings over other network services. Other improvements were doubling the Hounslow loop Sunday services to 2/hour and strengthening 4/5 car services to 6/8 vehicles.

The May 2016 will have a number of changes including some morning service for Yeovil.

There are discussions with Dorset councils how some empty stock placement services might be made revenue earners by serving Weymouth and the Heart of Wessex line which could even out the irregular GWR services pattern. Other discussion topics are how and where to

increase car parking capacity which may include decking (as at Winchester) and try to improve bus connections/information.

Following the launch of the Sherborne Community Rail Partnership there is a call for another CRP to serve Devon stations.

Chris advised that as part of Network Rail’s work to improve West Country rail resilience there could be central funding for West of England line signal improvements for Weymouth to Dorchester and Gillingham to Salisbury in Control Period 6 (2019-2024). He considers there is potential for the line’s renaissance to serve housing and employment schemes and it is possible/probable for schemes to be decided locally if/when devolution gathers pace with local infrastructure projects being commissioned through Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). The rechanneling of funding means that calls for the Bournemouth & Poole metro and South Hants metro style services could carry more weight and the Richard Drax MP suggestion for a Weymouth to London service via Yeovil as a basis of a Chiltern Line style regeneration for the Heart of Wessex Line needs to be given serious consideration and during questions advised Nigel Ewens that it could be a good time to start talking up his Portland and Bridport suggestions.

Rail route studies are London centric. Supporting Cross Rail 2 could relieve pressure on Waterloo and that TfL ‘hugging’ suburban services could lead to a ‘change in (service pattern) dynamics’ and maybe the long term requirement for rail access to Heathrow might best be served by services from Basingstoke routed via Reading. In the meantime suburban trains are being lengthened from 8 to 10 cars with more sidings being laid to hold increased rolling stock.

Responding to a question about Island Line Chris commented there had been ‘lots of studies’ but did not offer an opinion as to the future way forward.

Network Rail Route studies are looking at housing development proposals (lots of extant planning permissions yet to be built out) and forecasting 40% growth in rail passenger traffic and is starting to improve communications with politicians, planning authorities and LEPs.

Responded to the suggestion the West of England line needs to be double throughout Chris advised this can only be achieved by providing robust economic business cases so is only likely be achieved in a piecemeal fashion starting with dynamic loops that can be extended as traffic grows and again the need for NR to be fully aware of the significant number of houses being planned along the line and the commercial opportunities these provide.

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