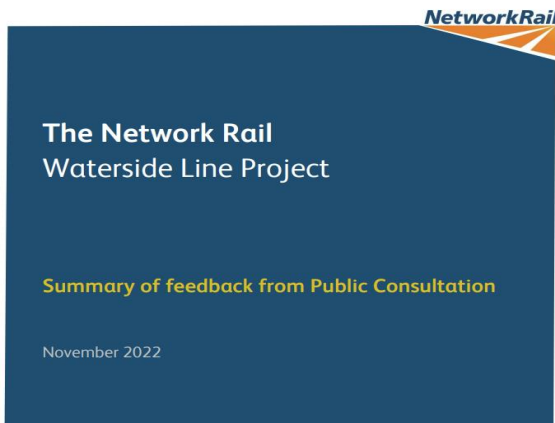


There have been some further developments since compiling our Autumn newsletter and the Wessex column for December's Railwatch, so here's a brief update...

Overwhelming support for Waterside rail service

Back in the summer, Network Rail published their draft proposals for restoring a passenger service on the Waterside Line between Southampton and Hythe. Subsequently they invited the public to submit comments on the plan via an online survey, backed up by leaflets and presentations in relevant neighbourhoods. We hope you were one of those that took part in the survey!



The results of the consultation have just been published and show that a huge majority of residents back the plan, with 84% saying they either "agree" or "strongly agree" that it will improve the public transport offering. NR report that over 1500 responses were received resulting in an 80% advocacy for the proposals. At Wessex Branch we contributed to the consultation with our own letter of support, backed up by evidence and some suggestions that we hoped would be helpful as the development process moves forward.

NR plans to make an application to Government for a Transport and Works Act Order some time in 2023, which will enable the necessary improvements to track, signalling and stations to begin. That's great news for residents in the Waterside area who have not had a passenger service on their line for over 50 years!

You can read the full report here:

<https://www.networkrail.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Waterside-Line-Summary-Consultation-Report.pdf>

Business Case for Welborne station gets under way

In the Wessex column of the December issue of Railwatch, we've included a progress report on the preparation of a business case for the proposed station at Welborne on the line between Fareham and Botley. We've since learnt that Fareham Borough Council has appointed SLC Rail consultancy to proceed with delivering the necessary Strategic Outline Business Case using the £65,000 grant from the Government's Garden Communities Fund. [FBC's press release](#) says the SOBC report will "help us move this ambitious goal one step closer" ...which is quite a turnaround considering the Council's original stance was that a bus connection to Fareham station would adequately serve the 6,000 home development.

New cycle hub at Salisbury

The launch of Salisbury station's [new cycle hub](#) took place recently. The new cycle facility represents the first phase of forecourt improvements which South Western Railway will be part-funding through their Customer and Communities Improvement Fund. The hub is a joint project between SWR, DfT, Wiltshire Council and Co Bikes with 74 cycle parking spaces and an e-bike docking station. It was officially opened by Cllr Tom Corbin, Mayor of Salisbury, who is also a SWR train driver.

Ongoing SWR issues

Following his face-to-face meeting with SWR's Senior Regional Development Manager, our Chair Mike Southgate has had a further email exchange to clarify a few points. The overall message from SWR is that the minor timetable adjustments from 11th Dec are the most they could achieve without putting forward a "robust business case" for additional services to the Dept. for Transport - hence our conclusion that the only way to make progress on this is through lobbying MPs. It is also clear that the delay to the introduction of the new Arterio train fleet is restricting SWR's ability to restore pre-Covid frequencies and train lengths.

The manager did express regret that their consultation exercise around major changes to the timetable for December (on which our Branch committee expended considerable time) was largely in vain. In their view, the recovery in passenger numbers was not yet sufficient to make substantive timetable improvements. This is a bit of a chicken-and-egg situation: we say that passengers who have a choice are hardly likely to return to rail if their service frequency has been halved or their journey time has been lengthened by poor connections.

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Connectivity between ferries and trains continues to be a major concern for travellers to/from the Isle of Wight, and our representative Stuart George has had meetings with relevant managers to try to iron out difficulties. SWR and Wightlink have agreed to review future timetable changes to improve the connections especially when the works at Ryde Pier has been completed. SWR say they remain committed to enhancing the service along the route with the intention to introduce a regular, all-day, two trains per hour service (albeit with alternate trains terminating at Ryde Esplanade) after the Pier works have been completed. There will be no change to the present timetable, except for engineering works, until Spring 2023.

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Alan Mayes has had a reply from SWR about the problem of ticket gates at Waterloo rejecting the return portion of an off-peak ticket. The Customer Relations manager claims it was a temporary measure during a month when extra manual ticket checks were being performed as part of efforts to reduce fraud - they suspected that people without railcards were claiming a railcard discount. Alan remains sceptical about this explanation since his railcard was not requested during the manual checks; moreover his valid ticket has failed to open the gates on numerous occasions since May.

Please let us know if you have similar problems at ticket gates. We always like to hear of your experiences with rail travel, good or bad – this helps identify any issues that need to be addressed. In the meantime, we hope you have an enjoyable Christmas and wish you all the best for 2023!

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