

SALISBURY TO EXETER RAIL USERS GROUP. (SERUG)

For The STATIONS OF GILLINGHAM, TEMPLECOMBE, SHERBORNE. YEOVIL JUNCTION AND CREWKERNE. November 2015.



Credit Paul Blowfield

This is the first of a series of newsletters, concerning the Waterloo / Salisbury to Exeter railway line, operated at the moment by South West Trains (SWT). It is promoted by Railfuture, an Independent voluntary national group campaigning for the future of rail transport. See www.railfuture.org.uk.

We give an independent view of the service quality, information and links with the TOC (Train Operating Company) ie SWT, Network Rail (NR who operate the track and signalling and supporting infrastructure), and any links with other groups, eg Friends of the stations at the head of this newsletter, and The Heart of Wessex Line.

The line's towns are increasingly dependent on an improving railway, as the populations continue to grow, as does their economic success, house building and increased ridership. There are too many single line sections (eg .Wilton to Tisbury passing loop/Tisbury to Gillingham/Yeovil Junction to just short of Exeter with passing loops at Axminster and Honiton) this limits frequency, good time keeping, and adds to journey times by including recovery minutes (eg stopping in the Tisbury loop, waiting at Salisbury etc).

The Yeovil Junction to Exeter line is also used for resilience (ie alternative route when the Castle

Cary/Taunton to Exeter St Davids line is blocked) for GWR (Great Western Railway) trains, whose High Speed Trains (HST) are longer and faster than the unit's that operate our line, hence their operation is restricted and our SWT train timings have to be altered to cope and their extra (but infrequent) use.

Our line is well used, especially the Salisbury to Yeovil Junction sections, and from Axminster and Honiton towards Exeter, that becoming part/mixing with the Devon Metro service with GWR.

There is an apparent demand for a faster journey times, greater capacity and better quality service, to match increased and varied travel patterns.

Links are provided at Salisbury with lines to Southampton, Portsmouth, Bath and Bristol/Cardiff and at Yeovil Junction/Pen Mill (stations not yet linked other than by bus until December 2015 when a limited SWT service will be tested) to Westbury, Dorchester West and Bath and Bristol.

In the long term Rf would like to see doubling of the line, but without funding that is unlikely. As a first phase doubling Wilton Junction (Salisbury) to Tisbury Station, and Yeovil to Crewkerne would dramatically improve the

service. A half hourly service from Waterloo to Yeovil Junction is warranted.

The lines rolling stock – the well liked DMU's (Diesel Multiple Units) are over 22 years old and operate on this section with mainly 3 car units with some 6 car. Rf would like to see 6 car trains, before the 19.20 departure from Waterloo, and a late departure from Waterloo to Yeovil Junction. Shorter journey times to Waterloo, will require more double track, revised signalling, with higher line speeds.

Rf with your help will lobby for these improvements.

THE 13th DECEMBER 2015 SWT timetable and new routes.

This gives additional services from Yeovil Junction to Pen Mill, Frome, Bruton, Westbury and Salisbury for the first time, (and on to Waterloo) so get your timetable as soon as you can. Connections with Bristol and Bath will improve (at Yeovil Pen Mill and other stations), as will those to Weymouth, and changing trains and connections become easier.

YOUR STATION.

The recent changes now support rail community user groups (CUG) which relate to stations or sections of lines, but at the extreme a line (eg Heart of Wessex for Bristol/Bath/Westbury/Yeovil Pen Mill/Weymouth). The following groups have written a few notes for this news letter.

Friends of Gillingham.

A new look into the future improvements for the station have been instigated by a team lead by Sarah Reeves of Three Rivers Council

Friends of Templecombe.

This support group looks after the extensive gardens, and earlier this year undertook the cosmetic renovation of the former waiting room/ toilet block, and redundant 1930's art-deco signal box. Those are now resplendent in former Southern Railway green and cream livery, having received a great number of favourable comments. Follow on <https://www.facebook.com/friendsofemplecombestation>

Friends of Sherborne

Sherborne has a much-valued ticket office (open until 2pm, and closed on Sundays), and buffet. The toilet s need to be open longer. Ticket machines, one of which provides a telephone link, provide a basic service but are not popular with an elderly population, some of whom find them confusing.

The Sherborne Transport Action Group maintains contact with South West Trains. And we need a roof erected over the cycle racks with a County Council initiative.

Many trains are overcrowded, and we need a late night service from London.

Yeovil junction.

A new Friends to be set up soon.

Crewkerne.

<http://www.crewkernetown.org/friendsofcrewkernestation/> is their excellent web site – have a look at it!

Heart of Wessex line (GWR)

<http://www.heartofwessex.org.uk/> another great web site for this line.

NETWORK RAIL. (NR) ..

NR have completed their long term study of the Wessex lines but they concentrate on London. New flyovers at Woking and Basingstoke are planned. We will lobby to ensure funding is available for these projects. Each may cost in excess of £10m.

In the meantime engineering works continue on our line to enable the safe and efficient running of your railway.

YOUR TOC - SOUTH WEST TRAINS. (SWT)

Your train operating company, (TOC) carries over 230m passengers pa, and holds a franchise to February 2017 controlled by Dept for Transport (dft). It may have a 5 month extension as Waterloo will be subject to major engineering work to enable 10 car (from 8) suburban units to operate. Watch carefully for news of changes in timetables and suburban services in 2016 and 2017, and mainline services will be affected. It is possible Waterloo may close for a period over Christmas 2017.

Consultation for the new franchise specification can be found at

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/477307/south-western-stakeholder-consultation.pdf and responses are required by 9th

February 2016. Individuals can respond. Any franchise, bidding, will have to pay a premium to government, and that will reflect the quality of service provided by the operator. The dft will have to ensure value for money. We have no doubt that this franchise is the most profitable, and other operators will bid. The Government will decide based on a) capacity, b) quality of passenger experience, c) market growth, d) Island Line (IOW) e) collaborative working with Network Rail f) other issues not yet specified.

CAN YOU SUPPORT US and START A RAIL USER GROUP TO LOBBY FOR IMPROVEMENTS TO YOUR LINE – CONTACT dbduncan.1@virgin.net especially if you would like to help manage the new group.