

please reply to:

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21 Dec 2020

Dear Sirs,

Railfuture response to the Draft Portsmouth Transport Strategy, 2020 to 2036

We have pleasure in submitting Railfuture's comments, observations and ideas in response to the consultation on Portsmouth City Council's draft Transport Strategy.

Railfuture is Britain's leading and longest-established national independent voluntary organisation campaigning for a better railway across a bigger network for passenger and freight users, to support economic growth, environmental improvement and better-connected communities.

Railfuture's Wessex Branch essentially covers Hampshire, Dorset and the Isle of Wight. Several of our members live in the City of Portsmouth and our well-attended AGM in 2019 was held in the City, with Stephen Morgan MP as guest speaker.

In general, we feel that Portsmouth City Council should not underestimate the potential of rail to solve many of the transport problems in its area. Rail currently has a low modal share, meaning that there is plenty of scope to increase the use of existing rail infrastructure with the aim of providing reliable passenger services for both local connections and inter-regional travel.

As progress is made towards a zero-carbon society, it's axiomatic that greater use should be made of the electrified railways in the South.

Our recommendations for Portsmouth's Transport Strategy are set out in the pages that follow.

- In **Section 1**, we list our general recommendations for rail services in Portsmouth.
- In **Section 2**, we provide suggestions for the five railway stations in the City.

www.railfuture.org.uk www.railfuturescotland.org.uk www.railfuturewales.org.uk
www.railwatch.org.uk

Section 1 – General Recommendations

1. Portsmouth City Council should **specify standards** it would like to see for train services on all rail corridors radiating from the City, then actively support investment proposals that would achieve those aspirations. Parameters would include as a minimum: public performance measure (PPM), comfort level, frequency, journey time, first/last train times, and service level for Sundays and Bank Holidays.

In setting these standards, it should be noted that...

- a. Pre-pandemic PPMs for Portsmouth-London, Portsmouth-Cardiff and Portsmouth-Brighton services were classed as poor; other services were about average.
 - b. Some rolling stock used historically in the South has offered poor levels of comfort, eg: Class 450 units on London services and Class 313 units on Coastway services.
 - c. The objective should be 2tph for all stations in the Solent conurbation, although 3tph is the normal minimum for a “turn up and go” service level.
 - d. Sunday services are currently poor on GTR services from Southampton and Portsmouth to Brighton / Victoria / Littlehampton and should be closer to the service level for Saturdays.
 - e. Journey times for Portsmouth to/from London, Eastleigh and Southampton are slow compared to similar rail services elsewhere.
 - f. Track layout and signalling upgrades are needed within Portsmouth to improve operational resilience and achieve faster journey times.
2. We urge the City to press Network Rail to **flood proof the rail bridges** over Hilsa Creak and Moat. We consider this essential following the completion of embankment works around the north of Portsea Island.
 3. There needs to be a **zonal travelcard** for the Solent region covering all modes including train, bus and ferry.
 4. We support development of the bus-based South East Hampshire Rapid Transit as proposed. However, we advocate that corridors with high passenger numbers should be considered for conversion to **light rail metros** at a future date, depending on the relative merits of bus and light rail prevailing at the time. Light rail has many advantages, including: greater capacity, better safety and reliability, easier to electrify and more energy efficient, and no pollution from tyre particulates.
 5. We support proposals for new **Park & Ride** station at Farlington with access to/from the A27. New stations have also been proposed for Paulsgrove and Copnor; additional stations at these locations could be looked at again as part of the “Solent Metro” concept.

Beyond the City, there is scope for developing a rail-based Park & Ride at Swanwick station with access from the M27, and for promoting Park & Ride at Havant station by augmenting the car parking provision as demand increases.

6. We are pleased that Network Rail has confirmed that there is space at Fratton yard for at least a small-scale **freight transfer facility**. There needs to be a concerted effort to

enable a greater proportion of freight passing through Portsmouth International Port to be carried on rail, thereby removing some of the HGV traffic from the City's congested road network.

7. There should be **direct trains to more destinations**. There is a strong case for Portsmouth to be served once again by CrossCountry services to the Midlands and North, at least one train every 2h. The City should also have direct trains to the South West (Exeter and Plymouth/Torbay) via Salisbury, at least on summer Saturdays.
8. There are known **bottlenecks and speed restrictions** on many rail routes in the South. Portsmouth City Council should therefore support investment in rail infrastructure on relevant routes that will enhance connectivity for the City.
9. All City stations should have an up-to-date **travel plan** with clearly defined targets for implementation. As a minimum, there should be:
 - a. Steps to improve interchange with other modes and enhance “last mile” connectivity.
 - b. A City-wide bike hire scheme (encompassing e-bikes/e-scooters) with rental hubs at stations.
 - c. Station adoption groups at all five stations to foster community involvement.

Section 2 - Stations

Our detailed suggestions for the five stations in the City are set out below, running from north to south...

Cosham

The station here suffers from being rather “hemmed in” which limits the scope for improving access by bus (esp. northbound buses) and by car (kiss & ride, hire-car and taxis). This suggests that the short-term focus should be on better walking routes and improving linkages with the City's cycle network.

Interchange

The main bus stops for northbound bus services are separated from the station by some considerable distance, and there is the additional inconvenience of having to cross a busy road. We advocate altering traffic priorities to enable northbound buses to call at the existing bus interchange (the former tram stop). There would need to be measures to deter other motor traffic from using the level crossing, thereby allowing a clear pathway for buses.

Our recommendations for the station are therefore:

1. Improved walking and cycling routes.
2. Developed an improved bus interchange, with greater priority for buses.
3. Lengthen platforms, especially the eastbound platform because 10/12-car trains calling at the station overhang the level crossing causing traffic delays.

4. Provide a frequent minibus shuttle to/from QA Hospital (possibly integrating the service with the “Lakeside Express”).
5. Enlarge the station forecourt by demolition of neighbouring buildings as opportunity arises to enhance public circulation space and improve access by car (for kiss & ride, car-hire and taxis).

Hilsea

The cheaply-built structure at Hilsea needs to be redeveloped in stages to achieve a high-specification urban station with a good level of passenger facilities that befits the bustling commercial and residential hinterland.

Because its location is remote from the City's arterial road network, it follows that the principal means of access will be on foot or by bicycle. The use of e-bicycles and e-scooters should be actively encouraged - such transport greatly enlarges the station catchment without commensurate need for a large parking area.

Friends for Hilsea

The creation of a station adoption scheme would be of particular benefit to Hilsea. This would enhance community involvement with the station and encourage greater use of train services by residents who live within easy walking or cycling distance.

At the very least, Hilsea needs...

1. Better waiting facilities, complete with toilets.
2. Step-free access to platforms.
3. Cycle hub, to include secure bike storage and a bike rental scheme primarily for employees at nearby businesses; also improved linkages to the City's cycle network.

Fratton

The setting of this extensive station site in the heart of the City is currently rather down-at-heel. There is much scope for improvement, possibly as part of a comprehensive neighbourhood regeneration scheme.

Fratton Place

The topography at this location lends itself to the creation of a new public realm on a raft spanning the entire station, morphing to street level on three sides. Inspiration for this could be taken from the scheme under development at Edinburgh Waverley station. For rail passengers, the key aim would be to facilitate easy interchange with bus transit corridors, and to create traffic-free linkages to local footpaths and the City's cycle network.

In the meantime, our suggestions for Fratton station are:

1. Platform layout and train-door opening could be improved to prevent passenger surges when trains call.

2. Improved walking and cycling routes.
3. Better (direct) access to platforms from south side of station.

Portsmouth & Southsea

Its central location and historic station building make this Portsmouth's “City Gateway” station, and any future developments need to reflect its heritage and importance.

e-Taxi Beacon Project

An ideal beacon project for the station's taxi rank would be a facility for opportunity charging of electric taxi vehicles. This could be either via induction charging loops buried in the carriageway, or via conventional plug-in charge points. The latter option would need to be accompanied by a “next taxi” indicator for prospective passengers so that taxis retain their “first in first out” position on the rank. Such a project would encourage the take up of electric taxis in the City, and do much to clean up the polluted air in the central commercial district.

These improvements are needed at Portsmouth & Southsea:

1. Add a third terminating platform at Low Level to improve operational resilience, although we see an additional platform at Harbour station as having greater priority.
2. Better bus-rail interchange with the construction of a bus station on land adjoining the railway station.
3. Better signage and improved walking routes through the station and to bus stops.
4. Improved connections with Portsmouth International Port for ferry and cruise passengers. An innovative transit system could be considered on this corridor to cope with the fluctuating demand.
5. A regular cleaning regime for the internal walls and roof of the High Level station.

Portsmouth Harbour

Travellers arriving at the final station on the line through Portsea cannot fail to be impressed by views of the harbour and historic dockyard. More could be made of this stunning location.

Grand Destination

Future development of Portsmouth Harbour station, part-funded through commercial lettings, should aim to open additional vistas and improve public circulation spaces. There is the possibility of creating a continuous harbourside walkway from Gunwharf Quays across the railway pier to the Historic Dockyard. At the very least, there needs to be a direct pathway between the station and Gunwharf Quays.

Recent gateline installations have resulted in convoluted walking routes between trains, ferries, exits and station facilities – some interchanging passengers have missed their onward connections as a result.

We would like to see the following improvements at the Harbour station:

1. Reinstatement of Platform 2 to improve operational resilience. Additional services are now being scheduled to terminate at Portsmouth & Southsea due to platform congestion at the Harbour, and this trend needs to be reversed.
2. Improvements to walking routes through the station, particularly for passengers interchanging between trains and ferries.
3. Closer integration of the station with Gunwharf Quays.
4. Improved harbour vistas and new walkways, with seating area and food outlets.

Tony Smale

A.D. Smale, Secretary
Railfuture Wessex Branch