

Development of Train Services for Chiltern Routes

Response from Railfuture

1. Introduction

Railfuture is pleased to respond to the London TravelWatch document regarding the Development of Train Services for Chiltern Routes. Our comments will be brief and to the point.

Railfuture is the campaigning name of the Railway Development Society Limited, a (not for profit) Limited Company organised in England as twelve regional branches plus two national branches in Scotland and Wales. This coordinated response has been compiled by Railfuture London & South East, and has been agreed with Railfuture Thames Valley for those sections of line in their area (Amersham to Aylesbury and West Ruislip to Bicester North).

2. General Comments

Railfuture welcomes the initiative from LTW to suggest ways of raising standards of service on Chiltern Railways services in London and South East. We note the work that has gone into gathering the detail on network capacity and existing services.

Chiltern is unique for a number of reasons: its close working relationship and shared infrastructure with London Underground (LU) on the Aylesbury Line; the close proximity of other LU and London Bus services to many Chiltern 'metro' stations on the High Wycombe line; the close mix of short and medium distance commuter traffic and the poor interchange facilities at Marylebone. It is equally unique for the impressive increase in patronage generated by reliable modern rolling stock and infrastructure; the benefits of a long-term franchise agreement and an imaginative customer oriented professional management team.

It is also inhibited by many of the factors that make it unique! These range from the poor interchange facilities at Marylebone, to a lack of infrastructure between Wembley and West Ruislip.

3. Specific Comments

'i. TfL' Stations

We would support an increase in the number of trains serving stations between West/South Ruislip and Wembley Stadium. Whilst we admire LTWs wish to increase the number of such local stopping services to 4 or 6 trains per hour (tph), we agree that the current two track infrastructure would not support such a level of service without an adverse impact on Chiltern Main Line (CML) services.

And, whilst an admirable aim to provide a turn up and go service we have grave doubts that local passenger numbers would ever support such provision. That being so, the concomitant investment in civil engineering to accommodate four-tracking and associated works would not stack up in terms of a viable business case. The area is too well served by alternative means of accessing west and central London. In addition to local bus services, the presence of the Central Line at West/South Ruislip, the Piccadilly Line within 80mtrs of Sudbury Hill Harrow, and the Metropolitan and Jubilee Lines at Wembley all mitigate against the provision of a duplicating metro service and the high cost of such provision.

However, we do support a modest low-cost improvement strategy. Our research indicates that a 3 tph all day Monday to Saturday service and 2 tph Sunday service at all Chiltern 'TfL'

stations would adequately cater for current and anticipated demand. This could be achieved by relatively modest investment in signalling improvements and by providing passing tracks at Wembley Stadium. We would also suggest that Sudbury & Harrow Road station be reviewed to consider its viability. The possible closure of this station would serve to improve end-to-end running times over this section.

We also note the current project to provide an improved junction layout at Northolt Junction and this would also fit well into our proposal.

ii. The Aylesbury Line

Railfuture supports the general aim to improve all services and we fully support the suggestion for a joint review to be undertaken by LU, Chiltern and Network Rail.

The introduction of new S8 trains on the Metropolitan Line by 2012 and the subsequent re-signalling due for completion by 2016, and other associated infrastructure improvements will provide a once in a generation opportunity to speed up and increase service levels.

We would support the introduction of more intensive Aylesbury Line services and the eventual increase of service to Aylesbury Vale Parkway. This would also require a modest improvement to the NR signalling infrastructure between Harrow South Junction and Neasden Junction to provide three-aspect signals and create shorter sections thus increasing line capacity.

Railfuture has long supported the East-West Rail (EWR) proposals including the reopening of the line between Aylesbury and Claydon Junction to passenger trains for example to Milton Keynes. We do not, however, see any logic in suggesting that all such services be routed to London via the Aylesbury – Princes Risborough line. It would be far more beneficial if services were split with some running via High Wycombe and others running directly into Marylebone via Amersham and Harrow on the Hill as part of a completely restructured service.

Our view is that any services from Milton Keynes be structured as follows: Monday to Friday peak hours 4 tph (2 via High Wycombe and 2 via Amersham); off-peak and Saturday 3 tph (2 via High Wycombe and 1 via Amersham); Sunday 2 tph split between each route. Along with a completely restructured Chiltern timetable with some trains starting from Aylesbury/Aylesbury Vale Parkway, the combined Chiltern/LU service to London via Amersham can be structured to more adequately cope with growing demand.

iii. West Hampstead

Railfuture has long supported the proposal to provide an interchange opportunity at West Hampstead. We recognise the logic and considerable journey opportunities presented by this. We recognise that the provision of the full scheme as originally envisaged by Chiltern, ran into considerable local opposition regarding its scope.

We would support the provision of a more limited scheme to provide platforms for Chiltern Line services. This would of course also serve to provide relief for the already overcrowded conditions at Marylebone. However, we have considerable reservations about how such a scheme can be presented in a value for money context. Clearly, it would not be possible to locate the platforms level with the tube station. The only possible viable location appears to be to the north of the bridge carrying the B510 West End Lane. Even here it would require an island platform and that would mean slewing the down line to create the necessary space. That would seem to indicate placement of the platform at least 75 but more probably 90 mtrs north of the B510. That would then require a footway back to the B510 over bridge and a connection to the West Hampstead LU station ticket hall. Even this more modest scheme would present both civil engineering challenges and a substantial cost. Nevertheless, we believe it is a necessary enhancement.

iv. Banbury

Concerns are expressed about the level of connectivity between High Wycombe and Banbury northwards and a suggestion is made to remodel at Banbury to facilitate changing there avoiding the use of the over-bridge; but the scale of work proposed does not seem to be justified. High Wycombe has through services to Birmingham hourly and in the alternate half hour a simple same platform change at Bicester North connects into Birmingham trains and

likewise southbound. Provided Bicester North retains at least 1 tph northwards post Evergreen 3 this service level would continue. As for changing at Banbury as platform one is now reversible, for northbound passengers this is a simple cross platform change. Their proposal would eliminate some conflicting moves but I think it would be hard to justify. Also more use could be made of the upside south facing bay platform (No 4) which is infrequently used at present.

v. Electrification

In the medium to long term Railfuture would support the general electrification of the line between Marylebone, Banbury and Birmingham. We would NOT support the diversion of all services from the Aylesbury Line via Princes Risborough, but would instead suggest the electrification of the Neasden Junction to Harrow on the Hill and Amersham to Aylesbury (and north to Claydon Junction, etc.). This would require the provision of dual voltage rolling stock for the section between Harrow on the Hill and Amersham. We do not view this option as disadvantageous or cumbersome, or indeed as high cost. Instead it would provide a fast and efficient service into London without compromise to the Chiltern Main Line.

The bad idea of transferring all services between Amersham and Aylesbury back to LU was floated in the 1980s. The same constraints apply today and will do in the future even allowing for new rolling stock and signalling. The limited capacity at Baker Street cannot be remedied and any upward flow of passengers displaced from Marylebone could not be handled. In addition, the S8 trains are not designed to the standard needed to operate out as far as Aylesbury, the seating in particular.

vi. Heathrow Airport

We do not see any business case whatsoever for this proposal.

vii. Uxbridge to Crossrail via Northolt

Railfuture does not see any business case for this proposal.

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