

## Agenda Item 13

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# Report

**Report subject** : SDC formal response to South West Main Line Route  
Utilisation Strategy Consultation by Network Rail

**Report to** : Western Area Committee

**Date** : 8 December 2005

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## 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Member's views on the comments set out in Section 4 of this report as the basis of a formal response of The Council to Network Rail's Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS) Draft for Consultation, which covers all rail services emanating from London Waterloo. The RUS will be used to help develop the franchise specification for the re-franchising of the South Western Franchise, currently operated by South West Trains. A new 7 to 10 year franchise will begin in February 2007.
- 1.2 The Consultation document seeks stakeholder responses relating to the issues of overcrowding on Waterloo-Exeter line services at peak times and on their proposals for improving the capacity of this route by adding two new passing loops to allow the present hourly services to Yeovil to be extended west to Exeter. Due to time constraints relating to the franchise replacement process set by the Department for Transport, the consultation period will be less than the standard 12 weeks. The deadline for receipt of submissions is Friday the 6<sup>th</sup> January 2006.

## 2. Background

- 2.1 The purpose of producing a Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS hereafter) is to provide a framework for making the best use of existing railway infrastructure and to evaluate the value for money of any enhancement options that could alleviate capacity problems. This RUS does not cover South Coast to South Wales services. These form part of the Greater Western franchise, which is due to be awarded in December 2005. The RUS will inform investment and capacity decision making over the period 2007 to 2017. The draft report has identified eleven key gaps or parts of the network that have or are expected to have capacity problems. Two of these "gaps" are relevant to the London to Exeter West of England line, which serves Salisbury and Tisbury.

- 2.2 The current level of service provided on this route is two trains an hour between Salisbury and Waterloo, with an hourly service westward as far as Yeovil, and services every other hour continuing to Exeter (and some extended to Plymouth/ Paignton). The RUS recognises that this level of service frequency cannot be improved upon with rail infrastructure as it stands. West of Salisbury, the majority of the line to Exeter is single tracked with limited passing loops, which is a severe constraint on the capacity of the route to run additional services.

The SELCA (Salisbury to Exeter Lineside Consortium of Authorities) partnership of local authorities has been lobbying the Strategic Rail Authority for the double-tracking of the whole route for a number of years.

- 2.3 The full RUS text can be found on the following website <http://www.networkrail.co.uk/Documents/SouthWestMainLineDraftConsultation.pdf>. Chapters 1 & 2 provide a good summary of the purpose of the RUS and how it relates to the South Western franchise. The key sections of the RUS that are of relevance to South Wiltshire rail stations are two parts of Chapter 6 of the report, entitled "Gaps and Options".

Gap 1 (pages 40-44) assesses the issue of peak hour overcrowding on several SWT routes, including the West of England line. Three options are considered. These are:

- Run more train services to reduce overcrowding
- Run the same number of services, using longer trains (and extended platforms)
- Lengthen the period of time in which commuters travel (before 8am & after 9am) using price incentives

Gap 9 (pages 61-62) addresses the capacity problem on the West of England line and offers two options, which are:

- Double track the whole West of England Route
- Install two new passing loops near Axminster and Pinhoe to allow an hourly Exeter service to be operated

A third option of changing the timetable to provide new capacity has been discounted as not being possible.

- 2.4 Chapter 7 (page 68) of the draft report specifies what comments Network Rail is seeking to glean from stakeholders. They are primarily interested in our views on the options set out in Chapter 6. The comments made by stakeholders at this consultation stage will be reviewed prior to publication of the final RUS report.

### **3. Main Considerations to consider in producing formal SDC response**

#### **3.1 Franchise specification & central government policy**

Under the Railways Act 2005, responsibility for rail passenger franchising has been transferred to the Department for Transport Rail Group, from the Strategic Rail Authority, which has now been wound up. This was to ensure that ministers were fully accountable for rail policy, and to allow government to closely specify what they require of franchises.

The previous policy emphasis on removal of bottlenecks, planned growth and large-scale investment in extra capacity of the railway network has given way to a less ambitious approach that seeks to control costs.

The two main aims of the current round of franchising is to ensure government is getting value for money for the resources it is putting into passenger rail franchises, and to ensure operators work to improve service reliability and punctuality. Network Rail is now unlikely to consider increasing frequencies on routes where this could affect punctuality. It is in this context that the Council's formal response to the RUS must be considered.

Current policy precludes public investment towards the provision of new stations. Neither the Department for Transport nor Network Rail has a programme for station re-openings. The only exception to this is stations that can be fully funded by developers of large new residential developments. Nevertheless, it would still be pertinent for SDC to refer to its desire to see new stations at Wilton, Dinton and Porton as part of its formal response.

### **3.2 Overcrowding of peak services**

During the morning peak, there are services at half-hourly intervals from Tisbury and Salisbury to London. Services are formed of 6 coaches up to Salisbury, then most are strengthened to 9 coaches. Overcrowding tends to become a problem at Andover and Basingstoke. Platforms west of Salisbury cannot accommodate trains longer than 6 coaches.

### **3.3 West of England Line Capacity**

Network Rail has stated that full double-tracking of the line would not offer value for money for the government. It argues that the benefits of double-tracking would be limited, because track capacity between Woking and Waterloo would not allow any improvements in frequency over and above current levels. It has stated that provision of two new passing loops near Axminster and Pinhoe would offer value for money, and enable an hourly Exeter service to be provided.

Both these passing loops are on the western part of the West of England route. No improvements are planned to extend the short passing loop located a quarter of a mile to the east of Tisbury station. It would make sense as part of any line capacity upgrade to extend this loop the short distance westward to pass through Tisbury station, in order to reduce knock on delays to services, and to speed up journey times (as currently London-bound trains have to stop at Tisbury, then stop again to the East in the loop to wait for the Exeter-bound train to pass).

The main danger of allowing for hourly services to Exeter would be if the franchise specification for the new South Western franchise potentially reduces the number of calls at intermediate stops such as at Tisbury from their present level, in order to offer reduced journey times for longer distance passengers.

## **4. SDC formal response**

- 4.1 SDC welcomes the options set out under Gap 1 to consider increasing the frequency or length of peak hour services to alleviate the growing problem of overcrowding. The Council would welcome any enhancement in capacity on the West of England route to improve the current two trains arriving at Waterloo between 8am and 9am.
- 4.2 SDC holds an aspiration shared with many other stakeholders of the West of England line to see the whole route double tracked, to improve journey times and service reliability between Salisbury and Exeter. In the absence of funding for this option, we would welcome the proposals for additional passing loops to enable provision of an hourly service to Exeter (in option 9.2), with the caveat that we would not wish to see service frequencies to intermediate rural stations such as Tisbury reduced from their present levels in order to provide faster journey times for long-distance passengers. The community of Tisbury is poorly served by the strategic road network and depends greatly on the continued existence of frequent services to other destinations on the West of England line.
- 4.3 In addition to the two loops proposed as part of Option 9.2, SDC would like to see Network Rail give consideration to the viability of extending the existing passing loop located a quarter of a mile to the east of Tisbury station westwards through Tisbury station, as a further means of improving line capacity and service reliability by allowing train services to pass over a longer loop, avoiding the need for trains to stop and wait for the single line to clear. Such a measure would require the down platform to be brought back into use and require a new footbridge to be constructed.
- 4.4 SDC would like to see its aspiration to see a new station at Wilton, to serve this important market town, and new stations at Porton and Dinton added to the list of new station proposals set out in Appendix B of the RUS report. This medium to long-term aspiration is set out within the Salisbury District Local Plan (Adopted June 2003). Proposals for a new station at Porton are being pursued by developers, as part of a process of consolidation of MoD activities on Porton Down. The proposals for new stations at Wilton and Porton have the support of Wiltshire County Council. Policy T11 in its Wiltshire Structure Plan Review 2016 Deposit Draft Alterations sets out that WCC will encourage and promote these proposed stations. The South West and South Wales Multi-Modal Study also known as SWARMMS - the South West ARea Multi-Modal Study report of May 2002 to the Government Office of the South West, on page 28 of the final report re-iterates the aspirations held by SDC and WCC to see a new station developed at Wilton.

**5. Recommendation**

- 5.1 That the Committee note the points made above, the points made by Cabinet at its meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> December (to be circulated at the Western Area Committee meeting) and to consider whether any additional comments, in so far as they effect the Western Area should be included within the Cabinet response, subject to any such comments being consistent with those made by Cabinet, to be used as the formal response of the District Council to the South West Main Line Route Utilisation Strategy consultation by Network Rail.

**6. Implications**

**Financial** : none

**Legal** : none

**Human Rights** : none

**Personnel** : none

**Community Safety** : none

**Environmental** : Improvements to the Salisbury – Exeter rail corridor will benefit the environment by providing a more attractive alternative to car travel

**Council's Core Values** : Promoting a thriving economy, being environmentally conscientious, wanting to be an open, learning Council and a willing partner.

**Wards Affected** : Salisbury City wards, Tisbury and surrounding catchment areas for rail

**Consultation** : details contained in the report

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The Link to Network Rail's South Western Main Line RUS can be found at

<http://www.networkrail.co.uk/Documents/SouthWestMainLineDraftConsultation.pdf>

As it is a 80-odd page report, members could save time by reading it selectively. The most relevant parts of the RUS report to Salisbury District are Chapters 1 & 2 and pages 40-44, 61,62 (which deal with options affecting the London-Salisbury-Exeter Route) and 68-69.