

SALISBURY TO EXETER RAIL USERS GROUP (SERUG)

Issue Number: 4

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Supporting the stations of: **Exeter Central, Pinhoe, Cranbrook, Whimble, Feniton, Honiton, Axminster, Crewkerne, Yeovil Junction, Sherborne, Templecombe, Gillingham, Tisbury.**

Includes news from the **Blackmore Vale Line Community Rail Partnership, and East Devon Rail CRP.**



Yeovil Junction – 9 July 2017. Class 159 on a Waterloo service passes the steam locomotive Clan Line on a 50th anniversary of the last steam on the old Southern region. Built in 1948, Clan line saw 19 years of service with BR before withdrawal in 1967. The class 159s have already seen around 30 years of service but only refurbishment (not replacement) is planned. They are already some of the oldest trains in the country that are still in main line service. (photo credit: Paul Blowfield)

Welcome to our fourth newsletter ! ...and a note from the Chair.

Our last newsletter was March 2017, so apologies for the delay but events outside our control have ensured a waiting game. For example, the DfT did not give a reasoned answer to our questions about the new franchise then did not answer our second letter.

Secondly, there was little valid news prior to the new franchise starting on the 20 August 2017, and then the £800m works at Waterloo had to complete before South Western Railway (SWR) had any chance of running an efficient service.

So, here we are in October, contemplating a new working relationship with SWR. We are looking forward to both working with them and challenging them to create a better passenger experience.

To help that aim, Railfuture and SERUG have combined to produce a Proposal which sets out – in detail - how services on the line could be transformed. It has gone to all 8 MP's whose constituencies adjoin the line, plus the County and relevant District Councils, Network Rail and SWR. Do read it on our web site (www.serug.co.uk) together with and more information about what we are doing.

The new Train Operating Company – South Western Railway. (SWR)

After the granting of the new 7-year franchise to First/MTR group, now known as South Western Railway, we felt passengers on the West of England Line had been given a raw deal from the Department for Transport (DfT) – as most of the specification focused on the commuter lines around London. This is not progress for the 7 million people per year who use the stations between Salisbury and Exeter Central.

We must ensure Government understands that better services on our busy line are also critical, especially with the large numbers of new houses planned and general economic development.

Our aims have been slightly amended following the DfT's appointment of the new operator:

- Increase services between Yeovil Junction and Waterloo to 2 trains per hour throughout (both directions), requiring the double track to be reinstated between Dinton and Tisbury – also allowing late running trains to pass each other more easily.
- The ability to join and split trains at Yeovil Junction – creating more capacity and opportunity for new services
- Newer, faster trains to improve capacity and reduce overall journey times. i.e. to replace the current 30 year-old units.
- Later evening trains to and from Waterloo (Monday to Saturday).
- Maintaining current levels of unregulated fares.
- Increased capacity west of Yeovil to enable more services and provide capacity for Great Western services when they are diverted. This could be provided by double track from Yeovil to Crewkerne, plus a 6 mile loop at Whimble
- Improve car parking and station facilities, especially at Tisbury, Gillingham, Sherborne and Crewkerne.
- Ability to embark and disembark from the front doors of trains - presently locked when trains are in service.

Please see the “Current Issues and Activity” section overleaf for details of what you can do to enhance the chances of improvements

South Western Railway's stated objectives for the line are:

- Refurbishing the existing trains, including WiFi, charging points from every seat, free infotainment and real-time information
- Faster journey times from throughout between Exeter and London – savings of 5 minutes from Exeter and 10 minutes from Salisbury
- Longer peak and off-peak trains, more 6 car trains beyond Salisbury
- A morning peak service from and return evening service to Warminster and Westbury
- Better spacing of Yeovil Pen Mill services
- Earlier Sunday services
- Delay repay introduced
- £2.6m annual Customer & Communities Improvement fund.

Waterloo Station Upgrade

A huge amount of development work took place at Waterloo in August/September. There were timetable changes (with some trains running to Reading via Basingstoke rather than to Waterloo) but also some unforeseen delays and cancellations, caused mainly by a minor derailment just outside the station. The long-term objective is to improve capacity for 10 car suburban trains and to update a station that has seen little improvement over the last 60 plus years.

This phase of the £800m project was completed virtually on time. The hiccup being a signal defect. We must place on record the high level of skill and work ethic of the orange army, ie the workers and managers who deliver such schemes – Well Done!

Only the first part of the upgrade is complete. The remaining work (to bring the old "Eurostar" platforms back into full-time use) will not be completed until September 2018 – so we can expect more service alterations again next year. No gain without pain as the saying goes, but when the end-product is reached, it will be a huge achievement and we will have a transformed Waterloo.

Community Rail Partnerships...

There are 2 Community Rail Partnerships that cover this line:

Blackmore Vale CRP (Tisbury to Crewkerne)

If you would like to get involved, please email: blackmorevalecrp@gmail.com or contact **Caroline Rowland**, Partnership Officer for Blackmore Vale Line Community Rail Partnership on 07933 212 117.

East Devon Rail Partnership - covering the stations from Axminster to Pinhoe. This CRP is at the set-up stage at present. Contact SERUG if you'd like to know more.

There is also now a "**Friends of Honiton Station**" group. This new group is to develop a platform community notice board to promote local groups and events. The big priority is to improve the Exeter morning service peak, eliminating the long gaps between some trains, and of course support SERUG's strategy. Again, contact SERUG if you'd like to know more.

SERUG is affiliated with Railfuture – a not for profit organisation which campaigns for a better railway in Britain

IMPORTANT Current Issues and Activity

SWR have issued their Consultation for the new timetable due to commence in December 2018. The details can be found at: www.swrailway.com/timetableconsultation. SERUG will be responding but we also ask YOU to respond directly with your thoughts as well. (Please send SERUG a copy to contact@serug.co.uk) Proposed timetables have also been published. There are several changes, some of which seem to demonstrate SWR's desire to meet their objectives detailed opposite. A primary issue of contention is the removal of the Clapham Junction stop on most of the Waterloo - Exeter Services. Whilst this would provide a small time saving, the primary reason is likely to be linked to the need to provide more trains into Waterloo – and as Clapham Junction is a major bottleneck, it's removal will assist the wider goal. What is NOT mentioned in the consultation is that there would still be a good connection at Basingstoke to a fast service to/from Clapham, which would provide very similar end to end journey times. See timetable number 158 and 160 in the consultation.

Fares

SERUG, working with Railfuture, applied to the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) suggesting a monopoly on services from London to West Country. (First also run Great Western Railway – out of Paddington). There is a danger that fares and car parking charges on our line could be unfairly increased. CMA accepted such, and fare controls have been suggested by First to the CMA. However, this only covers tickets between Waterloo and Exeter (NOT the intermediate stations). This is disappointing, but SERUG will continue to monitor the position. Please tell us if you believe the unregulated fares (especially Advance fares) are less available or priced higher than you're used to.

On-train Catering Services appear to be increasingly unavailable. Virtually all services are scheduled to have on trolley service. We'd appreciate any feedback on specific services where the absence of catering is a regular occurrence.

SERUG has a web site www.serug.co.uk - have a look, especially for the events we are organising (including a meeting with the new operator SWR).

Our aim is to lobby the Government, NR, SWR and others to improve services and passenger experience on this line. Do let us know your experiences. Our Chair, Bruce Duncan or Secretary, Nick Hurrell will be pleased to hear from you.

Contact at bruce.duncan@railfuture.org.uk or contact@serug.co.uk

We welcome new members - subscription £6 per year – to receive regular updates, meeting dates, and reduced admission to events, etc. See our web site and complete the form online - payment is via Paypal or cheque. You can also find out more about us with our new brochure – "Help make it better" - available at stations. Subs paid now will not be renewable until April 2019.