

# Salisbury to Exeter Rail User Group (SERUG)

## Response to South Western Railway consultation on December 2018

### timetable proposals

#### Introduction/ background

This document is SERUG's response to South Western Railway (SWR)'s consultation on the December 2018 timetable proposals. It follows feedback from our committee and our members. The response also follows a meeting with the Chair and Secretary and SWR (Jon Hills and Chris Wallace) at Woking on 28 November, and reflects the outcomes of that discussion.

SERUG was formed in 2016 and represents rail users of the West of England line, focusing specifically on the section west of Salisbury where the current infrastructure severely restricts service and line speed improvements. We cover the stations of Tisbury, Gillingham, Templecombe, Sherborne, Yeovil Junction, Crewkerne, Axminster, Honiton, Feniton, Whimble, Cranbrook and Pinhoe and Exeter Central. ***As such, this response focuses specifically on the West of England line (Timetable no. 160)***

We now have over 100 members and 50 affiliates (non-paying). More information can be found on our website [www.serug.co.uk](http://www.serug.co.uk)

SERUG is not funded by any commercial rail operators or rail-based organisations. We lobby independently for service and infrastructure improvements that will benefit the travelling public. SERUG is affiliated to Railfuture, a non-political, not for profit organisation which campaigns for a bigger and better railway in Britain.

We have assumed that all services have sufficient rolling stock capacity to cope with the new timetable demands, and that the old 158/159's have enough resilience to provide sufficient cover. Current users have also stressed their concern about late running due to single line constraints and wish to be reassured that the new timetable does not increase delays. It is also assumed that on board catering will continue to be provided as now.

#### SERUG Response

##### **New Services**

1. We welcome the 3 additional off-peak services in both directions between Yeovil Junction and Waterloo.
2. We also welcome the later evening trains, especially the Waterloo - Exeter service at 21.25 and later services to Salisbury and Gillingham). We urge you to consider stronger negotiation with Network Rail to allow the 22.25 to be extended Yeovil Junction on Mon to Thurs (as well as Fridays). It is surely unlikely that Network Rail will require regular night-time possessions on this section.

3. The 07.18 Yeovil Junction to Exeter will improve capacity into Exeter. We understand the pathing issues caused by this train running so soon after the 07.06 departure (but we would urge you to re-consider the Crewkerne stop. All other services stop here. Our research shows that there is still sufficient time to stop at Crewkerne and Chard Junction in time to cross an up service

### **Removal of the Clapham Junction stop from most Exeter services.**

We understand that the increase in the number of services into and out of Waterloo means that Clapham is an increasing bottleneck and potential danger to punctuality. However, the status quo on West of England (WoE) services should be maintained, with the Clapham stop on Exeter trains retained, and removed from the Yeovil/Salisbury services (i.e. no change to what happens now).

### **Retention of the Woking stop on Exeter Services**

We support the proposed retention of this stop, which provides well known connectivity for other services and Heathrow RailAir link.

### **Alternate stopping of services at Clapham Junction and Woking**

We do not support this suggestion. It is easier for passengers to know that an hourly service exists, rather than having to “remember” which service stops on alternate hours.

To confirm our position – SERUG want to retain both the Clapham and Woking stops on Exeter services (with the current exceptions, as now, during peak hours).

### **Train Formations**

We are pleased to hear that more formations will be strengthened to 6 cars west of Salisbury. There is also higher demand during summer peak where longer trains are required due to loading and luggage issues. At these times, 6 cars on all Exeter services are required.

6 car formations are also particularly important with some of the early morning commuter services into Exeter where overcrowding currently occurs as far east as Honiton. Our research shows the following:

The present 0753 ex-Honiton to Exeter (the 06.08 from Salisbury) runs with six cars. If it is the intention to split this service at Yeovil (to provide stock for the new 07.18 to Exeter), this would bring no overall increase in capacity towards Exeter. All that will happen is that both the 07.53 and 08.14 departures from Honiton will be three cars. Currently, 100-120 passengers join the 6-car 07.53 at Honiton which then runs full and is often standing from Feniton onwards. Many of the present users will likely remain with this service – but running it as 3 cars will cause serious overcrowding. The later (new) service might take some of the overflow but would also attract new users, therefore creating the possibility of overcrowding for that train also.

### **Timetable Resilience**

1. Whilst we welcome the increased number of services between London and Yeovil, there is a concern that the extra services will reduce timetable resilience even further. It will also leave

fewer pathways for additional traffic - track measurement, maintenance (even steam and diesel excursions) together with a lower degree of slack to permit the service to recover when disrupted.

2. We support the retention of the additional "local" late afternoon services from Exeter to Honiton and Axminster, however they are frequently delayed or cancelled due to other late running services. We remain concerned that these cancellations may continue.

### **Direct services to Weymouth on summer Saturdays**

A "nice to have" – but not vital. Pricing was effective in guaranteeing good loadings when the service ran in 2016. If it runs the service must be resilient

### **Whimble**

Noting the welcome additional morning train from Whimble at 0825, there will still be the same 70-minute gap as now in the up-evening services from Exeter to Whimble. We understand the DfT has specified that Pinhoe requires an hourly service, but Whimble remains disadvantaged. We suggest that the 1726 from Exeter St Davids also stops at Whimble (the only station not served), which would help to plug a gap in the evening peak.

### **Through Services to Barnstaple**

We have heard stories that some users are suggesting an extension of some Waterloo services through to Barnstaple. At this stage, SERUG does not support this. Any delays on that section would create havoc with timetable resilience on the sections towards Yeovil and Salisbury.