

SALISBURY TO EXETER RAIL USERS GROUP (SERUG)

Issue Number: 5

March 2018

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



Class 159 in New South Western Livery at Bristol (photo Paul Blowfield)



Templecombe station March 2nd – no signs of trains today! (photo Paul Blowfield)

Welcome to our 5th Newsletter! ... and a note from the Chair.

Our last newsletter was October 2017, and what a busy time we have had on your behalf. The pinnacle being a meeting at the House of Commons in February 2018, with MPs whose constituencies adjoin the line, to present our Proposals for infrastructure investment on the Salisbury-Exeter section.

The meeting was timely as the Network Rail Strategy document for the Wessex region (Feb 2018) contains no plans whatsoever for infrastructure improvements to the line in the foreseeable future.

Eight MPs or their representatives attended the meeting which focussed on the need to improve capacity and train service reliability. Realising the likely budget constraints, we highlighted just 4 key areas for improvement – each of which would bring substantial passenger benefit. Our proposals were received with great interest and Sir Oliver Letwin agreed to coordinate the MPs actions, which include a formal request to the Rail Minister to initiate funding from via Network Rail to prepare costings for the proposals. We are delighted to report that, without exception, all the MPs involved have formally confirmed their support for our proposals and a letter was sent to the Minister on 2nd March. You can read the full SERUG papers on the website www.serug.co.uk.

The Dft has also supported some of our aims in its response to the Peninsular Rail Task Force, who care for the Devon & Cornwall rail network following the recent Dawlish and Exeter (Cowley Bridge) flooding. Our line is used by Great Western railway (GWR) as a diversionary route when things go wrong.

We will continue to work hard to push for improvements, but we must be realistic in understanding that infrastructure improvements take a long time. The key issue is to get work costed, agreed and formally scheduled.

Bruce Duncan – Chair. March 2018

Summary of our Aims

Our meeting with the MPs highlighted the following key areas for urgent attention:

- Re-instate double track between Dinton and Tisbury (including the second platform at Tisbury), thereby improving resilience for late running, faster journey times and allowing the potential for a half hourly service in both directions between Salisbury and Yeovil Junction.
- Increased capacity west of Yeovil allowing more local services into to Exeter and the ability for Great Western services to be diverted over this line without interrupting the timetable. This would be achieved with a 6-mile loop near Whimble and a further long loop east of Crewkerne.
- The ability to join and split trains at Yeovil Junction – creating more capacity and opportunity for new services

Other objectives continue to include:

- Newer, faster trains to improve capacity and reduce overall journey times.
- Later evening trains to and from Waterloo.
- Maintaining current levels of unregulated fares.
- 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.

Our MPs need your support...

Our MPs have unanimously supported SERUG's objectives.but investment will take time, so please continue to lobby them to get things moving
Let them know your views (good as well as bad) on how Network Rail and SWR are performing too.

Passenger numbers continue to increase

The ORR (Office of Rail & Road) publish passenger use figures each year. 2017 saw an annual increase of 4.3% along our line, even though Waterloo had a reduced service in August.

Excluding Exeter Central and Salisbury, Gillingham has the highest number of passengers (434,378) followed by Axminster (395,216) and Honiton (390,050). Gillingham requires a station upgrade as it has poor passenger facilities.

Tisbury (239,480), has a single platform and also needs refurbishment. Our presentation to the MPs highlighted that the second platform should be restored (along with a longer loop from Dinton through to Tisbury). This would dramatically improve the passenger experience and cut 7 minutes on journey times from Salisbury and beyond.

Cranbrook in its first full year after opening saw 90,000 journeys!

The full figures are on our website.

South Western Railway issues

South Western Railway (SWR) have not had an easy time after their August 2017 start. Punctuality has been poor, notably so on this line, with on-time arrivals dropping from 85.4% to 80.9% over the past year. Whilst many of the issues are the result of the unreliable signalling and lengthy single line sections (and therefore cannot be attributed to SWR), the 30 year-old trains are now showing their age, with reliability falling by a whopping 56% over the past 12 months.

We are due to have meetings with the Engineering Director at SWR about the train reliability. In addition, a new Regional Development Director has also been appointed and has agreed to talk to both members and non-members on 27 April at the Yeovil Railway Centre (See Upcoming Events below).

If your train is delayed by 15 minutes or more, you can claim compensation from SWR. Known as "Delay Repay" the full details are available on the SWR website. Feedback from those who have used this compensation facility suggests that it works well.

SERUG will work as closely as we can with SWR and Network Rail to provide a bigger and better railway.

It is important that we lobby for long term improvements NOW. We wish to shorten the procurement time too.... The improvements at Axminster (2009) included 3 miles of new track, a new platform with bridge and lifts, new signals etc at a cost of £20m, but took about 15 years to deliver!!!

The trains will need replacing by the next franchise, and so we will research alternatives so that procurement may be possible during the next franchise.

Upcoming Events *(Full details will be posted on our website)*

- Meet SWR Management: 27th April at yeovil Railway Centre (start 16.30) Open to all (members and non-members)
- Members only visit to Exeter Powerbox Date TBA *(did you know that our line is controlled by no less than 7 signal boxes?)*

We need your feedback....

We're seeing increasing dissatisfaction with the service provided. Whilst we must understand that not all problems are of SWR's making, they remain the point of contact for resolution. SERUG would like to monitor your issues, please copy us in on any relevant correspondence you have with SWR, Network Rail or other rail-related bodies. Our email address is contact@serug.co.uk

On-train Catering Services appear to be increasingly unavailable. Virtually all services are scheduled to have a trolley service. Let us know of specific services where the absence of catering is a regular occurrence, especially between Salisbury and Axminster/Exeter.

SWR Web site - has come in for criticism, and it does not seem to be user friendly. We also have evidence that Advance Fares on some routes are not displayed. Although most 3rd party sites such as Trainline or RailEasy charge a booking fee, our advice is check with them before booking with SWR.

Do you have Marketing Communication experience? As our profile and membership grows, we need support in communicating our activities. Our website needs to be updated more regularly and we need to develop other media (Facebook, Twitter, etc). We need someone to help us here...If you're competent with web-building & social media activity and able to spare an hour or so a week to support us with this, please get in touch at contact@serug.co.uk

Community Rail Partnerships...

There are 2 Community Rail Partnerships that cover this line:

Blackmore Vale CRP (Tisbury to Crewkerne)

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 group is at the set-up stage at present. Contact SERUG if you'd like to know more.

There is also a "**Friends of Honiton Station**" group. This new group is developing a platform community notice board to promote local groups and events.

SERUG's aim is to lobby the Government, Network Rail, Train Operators and others to improve the passenger experience on this line. If you'd like to help, Bruce Duncan or Secretary, Nick Hurrell would be pleased to hear from you.

Email: bruce.duncan@railfuture.org.uk or contact@serug.co.uk

Membership is £6 per year – includes regular updates, and reduced admission to events. See our web site and complete the form. Subs paid now will not be renewable until April 2019.

You can also find out more about us with our new brochure – "Help make it better" - available at stations.

www.serug.co.uk

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