

SALISBURY TO EXETER RAIL USERS GROUP (SERUG)

Issue Number: 6 August 2018

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



Class 158 in New South Western Livery at Yeovil Junction June 2018. (photo Paul Blowfield)

Welcome to our 6th Newsletter! ... and a note from the Chair.

Our last newsletter was in March 2018. Since then, performance on our line has not improved, with regular signalling failures, strikes and poor reliability of the 30 year old trains, resulting in some cancellations and services with fewer seats.

Passenger satisfaction on punctuality and reliability with SWR fell to 65% in the Spring of 2018, down from 77% a year earlier.

Not all issues have been SWR's fault of course. Network Rail (NR) who run the track and signalling, must take the blame for about 68% of the problems (according to a survey completed by the Office of Rail and Road on NR's performance). Reasons provided are the migration from Waterloo to Basingstoke of the Rail Operations Centre, the award of a new franchise with less mature working relations, and issues from the 10-car train service (Waterloo suburban lines) etc. It will be noted that none of these relate directly to the Salisbury to Exeter section, but unfortunately, they impact us east of Basingstoke towards Waterloo.

However, signal failures and track circuit problems are a frequent cause of delays west of Salisbury and NR clearly need to allocate funds to resolve those matters.

Right now, we also have the strikes by RMT, affecting both weekday and summer week end travel.

The coming months do not bode well either. The line will be closed west of Crewkerne for engineering work in September. We can also expect more disruption in early

2019 when GWR services will have to use our line due to closures between Exeter and Taunton (see next page).

The announcement that rail fares will rise by an average of 3.2% in January 2019 will no doubt cause anger amongst some rail users. – especially as this line has seen almost no investment for a number of years.

The 8 MPs whose constituencies adjoin the line, continue to support our work. It is important that they hear your views as well as ours, so please continue to let your local MP know your views (good as well as bad) on how Network Rail and SWR are performing.

SERUG has now joined the West of England Line Strategy Group (WofELSG). This group includes County Councils and Public Authorities, NR, SWR, Travel Watch South West and SERUG. We will work together to try and deliver infrastructure improvements on the line in the long term – see the Tisbury comments below.

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

Bruce Duncan – Chair. August 2018



Corfe Castle station June 16th 2018 - Summer Saturday services from Salisbury via Yeovil to the Swanage Railway at Corfe Castle – an excellent innovation from SWR. (photo Paul Blowfield)

South Western Railway issues and update...

Andrew Ardley was appointed by SWR as their Development Manager for this line and we continue to work with him. He attended our 27 April 2018 meeting at Yeovil Railway Centre where about 50 of our members heard his views on the franchise and services.

We have also met Neil Drury, the Engineering Director at SWR, to discuss train reliability and he is hopeful that the refurbished trains will deliver a more reliable service.

SWR, after much public consultation, submitted a revised and improved timetable for services and increased capacity, from December 2018. Sadly, these proposals were rejected by Department for Transport, so SWR continue to discuss with them on how those service levels and capacity can be improved. More of this when details are known.

The SWR complaints process has recently come in for some criticism. Whilst the "Delay Repay" process (for trains that arrive more than 15 minutes late) seems to work well, SWR's ability to respond to general complaints is generally poor. Inadequate responses to concerns on passenger safety and website fares are just two examples passed to us where genuine issues have either been misunderstood or not resolved at all.

Tisbury/Dinton track doubling:

Network Rail are leading the consideration of the replacement south platform at Tisbury, plus doubling of the track towards Dinton, both part of SERUG's aspirations. This exercise forms part of the new Continuous Modular Strategic Planning (CMSP) process. This means NR will work up a scheme (with costs) to enable consideration on value for money and suitability for funding. Much work to be done yet, but it is a start. Our partnership with WofELSG will be the focus for this work.

Network Rail issues: LINE CLOSURES!!

The line between Crewkerne and Exeter St David's will be closed for a total of 10 days in September (some weekends, some weekdays). On Sunday 7th October, the line between Salisbury and Yeovil Junction will also be closed. Replacement buses will run. Please check your journey times.

Between 17 February and 12 March 2019, there will be major work between Exeter and Taunton which will mean that many GWR trains will be diverted over our line once again. Be aware of possible timetable changes and unfortunately, likely disruption to SWR services.

Upcoming Events (Full details soon on our website)

Members only visit to Exeter Panel Box - Thursday 11 October 2018 14.00 hours. (Did you know that our line is controlled by no less than 7 signal boxes!)

SERUG Committee

We urgently need a representative for Exeter Central station. Contact us via the website if interested.

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. Therefore, 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

Community Rail Partnerships...

Blackmore Vale CRP (Tisbury to Crewkerne)

Contact: **Caroline Rowland**, Partnership Officer for Blackmore Vale Line Community Rail Partnership on 07933 212 117.

Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership - East Devon

Line - covering the stations from Axminster to Exeter Central. Contact Richard Burningham on 01752 584777.

A recap on our key Aims and Strategy –

- Improve resilience between Salisbury and Yeovil Junction by reinstating double track between Dinton and Tisbury Station (including a rebuilt south platform), This will also allow the potential to operate 2 trains per hour in both directions, between Yeovil Junction and Waterloo.
- Increased capacity west of Yeovil for more services and passing places for Great Western services when they are diverted, also allowing the proposed Devon Metro services to operate. Provision of a 4-mile loop at Whimple, and another 4-mile loop between Yeovil and Crewkerne,
- The ability to join and split trains at Yeovil Junction – creating the opportunity for new services.
- New, faster trains to improve capacity and reduce overall journey times. i.e. to replace the current 30 year old class 158 and 159 diesel units
- Later evening trains to and from Waterloo (Monday to Saturday)
- Maintaining current levels of unregulated fares
- Improve car parking and station facilities at Tisbury, Gillingham, Sherborne, Templecombe and Crewkerne.
- Ability to embark and disembark from the front doors of trains, which are presently locked when trains are in service.

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: contact@serug.co.uk

Membership is £6 per year – includes regular updates, and reduced admission to events. See our website and complete the form.

www.serug.co.uk .

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