

SALISBURY TO EXETER RAIL USERS GROUP (SERUG)

Issue Number: 7 February 2019

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

NOTES FROM THE CHAIR.

A lot has happened since our August 2018 newsletter, but not all of it has been good, as SWR's passengers will testify. Andrew Ardley, SWR's Regional Development Manager has provided a useful update below. Tony Hill (SERUG Committee) has also provided an update about the fast Christmas trains, the diversions from the GWR main line and flood alleviation works.

The RMT strikes continue and are not welcome, especially as the one-man operation would not affect our line

Many trains in 2018, had fewer coaches with passengers standing, but this has improved since Christmas.

The DfT and Government stopped the proposed timetable changes due to be effective from December 2018. This did not help SWR who were due to make substantial improvements.

Overall, there appears to be a lack of good leadership for our National Railway, though our 8 MP's along the line continue to give their excellent support, led by Sir Oliver Letwin.

The circulation of this newsletter now exceeds 1,000 copies, so we hope there is something in this copy to interest you – if not let us know! Finally... We urgently need someone to take charge of our communications and web site. Please let us know if you can help.

OUR AGM IS TUESDAY 26th MARCH 2019, 17.00 hrs, Raleigh Hall, Digby Rd, Sherborne, DT9 3PP with Ian Walmsley (Modern Railways) as speaker and Andrew Ardley from SWR to answer your questions. £4 to members and £10 to non members to include membership to April 2020- see web site.

Update from SWR.

Andrew Ardley (SWR Regional Development Manager)

A shortened version of SWR's update below, the full text is on the SERUG website and includes more on the May 2019 timetable improvements.

2018 was a challenging year for all on the WOE line with a combination of strikes, rolling stock availability and infrastructure issues including signalling failures, rail adhesion problems, temporary speed restrictions, even animals on the line! We are optimistic for 2019 and the continued support and involvement of the SERUG committee and members is much appreciated. The strike situation has not improved, and the RMT is expected to re-ballot members for further strikes beyond March. If strikes continue, we are looking to further improve the service offered including extending rail services to Exeter where resources allow. There is lots planned - improvements to stations and car parks alongside longer-term work, for example the planning for the additional passing loops between Salisbury and Exeter.

Rolling Stock formations on the line are back up to normal from the December timetable, with further strengthening of a number of services. Our plans to recover from the engine supply and repair issues in the autumn have been successful. Further plans



Summer time, sunshine, warmth and rail travel -photo Paul Blowfield

are being developed to enhance engine reliability on top of modifications on the fleet that are already planned or underway. The fleet continues with disability access work (PRM) and unit refurbishment programme but the overall position continues to improve. More units have had both the external repaint and standard class refurbishment work undertaken, with work for charging points in standard class and the refurbishment of the first class sections, with a 2+2 layout, new seats and inductive charging tables still to be completed.

Performance... Network Rail's renewed focus on reducing failures will improve the performance on the line. The last full period 73.9% PPM (public performance measure) has improved in this period, but there is still some way to go for a consistently high level of right time arrivals.

May 2019 Timetable... Whilst this isn't the full implementation of the delayed December 2018 proposals, the WOE sees a number of welcome enhancements. Some details and some formation changes are still to be finalised, but the headlines are shown on the web site (www.serug.co.uk under timetables) including:

- 3 off peak and return services are extended from Salisbury to Yeovil Junction/Pen Mill.
- Alternating calls on weekday evening Exeter bound trains at Feniton and Whimble are reversed to remove a current performance issue involving the evening peak Exeter – Honiton service and Additional calls at Pinhoe.
- **Saturdays** AM Waterloo – Weymouth via Yeovil service, Additional Yeovil Junction – Weymouth shuttles.
- **Sundays** Extension of further Waterloo – Salisbury services to Yeovil Junction, New hourly Salisbury – Reading service during middle part of day calling at Andover with some extended to / from Gillingham.

Timetable Summary... The main benefits for customers west of Salisbury is the increase in the number of services to / from Yeovil and between Salisbury and Waterloo / Reading which frees up seating capacity on the Exeter services, in some cases supported by strengthening of those services. Further improvements are being considered for the December 2019 timetable.

Network Rail (NWR) Update

Network Rail look after the track, signalling and infrastructure, including any new investment in the line. The lines from Waterloo to Portsmouth, Weymouth, Reading, and our West of England Line (WOE)line, plus all the commuter routes are known as the "Wessex Route". The route has been subject to long term operational decline since 2011, and especially since August 2017. Recently, Network Rail have been responsible for 75% of train delays/cancellations and the Wessex Route Director was replaced in November 2018. A Report (or should we say YET ANOTHER REPORT) known as the Holden report was published in August 2018. It was comprehensive, and gave many conclusions and recommendations. NWR, accepted its findings and we now look to see how many will be implemented. It is available on the SWR website as: <https://www.southwesternrailway.com/other/about-us/independent-performance-review>).

Lobbying Update

SERUG continues to work alongside NWR and SWR with the CMSP (Continuous Modular Strategic Planning) approach, focussed on Tisbury station and Dinton for replacement of the double track. This, along with the need for double track in the Whimble area, are two major infrastructure proposals at the moment.

We are also lobbying strongly for better access at Yeovil Junction and Gillingham (Dorset, not Kent of course), and car parking remains a major issue at many stations on the line, more is required (plans finally seem be progressing at Crewkerne).

We continue to work with the WOE Line Strategy Group (WESG), along with Travel Watch South West, County and Local Councils, LEP's (Local Enterprise Boards) NWR, SWR and GWR. We are confident that is a positive step to generate a consensus for major infrastructure improvements for track and signalling, shorter journey times, improved timetable resilience,

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.

OUR AIMS and Strategy are – Increasing services between Yeovil Junction and Waterloo to 2 trains per hour in both directions, necessitating the double track to be reinstated between Dinton and Tisbury with Tisbury Station rebuilt south platform – This will also allow late running trains to pass each other more easily.

- **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**
- **Increased capacity west of Yeovil for more services and passing places for Great Western services , when they are diverted, and allow the proposed Devon Metro services to operate. Provide and a 6 mile loop at Whimble, and double track between Yeovil and Crewkerne,**
- **Improve car parking especially at Tisbury, Gillingham, Sherborne and Crewkerne, and station facilities.**
- **Ability to embark and disembark from the front doors of trains, which are presently locked when trains are in service.**

and newer, faster trains give a better travel experience. We'll keep you informed of progress.

Notes from Tony Hill Committee member (Exeter) Fast trains, Diversions and Flood Relief.

A faster train at Christmas...

To cope with the high Christmas demand, SWR ran an additional "fast" train from Waterloo to Honiton on Fri 21 December, and from Honiton to Waterloo on Fri 28 Dec. First stop after leaving Clapham Junction was Sherborne, in 1 hr 47 mins (from Waterloo) rather than the normal 2 hrs 12 mins. This demonstrates that improved journey times on the mainly single-track West of England line are indeed possible – and with our suggested infrastructure improvements in the Dinton/Tisbury area, perhaps they will finally become a reality. Three "fast" trains to Weymouth on 21 December, and four from Weymouth on 28 December, also ran.

Well done SWR.

Taunton to Exeter line closure sees diversions via Honiton and Yeovil.

A planned three-week closure (18 February and 8 March) of the 'Western' main line between Taunton and Exeter, principally for work in Whiteball Tunnel, will mean diversions of Great Western services to run from Castle Cary and Exeter via Yeovil Junction and Honiton.

Although most South Western Railway services are scheduled to run as normal (some changes to the local peak hour services between Exeter and Honiton/Axminster), previous experience has shown that just the smallest delay results in many hours of disruption all along the line.

We can only hope for better this time.

Flood alleviation works completed.

Long needed major flood alleviation works between Axminster and Chard Jn were completed in the Autumn past at a cost of £9 million. This should provide greater resilience if we experience heavy rain or snow over the coming months.

Finally - A big thank you to member Dave Tozer who has been keeping a wary eye on the Exeter-Honiton afternoon trains for us.

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. See = www.serug.co.uk .

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