

# SALISBURY TO EXETER RAIL USERS GROUP (SERUG)

Issue Number: 8      May 2019 .

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



Cranbrook – A new station, only one platform, but plenty of car parking

Photo: Paul Blowfield

## NOTES FROM THE CHAIR.

Welcome to our latest Newsletter. Much of the content has been triggered by member and passenger feedback on operational issues at SWR and Network Rail.

No sooner had SWR told us that the train formation shortages were behind them, short formations were again rife, especially in January and February. By mid-April, there seemed to be a better pattern. However, this is a continual and serious issue with passengers who travel in uncomfortable conditions.

Without doubt, new trains are required, and they take a long time to procure, Planning must start now if new rolling stock is to be specified for the next franchise in 2024. Following reports that South West Trains “ran down” maintenance at Salisbury, we trust that SWR will be efficient in their train care during the later stages of their franchise.

The new summer timetable (from 19 May 2019) has more off-peak trains Waterloo to Yeovil Junction, that is excellent as it will improve capacity (see over).

I said in our last newsletter that, overall, there appears to be a lack of good leadership for our National Railway, so it is good that our 8 MP's along the line continue to give their excellent support, led by Sir Oliver Letwin. We will continue to ask them to push for money from HM Treasury to build the required infrastructure improvements, especially Whimble and Dinton double tracking, with its associated signalling.

The lack of resilience of the Salisbury to Exeter line was illustrated when the GWR diversionary trains used our route. Nick

Hurrell (Secretary) has written about that (see over). We will use it as evidence to support our claims.

Of course, we eagerly await the completion of the Williams Review, which is rumoured to propose widescale changes to the Franchise system and reduce the DfT stronghold on rail. With the popular appointment of Andrew Haines as CEO at Network Rail, could the Williams/Haines “effect” just be the right catalyst for a sea-change in the way our railways are run? We can only hope!

In the meantime, it is pleasing to note that Network Rail are taking the CMSP (Continuous Modular Strategic Planning) for our line seriously. The formal launch, with full staffing in place, was on the 11 February 2019, at the Basingstoke Rail Operations Centre (ROC). We hope the final report will be out before year end.

Our AGM on Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> March, was a great success, with an excellent talk from Ian Walmsley (Modern Railways Magazine) and an update from Andrew Ardley (SWR). Ian spoke about the ease of 3<sup>rd</sup> rail electrification infills (which the ORR do not like, but is safe with a modern specification) and of course, Salisbury to Basingstoke springs to mind. On new trains, he firmly believes that the passenger should be consulted, otherwise we should wary of the DfT dead hand approaches. Maybe Modern Railways (June edition) will have a few extra thoughts?

There is also a good article in “Today's Railways” publication about the Yeovil to Exeter section of the line.

## Public Performance Measure (PPM) Nick Hurrell writes...

There are numerous ways of measuring train operator performance. The most frequently used is the "Public Performance Measure" (PPM). For the Waterloo/Exeter line, the PPM target is for **89.2%** of trains to arrive at their destination on time – but note: "on time" is defined as arrival at the destination within 10 mins of advertised time! Of course, the PPM measure doesn't take into account short train formations either.

The PPM figures for the first 4 months of 2019 for the West of England line are as follows:

- January: 88.3% (target almost achieved)
- ✗ February: 73.3% (target not achieved)
- ✗ March: 76.9% (target not achieved)
- ✗ April: 83.3% (target not achieved)

### How does this compare with other lines/operators?

April 2019 figures show the following achievements:

- Whole UK Network: 91.3%
- South Western Railway (all routes): 88.7%

Comparisons with other individual operators are difficult, due to the mix of short, long distance and commuter routes, but if we look at similar medium distance routes that operate diesel services, it is clear that SWR's performance is below par:

- Chiltern Railway: 95.9%
- Great Western (Cotswold Line): 91%
- East Midlands Trains (Intercity): 93.9%

## Great Western Railway Diversions

In our last Newsletter, we highlighted the timetabling difficulties encountered when GWR services are diverted to run via Yeovil, even when these are planned in advance. We were perhaps naïve in hoping that previous lessons would have been learned when the GWR was again closed for planned engineering work between Exeter and Taunton from 18<sup>th</sup> February to 8<sup>th</sup> March.

## 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. There is a new line guide, pick up a copy from your station.

**Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership - East Devon Line (incl. Axminster to Exeter Central)**. Contact Richard Bumingham on 01752 584777

## SERUG Aims and Strategy:

- Capacity for 2 trains per hour each way between Yeovil Junction and Waterloo, 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, to improve resilience for Great Western services (when they are diverted) and to allow the proposed Devon Metro services to operate. This requires a 6-mile loop at Whimple, and an additional passing place between Yeovil and Crewkerne,
- Improve car parking and station facilities, especially at Tisbury, Gillingham, Sherborne and Crewkerne, plus better disabled access at Yeovil Junction.
- 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 (Chair) or Nick Hurrell (Secretary), would be pleased to hear from you. Email: [contact@serug.co.uk](mailto: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](http://www.serug.co.uk)

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

Perhaps not surprisingly, SWR performance was hampered yet again during this period. The West of England line PPM figure for the diversionary period was just **72.7%**. On 4 days, the figure remained **below 50%**. The inconvenience to passengers was considerable, and demonstrated yet again that our timetable is fragile enough, without the added complication of hosting other company's services.

The poor performance figures prove yet again that investment in extra passing loops is essential to achieve some level of timetable resilience, let alone more trains.

## Confirmation of the new timetable from May 19<sup>th</sup>

The regular service pattern is basically unchanged (with most Woking and Clapham Junction retained in the **off-peak** period).

Whilst this isn't the full implementation of the delayed December 2018 proposals, our line does see 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](http://www.serug.co.uk) under timetables) including:

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