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Wiltshire
COUNTY COUNCIL

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No. 5

Please ask for: David Phillips

Our ref: DP/TP/Rail

Your ref: ✓

29th July 2005

Dear Sir/Madam,

Greater Western Franchise: Stakeholder Consultation

Attached is the formal response from Wiltshire County Council.

Rail is important to the County, providing for about a third of all journeys by timetabled public transport. Although the Council has no direct responsibility for trains, the continuation and improvement of passenger services will make a significant and measurable difference to the outcomes of the Local Transport Plan regarding traffic growth, accessibility and economy. I hope that this will receive due attention when the franchise specification is refined.

Because information on the draft timetable has been provided in confidence to officers of this authority, comments specific to this have been provided in an additional annex circulated only to persons in sight of the timetable.

It is to be noted, however, that, unless improvements are made to the proposed timetable, the service it provides will be significantly worse than the Stakeholder Consultation Document implies.

Yours faithfully,

P L Tilley,
Manager, Transportation & Development



Wiltshire County Council

Greater Western Franchise: Stakeholder Consultation Response

July 2005

1. Are there other objectives, consistent with the Franchising Policy Statement that should be included?

The franchise-specific objectives should include the requirement to support the Government's objectives for improving accessibility to services and for sustainable communities.

The given objective *to maintain a strong regional orientation, responsive to the needs and aspirations of local Stakeholders* should explicitly include the need to support the achievement of the Regional Transport Strategy and Local Transport Plans.

2. Do you agree that the proposed specification meets the objectives for the franchise?

No.

The proposed service specification fails to meet customer needs, particularly for journeys involving interchange at Westbury and for users of smaller stations. It fails to take account of the ongoing growth in patronage of affected services and the potential for further growth.

The concentration on serving narrow market segments (notably, the service is oriented towards commuting to London and Bristol) will restrict growth in off-peak and contra-peak travel, ultimately worsening financial performance.

3. You are invited to comment on specific aspects of the above specification.

- The termination of the current Paddington-Exeter services at Westbury destroys the value of Westbury as a connectional hub for flows from Solent & Wiltshire to the South West. This affects over 100 passengers per day in each direction – the omission of the through Portsmouth-Penzance working would be *additional* to this impact.
- There is a continuing failure to address the need for an earlier Paddington-Westbury-West of England service, providing an Exeter arrival at (say) 09:40 to meet business needs, but also suitable to cater for the currently untapped day-return market.
- The halving of the off-peak frequency at Bedwyn will be detrimental to the business at a station where only a quarter of passengers are commuting. Bedwyn is the railhead for Marlborough, to which an hourly connecting bus service operates.
- The reduction of Swindon/Bristol-Southampton services south of Westbury leaves the route with an hourly service, contrary to the recommendations of the Bristol/Bath – South Coast Study, in which preliminary estimates indicated that a 2 trains per hour service between Bristol and Southampton would be financially sound. Wiltshire's twice-yearly passenger census indicates that Wessex Trains services at Salisbury¹ are growing patronage rapidly – averaging 9% p.a. over the last three years.
- Consideration should be given to amending services on the Bristol-Westbury section to better accommodate local needs, recognising that there is a contra-peak demand for journeys to Bath, Trowbridge and Salisbury that is poorly served by the proposed timetable.
- The Council supports the position taken by the Heart of Wessex Rail Partnership regarding the proposed level of service at smaller stations.

¹ Including the Bristol-Salisbury leg of services operated by SWT.

- Improvement of the service between Westbury and Swindon was an objective of Wiltshire's first Local Transport Plan, being closely linked with the strategy for the Western Wiltshire Corridor. The current service of five trains each way is underperforming, partly because the train times do not meet market needs, partly because the reliability of the service has been atrocious. The provision of a peak-only service cannot yield major cost savings. While the nature of the route does not make it a candidate for Community Rail designation, there are opportunities for partnership working with the County Council and other local bodies to identify and promote a more useful and better patronised service.

4. Are there other third party projects or proposals, which are capable of implementation during the franchise and consistent with SRA Appraisal Criteria and new Stations Guidance, that you believe, should be included here?

The proposal to relocate Melksham station contained in the first Wiltshire LTP may be replaced by a scheme to improve access to the existing station. The opportunity arises from a new housing development close to the station, offers lower cost, and the potential to deliver within the franchise period. Progress would be dependent on the provision of a suitable train service.

5. Are there particular proposals you believe bidders should consider that will meet the objectives outlined?

Rail travel is significant to Wiltshire: rail journeys make up about a third of all (timetabled) public transport journeys starting or finishing in the county. The objectives of Wiltshire's Local Transport Plan are likely to be best progressed by a passenger train service that serves a wide variety of journey purposes, not just peak commuting to major centres. It is believed that this approach will also serve the rail industry (and taxpayer) well, by building demand on off-peak and contra-peak services where there is some spare capacity.

In pursuance of this approach, the franchisee should:

- Maintain the value of South/West connections at Westbury;
- Provide an earlier westbound Berks & Hants service calling at Westbury with an Exeter arrival before 10:00;
- Build upon the rapid patronage growth on Severn-Solent services, encouraging the growth of off-peak and contra-peak demand, aiming for a 2 trains per hour service south of Westbury;
- Tailor the service to meet local needs;
- Work with the County Council and other partners to devise and promote a viable service pattern for the Westbury-Swindon route;
- Work with the County Council and other partners to improve interchange and integration with other transport modes, and to promote use of these facilities. In particular, the Second LTP cites Westbury as a possible Transport Development Area.
- Continue to explore options for the economic provision of a station at Corsham;
- Propose means for providing improved rolling stock, particularly to replace class 150 units used on longer journeys.

[Further comments on the detail of the timetable proposals are contained in Annex 1 which will be treated as confidential for the duration of the franchising process]

Greater Western Franchise: Stakeholder Consultation

Annex 1

Comments on timetable details provided in confidence

- In general, the service identified in the Consultation Document as the "Peak Frequency" applies in one direction only, but the document does not make this clear. This is misleading – the proposed timetable will disappoint many "contra-peak" travellers.
- The westward extension of the Paddington-Bedwyn service loses value because the first arrival at Westbury is too late to facilitate morning appointments in West Wiltshire. This undermines the attractiveness to business of West Wiltshire, and therefore the key LTP strategy of balancing housing with employment.
- The existing 05:43 from Paddington to Bristol TM/Cardiff picks up in excess of 50 passengers at Chippenham; the proposed timetable starts much later and does not provide for this demand.
- Table 6.1.4 provides a misleading impression of the off-peak service at Westbury, for which the timetable provides only one westbound departure before 18:00.
- The additional peak shuttles between Newbury and Bedwyn mentioned in the Consultation Document do not seem to appear in the draft timetable v17.
- The frequencies given for various stations in table 6.1.12 do not appear to be met by the proposed timetable v17. In particular, the morning opportunities for travel from smaller stations in the Bristol→Southampton direction is severely curtailed compared with the existing timetable. This is unsatisfactory as Bath, Trowbridge, Salisbury and Southampton are commuter destinations.
- The proposed service reductions between Westbury and Southampton leave a residual service at smaller stations that is not timed to meet local needs. For example, it fails to recognise Salisbury as a destination for commuter and educational journeys.