

George Batten BSc (Hons) C.Eng FICE FIHT
Director of Environmental Services

Mr Roger Jones
Divisional Mgr, Rail Franchise Specification
Zone 5/26
Great Minster House
76 Marsham Street
LONDON
SW1P 4DR

Fax : 01225 713207
Direct Line : 01225 713459
Operator : 01225 713000
E-mail : davidphillips@wiltshire.gov.uk

Please ask for : David Phillips

Our ref : TP/Rail

Your ref :

27th October 2005

Dear Sir,

Greater Western Franchise

The recently published report *Stakeholder Consultation on Greater Western franchise replacement* may claim that the DfT has endeavoured in good faith to summarise each response, but I am concerned to find that a significant number of points raised by officers and by the Cabinet Member for Transport & Environment have been either omitted or misrepresented. This is serving to reinforce a suspicion that the consultation exercise is failing to meet acceptable standards of responsiveness to stakeholder concerns.

The published reasoning behind your proposals to reduce the level of service between Swindon and Westbury is that this is "to match demand, which is mainly for commuter travel". I have a number of comments to make regarding this:

- The nature of demand is far more varied and includes diverse longer-distance journeys, for example to Salisbury and London. Evidence available to us suggests that commuting may account for 50% of demand – and this split between local and long-distance commuting. The remaining demand is diverse with a significant long-distance element.
- The existing service, with only one train each way between the peaks, fails to meet requirements. Appalling reliability a while back due to staff shortages – one ex-user reported their train cancelled on four consecutive days – has delayed growth of patronage.
- In the late 1990's, this authority discussed improvements to the train service (over the token provision at that time) with the incumbent rail operator. A sample timetable was produced with three inter-peak workings each way, but with later start / earlier finish, and preliminary patronage forecasts were undertaken. Comparing the train operator's suggested break-even patronage with forecasts suggests that additional subsidy would have been a forecasting risk, not an inevitable outcome.
- Rail industry costs may have increased in the interim; however at other Wiltshire stations patronage has far exceeded forecasts made using the same methodology as that used for Melksham.

[continued]



Environmental Services Department, County Hall, Trowbridge, Wiltshire BA14 8JD

I note that your principal objectives include working within public expenditure constraints and achieving value-for-money. It is entirely consistent with these objectives for you to base your service level decisions on predictions on patronage that the new franchise is capable of achieving, and not on the past, somewhat dismal, performance.

Associated with the reduction of trains via Melksham is a reduction in the service levels between Westbury and Southampton. Considering that the Bristol/Bath-South Coast Study concluded that it is evident that a business case exists for a more frequent [2 tph] train service on the line, one must wonder at the DfT proposals for the service. Does the Government not agree with the work of the consultants it commissioned?

The time is approaching when the Council will have to commit to a final version of LTP2. Therefore in pursuit of both our primary objectives and yours, I am requesting the following:

- The Swindon-Westbury-Southampton service level should reflect desired and properly researched outcomes, and not past performance. As indicated in my formal consultation response, the Council is offering to engage with the ToC, DfT and local stakeholders to assist in derivation of an optimal service. The Council's local knowledge is supported by information collected from around 1100 passengers on the route.
- In the interim, while the optimal service is being researched, a service should be maintained preserving the peak, contra-peak, and inter-peak elements of the existing service.

In view of the public interest surrounding this issue, and tight LTP schedule, an early response would be much appreciated.

Yours faithfully,

Alan Feist,
Assistant Director, Environmental Services