

Western Gateway STB Board Meeting: 28 June 2023

Network Rail update

Industry position

The rail network was as busy in April as it was before covid, as industry wide revenue and passenger demand continue to recover. Whilst some of this recovery owes to the introduction of the Elizabeth Line the picture across the Western Gateway area is encouraging. Journeys to and from Bristol, for example, reached pre-covid levels in April, and operators report strong demand on leisure flows across the region.

Once again leisure journeys, typically made outside traditional peak periods, dominate both revenue and journey numbers. The role of the leisure sector has historically been stronger in the Western Gateway area than nationally, and we are now seeing nearly as many passengers travel in the six hours between the AM and PM peaks as in the six peak hours.

As travel patterns settle we are seeing lower demand than pre-covid on Mondays and much higher demand on Saturdays such that these two days see a similar number of passengers overall.

Despite this recover figures for the January to March this year illustrate the financial challenge the industry still faces. Whilst revenue grew to a **record high** since the start of the pandemic (£2.2 billion) this only represents 70 % of revenue from 2019, adjusting for inflation. Consequently operators and Network Rail are increasingly focused on affordability and financial sustainability, and this is likely to affect enhancements funding in the short term.

CP7 business plan

On 19 May Network Rail published its **£44bn**, five-year plan for **Control Period 7** (CP7 - 2024-29), for the railway in England and Wales that sees increased investment in tackling climate change and improving train performance from current levels, with an overarching focus on delivering for the needs of passengers and freight users.

The funding includes investment of £1.6 billion in earthworks and drainage, which are increasingly put under pressure by climate change. Other investment includes 'next generation' signalling, renewing lifts and escalators, improving lighting and passenger information systems, reducing emissions and achieving efficiencies of £3.4 billion.

The CP7 funding settlement covers operations, maintenance, and renewals. Enhancement funding is no longer committed in five year periods and government-funded projects instead are considered for entry into the Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline (RNEP), of which we await an update.

Industrial Action

The industrial dispute between Network Rail and the RMT was **resolved** in March. Disputes remain live between RMT and ASLEF and many of the train operators and whilst the impact is slightly lessened now that signallers and controllers are no longer involved planned strikes will significantly affect services.

Strike action took place on 31 May and 2 and 3 June, and RMT and ASLEF member **will be taking further action** in July including an ASLEF overtime ban between 3 – 8 July and three days of RMT strike action on Thursday 20 July, Saturday 22 July, and Saturday 29 July.

Restoring your Railway Ideas Fund

The **Devizes Gateway Interim Feasibility Study** was completed as planned in March. This identified the case for the new station could not be made at present, partly due to the economic case not being strong and partly due to the lack of a viable train service option to serve the station. A key recommendation of the study was that Network Rail carry out a strategic study of the Wiltshire rail network to understand how Devizes Gateway could be delivered as part of a wider **integrated programme of Wiltshire rail service improvements** (see 'Strategic Studies').

We await decisions on **Corsham, Stonehouse Bristol Road, St. Anne's Park, Langport & Somerton**, and **Wareham-Swanage**, all of which have had SOBCs submitted to the RyR assessment panel. We hope for further announcements before the Westminster summer recess.

West of England rail improvements

The introduction of the **May 2023 timetable** saw significant service improvements in the West of England, with additional hourly services between Gloucester and Bristol, and between Bristol and Westbury. These services were delivered as part of the MetroWest programme.

The May timetable included improvements to services on the Heart of Wessex line between Bristol and Weymouth, with a more regular service offering from GWR and changes to SWR services to better complement the overall offer.

In the north of the patch CrossCountry reintroduced the hourly Bristol Manchester service after a long absence owing to the pandemic, and in the process doubled the service frequency between Bristol and Birmingham to half-hourly.

Work on two **new stations** in the Greater Bristol area is underway. Construction of **Ashley Down** station commenced in March 2023 and is programmed to be complete in 2024. Recent work involved a 16-day block of the slow lines to install the two platforms and realign the track. Foundations for the footbridge and lifts are underway with these elements being installed throughout the summer and autumn.

Portway Park & Ride station is now **complete** and has been **approved for entry into service** by the Office of Rail and Road (ORR). Some final agreements regarding access across the site by different parties remain to be signed. The station is due to open during the summer.

Strategic studies

Across the Western Gateway area we currently have three live strategic studies.

The **Salisbury Area Strategic Study** focuses on the area around Salisbury that is due for resignalling in the next decade. The study will identify potential improvements and enhancements that could be delivered alongside resignalling.

It will align service recommendations from the West of England, South West Main Line Phase 2, and Wiltshire strategic studies. It will also look at wider station improvements and land strategy around the station. A Train Service Specification (TSS) has been agreed with stakeholders and timetable analysis is scoped to begin.

Focused on services into London Waterloo, the **South West Main Line Phase 2 study** considers infrastructure from Woking to Alton, Bournemouth, Portsmouth Harbour and Salisbury. It recommends an additional peak train per hour from Salisbury in the high peak in the period to 2050. The draft report is being finalised and will be circulated in summer.

Following delivery of the Devizes Gateway Interim Feasibility Study, we are making good progress on the **Wiltshire Rail Strategic Study**. This study, in collaboration with Wiltshire Council, Western Gateway, community rail partnerships, and train and freight operators, will identify the interventions needed to deliver a range of service enhancements in the Wiltshire area.

Stakeholders have agreed the train service vision and timetable analysis has begun. We are also working on assessment of level crossing risk. The next stage will involve assessment of the socio-economic case for improvements. We will shortly be engaging with Western Gateway and Wiltshire Council on a whole-transport-system assessment of proposed train service changes, aligned to an agreed set of objectives for rail in Wiltshire. The study is programmed to complete in December.

When completed these studies will form the basis of our long term strategy alongside the established [Greater Bristol Strategic Study](#), [West of England Line Study](#), [Dorset Connectivity Study](#), [Bristol to Exeter](#) and [Bristol to Birmingham](#) Corridor Strategic Studies.

Development of strategic recommendations

We are developing two SOBCs, led by Wessex Route, in partnership with Western Gateway to develop the recommendations of strategic studies:

- **Yeovil Junction to Salisbury service enhancement**
 - Developing West of England Line study recommendation for 2tph service west of Salisbury to Yeovil Junction
 - In advance of the Western Gateway funded engineering feasibility and cost estimating, we have undertaken the timetable analysis to confirm the infrastructure required to operate a 2tph service

- SOBC to begin in earnest later in the year
- **Heart of Wessex Line (Bristol-Weymouth) service enhancement**
 - Developing Dorset Connectivity Study recommendation for 1tph service
 - Western Gateway funding for development work
 - NR and GWR have completed the timetable analysis and identified the required infrastructure (Yeovil resignalling and new loop between Castle Cary and Yeovil)
 - Engineering feasibility and cost estimation are now underway.
 - SOBC document drafting commenced
 - Collaboration with and input from local partners to provide local insight will be crucial in making the case for investment.

Western Route continues to investigate the business case for a new bay platform at **Cheltenham Spa**, funded by Western Gateway; timetabling work has been completed and performance modelling is underway to establish which of the two potential infrastructure options works best and to see to whether an improvement on current performance is evident. We will review and jointly decide whether to progress to a full SOBC later in the year.

Western Route also continues to engage with WECA on proposals to develop a business case for service improvements between **Bristol and Weston-super-Mare** following the recommendations of the Bristol to Exeter study.

Strategic Station plans

We are producing strategic station plans for three stations where service improvements are identified in our recent studies. These plans will deliver station improvement recommendations to be developed in partnership:

- Yeovil Junction
 - Remit agreed and workshops held on Interchange & Integration, and Station Property & Sustainability
 - Station facilities and accessibility workshop planned
- Wareham
 - Remit agreed and Interchange and Sustainability workshops held
 - Recommendations being written up
- Bournemouth
 - Initial discussions with BCP Council to scope Strategic Station Plan
 - Potential pre-work for proposed Dorset Metro SOBC in 2024

Matt Haywood

Interim Head of Strategic Planning – Western, Network Rail

For and on behalf of the Network Rail Wessex and Western strategic planning teams

June 2023