

## Western Gateway STB Board Meeting: 10 July 2024

### Member update – Network Rail

#### Industry update

- **Control Period 7** began on 1 April. This is the five year period against which Network Rail is funded and regulated. The Office for Rail and Road (ORR) confirmed last year that expenditure in England and Wales is forecast at £38.5b for the control period – slightly less in 2023-24 prices than the figure for CP6 (2019-2024) – and includes more stringent train performance targets as well as a freight growth target of 7.5 %.
- The CP7 figure does not include enhancements, which are funded through the *rail network enhancements pipeline* (RNEP) with funding decisions against each stage of the project business case – the SOBC, OBC, and FBC.
- Ministers put forward the draft **rail reform bill** in February that would enact creation of an Integrated Rail Body (IRB), and transfer franchising powers from the Secretary of State. These are key legislative elements of the rail reform agenda, which remains a feature of all political parties’ plans for rail. Another key element is stronger regional partnerships.
- The establishment of a new normal in **passenger demand and revenue** is supported by year-on-year demand growth of 4 % across the network – a strong figure but closer to the ‘business as usual’ seen pre-2020.
- Journeys and revenue are at 85 % and 75 % of pre-2020 figures, respectively, on 90 % of train miles. This highlights the new financial reality of the industry.
- There are weak signs that business recovery may be continuing whilst other sectors are plateauing, albeit with a very different pattern to pre-2020, with leisure well over 50 % of revenue.
- Weekdays are still busier than weekends, with Fridays busier than Mondays reflecting more leisure journeys, although Mondays remain just about busier than Saturdays across the network.
- However regional differences remain, with the South West continuing to grow strongly. Journeys within Wales, Western, and Wessex routes have seen the largest proportional increase in revenue year-on-year, at 17 %, suggesting the South West is outperforming the national averages.
- A year has passed since introduction of the improved MetroWest services in the north of the Western Gateway area. Improved services to Gloucester and Westbury have seen a 27 % annual increase in passengers in this area.

#### Western Gateway area rail improvements

##### Passenger train services

- A number of changes in the **June 2024 timetable** have improved passenger services in the Western Gateway area. These include:
  - o additional weekend services on the Heart of Wessex line between Bristol and Weymouth, and planned longer trains on the line
  - o improved capacity at Swindon and Bristol Parkway in the evening peak as a result of reintroduction after four years of two ‘superfast’ services direct between London Paddington and Bristol Parkway
  - o minimum hourly services at all stations in Gloucestershire following TFW’s introduction of hourly services between Cardiff and Cheltenham using new CI197 trains
- Further committed improvements include a trial service between Bristol Temple Meads and Oxford for the first time in more than 20 years. This will commence in September with two return Saturday services.
- Significant timetable improvements remain constrained by the availability of rolling stock. GWR have submitted a business case for introduction of additional units that could allow timetable improvements in the medium term.
- The recent agreement to add 12 trains to CrossCountry’s long-distance fleet will deliver capacity benefits across all routes and enable significant **May 2025 timetable** improvements. These include reintroduction of 2tph on

the Reading Newcastle route, which will ease congestion on Bournemouth Manchester services, and the introduction of a daily direct service between Cardiff and Edinburgh calling at Gloucester.

- Two major projects to improve the railway will impact services in Western Gateway in the coming months:
  - o The [Severn Tunnel Blockade](#) in July will affect services in the Bristol area. There will be no direct trains between Bristol and South Wales for two weeks from 3 July whilst major drainage and track renewal works are delivered.
  - o Over Christmas and most of January 2025 the major **Westbury blockade** will see widespread changes to services around Westbury whilst key junctions are renewed. There will be a heavily amended train plan with Westbury station out of use for the period. Heart of Wessex Line through services will continue to run (avoiding Westbury) but services to / from Salisbury will be curtailed north and south of Westbury.

### Station improvements

- In May successful bids to the **Access for All programme for CP7 (2024-2029)** were announced. 310 stations were nominated and 50 have been selected for additional feasibility work to become part of the AfA programme, for which £350m of funding is allocated. Four stations in the Western Gateway area were successful: **Castle Cary, Dorchester South, Stroud, and Yeovil Junction**. Match funding commitments from local partners have played an important role in securing the funds.
- Dorchester South and Yeovil Junction are both subjects of Strategic Station Plans advocating for improved accessibility. Those plans' recommendations will be factored into the AfA scheme development. Design work for the Castle Cary solution has already begun, with a temporary footbridge in place for the Glastonbury festival.
- The major station forecourt improvement at **Salisbury** started on site on 10 June. The Wiltshire delivered scheme will take around a year and will significantly improve the station as a gateway to the city including new direct bus services. SWR expect to open the new East Goods Yard temporary car park in November and are about to start design work on a new deck for the main car park that will eventually replace the spaces at East Goods Yard.
- Refurbishment of the toilets at **Yeovil Junction** is complete and has delivered a new accessible facility.
- Passengers on all GWR services in Gloucestershire can now use GWR's pay-as-you-go touch smartcard after the scheme was extended to cover Swindon and the Stroud Valley. The GWR pay-as-you-go travel area now stretches from Ashchurch to Swindon, Freshford, and Weston-super-Mare.
- Together SWR and GWR will fund over £1m of improvements through the 2024/25 **Customer and Communities Improvement Fund**. Successful schemes are being announced and include an interactive information totem at Dorchester.
- Following a successful trial phase in autumn 2023 Phase 1 of the **Industry Revenue Generating Initiative (IRGI)** was announced in April. £80m of funding is available for schemes that meet strict financial criteria in terms of return on investment. Bids were submitted by the deadline of 14 June, including three for schemes in Western Gateway. These are:
  - o a £6.5m bid for Bath Spa gateline and concourse improvements;
  - o introduction of ANPR at car parks at Christchurch, Sherborne, Weymouth, Tisbury, Wareham, Branksome, and Parkstone, and
  - o conversion of station houses to rental accommodation, including at Tisbury.
- Announcement of successful IRGI phase 1 schemes is expected in mid-July.

### Strategic pipeline

#### Strategic studies

Two of the three live strategic studies across the Western Gateway area have reached final draft. These studies identify an evidence-based case for service improvements. Further development relies upon collaboration with Western Gateway and other strategic transport and spatial planning authorities.

- The [Wessex Mainlines Strategic Study](#) has now been published on the Network Rail website. The study builds on the South West Mainline study and sets out the long term strategy for growth on the main line routes beyond Woking to Salisbury, Bournemouth, Alton and Portsmouth, establishing the infrastructure interventions required to deliver the additional services recommended.

We will now work alongside our performance and simulation and timetable analysis teams to set out in more detail what interventions are required, when, and if non-infrastructure interventions may be able to deliver the same level of benefit.

- The **Wiltshire Rail Strategic Study** builds on our joint work with Wiltshire Council on the Devizes Gateway new station interim feasibility study. Working closely with Western Gateway and industry partners the study identifies the investments required to deliver a range of service improvements in the Wiltshire area, with particular emphasis on improved north-south connectivity between Swindon and Westbury.

The study is all but complete and a draft for consultation will be shared with stakeholders in early July.

- The **Salisbury Area Strategic Study** focuses on the Salisbury signalling area which is due for resignalling in the next decade. Resignalling may present an opportunity to deliver service improvements more efficiently and therefore with a better business case.

The study will identify potential improvements and enhancements that could be delivered alongside resignalling, aligning service recommendations from the [West of England Line CMSP](#), [Wessex Mainlines Strategic Study](#), Wiltshire Strategic Study, and fleet decarbonisation strategy.

Timetable analysis for the study has identified a number of interventions required to deliver the services outlined in the Train Service Specification. These include headway reductions, and reinstatement of platform 1 at Salisbury. We are working with our internal engineering teams to develop assessments for these interventions which we feed back to the resignalling team.

We intend to share a draft strategy document for comment in the Autumn.

These studies join our established Greater Bristol Strategic Study, West of England Line Study, Dorset Connectivity Study, Bristol to Exeter and Bristol to Birmingham Corridor Strategic Studies and form the basis of our long term strategy.

Next priorities include a freight enabling strategy – which will consider targeted capacity and capability recommendations to support rail freight growth across the South West – and a Swindon corridors study that consider the railway system centred on Swindon in light of established studies and growth opportunities.

### **Strategic station plans**

- [Yeovil Junction Strategic Station Plan](#) is now published. We will promote the conclusions of this piece of work throughout the development process of the AfA scheme.
- [Wareham Strategic Station Plan](#) is also now published. We are pleased to see some of the recommendations already progressing at the station.
- The draft Bournemouth Strategic Station Plan was recently shared for comment.
- The draft Dorchester Stations Strategic Station Plan was also recently shared for comment. The plan considers Dorchester West and Dorchester South and assesses what changes may be required in light of strategic service recommendations on both routes. The recent AfA announcement means some amendments will be required before publication.

### **Development of strategic recommendations**

We continue to collaborate closely on the three Western Gateway funded SOBCs that develop our key strategic study recommendations:

- Work is continuing on the **Yeovil Junction to Salisbury Service Enhancement SOBC**. This makes the case for extending services which currently start and terminate at Salisbury to Yeovil Junction, doubling the frequency to 2tph on this part of the West of England line, per the recommendation of the [West of England Line CMSP](#). Timetable analysis was completed last year and intervention assessments and economic appraisal – including performance and journey time benefits – are commencing this summer.

- The Western Gateway funded **Heart of Wessex Line SOBC** final draft has been shared for comment. The recommendation is for a 1tph skip-stop service on the existing line (i.e. not via Yeovil Junction). This has the best BCR as well as a strong strategic case. Funding will be required to progress the case beyond SOBC.
- We are progressing the **Dorset Metro SOBC** with key partners including Western Gateway and Dorset Council. This is a recommendation of the [Dorset Connectivity Strategic Study](#) and will examine the feasibility of introducing additional services between Brockenhurst and Wareham. Timetable analysis was completed earlier this year and we are agreeing options to take forward to intervention assessment and economic appraisal.
- The **Bristol to Oxford SOBC** is near completion with the economic case complete. This was part funded by Western Gateway and shows a high value for money case for a direct hourly service between the two cities, calling at Bath Spa, Chippenham, and Swindon.
- Work is ongoing to refine the TSS and infrastructure requirements for the **Greater Bristol rail investment programme** building on the Greater Bristol Strategic Study. This will result in a pipeline of interventions for future investment to support service improvements. We will share findings with stakeholders in September.
- We continue to work closely with WECA to support their new stations and 'turn up and go' studies. We are also working with Devon on the Devon Metro SOBC which looks to improve services at the western end of the West of England Line. This would improve performance on services along the whole line.

### **Decarbonisation**

- Many of the principal passenger routes in Western Gateway are served by 1980s and 1990s diesel multiple units, including the West of England, Heart of Wessex, and Wessex Main, and Bristol to Gloucester lines. These aging trains will need replacement in the early 2030s and we are working closely with operators and industry partners to identify options for replacement fleets, with a focus on developing a viable non-diesel replacement option.
- Together with SWR and GWR we are looking at how hybrid battery-electric trains could replace diesel fleets across the South West. This includes work to understand the capability of technology likely to be available, and to identify what supporting infrastructure would be required. This is likely to include further sections of overhead line electrification, with the Filton Bank in Bristol a high priority and likely must-have. WECA and GWR have agreed to contribute towards an Outline Business Case for Filton Bank electrification, but a shortfall remains.
- Any infrastructure investment will need to have a compelling TAG-compliant business case. We are therefore developing other options including life extension of existing stock, new or cascaded diesel trains, and bi-mode electric/diesel trains.
- With GWR we are developing **Project Churchward** working closely with DfT and will submit an SOBC covering both new trains and infrastructure for DfT to consider later this year.
- Alongside potential decarbonisation benefits fleet replacement offers opportunities to deliver capacity improvements (e.g. with longer trains) and address known timetable opportunities.
- As development progresses there is a role for the STB and constituent authorities to support the case both for new non-diesel trains and for sufficient stock to support capacity and connectivity improvements by identifying efficiency opportunities, additional benefits, and contributory funding sources.

For further information on any items above please contact [westernstrategicplanning@networkrail.co.uk](mailto:westernstrategicplanning@networkrail.co.uk).

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

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