



Representing users of the Exeter – Barnstaple Railway Line

GREATER WESTERN FRANCHISE REPLACEMENT Responses to Department for Transport Consultation Document

The Tarka Rail Association welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Department's Consultation. **It is important to note that this response must be read in conjunction with the Association's Aspirations document.** Whilst that concentrated on the Tarka Line, we have attempted to take a broader view (where appropriate) in this document.

The responses are numbered in the same order as the questions are set out in the consultation document. Consequently, those questions are not repeated here.

- 1 We agree subject to definition of "defined infrastructure and rolling stock" as set out in the second objective. We also believe that the best possible bus-rail co-ordination should be an objective.
- 2 Sufficient resources must be made available (both infrastructure and rolling stock) to enable the three, then four car and eventually more frequent Devon Metro scheme of which the Tarka Line forms an integral part in order to cater for the expected increase in housing and economic activity, particularly in North Devon and around Exeter.
- 3 The far south west of England is often overlooked and frequently is the last in line for investment. Sufficient resources must be made available for 2 above as well as the refurbishment/replacement of the HST fleet which needs to be in adequate numbers to cater for growth, especially in recognition of the area being a year-long holiday destination as well as accommodating a rapidly expanding resident population. Also it is imperative that during construction or diversions associated with any infrastructure works, careful attention is given to connectional times for services radiating from the main line so as to minimise inconvenience to passengers.
- 4 There needs to be an extrapolation of current demand curves, taking into account congestion, the cost of motoring (including such things as insurance for young people) and, most importantly, the growth in population and economic activity in both Exeter and North Devon. There also needs to be an ongoing programme of track renewals to facilitate the speeding up of local services and works to upgrade or abolish level crossings, especially (on the Tarka Line) at Salmon Pool and Eggesford -see paragraph 12 of our Aspirations document which gives detailed figures for North Devon.
- 5 Sufficient capacity to enable a two trains per hour service to operate on the Tarka Line. Also the need to increase operating flexibility at Exeter St Davids and between there and Central to reduce delays and congestion.
- 6 TRA does not believe that weekday (as opposed to weekend) running of trains to Brighton is the best use of scarce resources. Following electrification to Oxford and Bristol, we would welcome the reintroduction of through trains between the two cities. As a means of giving

some relief, we would welcome the reintroduction of through SWT services to Paignton, especially at weekends as well as Barnstaple (as requested in our Aspirations document). Similarly we would welcome through far south west – south coast services at weekends. We also believe that there is sufficient demand for Cardiff – Taunton trains to be extended to Exeter, possibly serving new stations at Wellington and Cullompton.

- 7 We understand that DCC will be including the Devon Metro scheme as part of their submission.
- 8 A) Devon Metro or all local services in Devon & Cornwall.
B) As a voluntary body, we do not feel able to answer this question.
C) Devon County Council or Devon County Council and Cornwall Council.
D) As 8B) above.
- 9 We would ask that our submission (already sent to the Department and Passenger Focus) be considered as essential local aspirations for the Tarka Line.
- 10 We very strongly support the existing level of service as the starting point for the new franchise and support bullet points 1, 2, 4, 5, 6 & 7. We believe that calling patterns can best be served by specifying a minimum service (ie number of trains) at each station with details subject to consultation with local users. But please also see our Aspirations.
- 11 The simple answer should be what is in the best interests of passengers. For the Tarka Line, we see the ultimate timetable comprising two trains per hour (initially at peak times) as the best way to cater for all needs. However, very long journeys to the far south west could best be served by extending the appropriate services west beyond Reading to serve intermediate stations along the Berks & Hants Route to Taunton. This would enable longer distance services to Plymouth and Penzance to call Reading then fast to Taunton connecting in both directions with the Berks & Hants service.
- 12 See above response.
- 13 If part of the HST fleet is to be refurbished, then adequate provision needs to be made to a) reflect the age of the trains therefore adequate provision for maintenance spares and b) to cater for future growth. However, we would ask if consideration has been given to an alternative. With the introduction of IEP on the East Coast route, could not the newer fleet of Mark 4 coaches and DVTs be transferred west and used with refurbished Class 67 or new Bombardier Traxx diesel locomotives on non-IEP services? These (or refurbished 2+5 HSTs) could also be used on Cardiff – Portsmouth services, in turn releasing Class 158s which could then be used on semi-fast services to and from Bristol and Cornwall. The Class 91 locos could be stored for future use as electrification (eg to Plymouth) proceeds. Such expansion would also benefit Cross Country services, especially if the very short Bristol – Bromsgrove section were also wired.
- 14 See above response.
- 15 There is no doubt that since re-launching the service as part of the present franchise, the demand and use of it has grown. We believe that it should continue to be supported by Government in the same way as the Caledonian Sleepers are. One possible solution, if HSTs are to be retained, would be to sandwich the sleeper rolling stock between two Class 43 power cars.
- 16 As this relates to the Thames Valley services, we do not feel it is appropriate for us to comment.
- 17 Although obviously a balance has to be struck to achieve best value for money, on the face of it, it would seem more appropriate to electrify the branches. This would make more effective and efficient use of the electric train fleet as well as releasing additional DMUs which are urgently needed elsewhere to cater for growth on other non-electrified lines. If electrification is not favoured, could not a DMU be attached/detached to an EMU at Maidenhead and Twyford to enable at least one through service to be maintained each way?

- 18 We broadly accept that, at present, and especially on weekdays, the service to and from Brighton is not a good use of scarce resources.
- 19 This is already the case on the Tarka Line where most trains stop at a number of railheads. Four stations only have a very minimal service. This could be further refined in the event of a more frequent service whereby some of the existing stops could be transferred to a slower service. This is dealt with in more detail in our Aspirations document.
- 20 As will be seen from our response to Question 13, we consider that the Cardiff – Portsmouth service should be elevated in status and allocated appropriate resources accordingly. The service to and from Weymouth has traditionally operated from Bristol which would seem more appropriate, with these and local services around Bristol operated with Class 165/6 dmus when they become available.
- 21 Our detailed aspirations have already been set out in our earlier submission. On a slightly wider front, once again we strongly support the Devon Metro concept, albeit with a more frequent service eventually on the Tarka Line. In general terms we strongly urge the DfT to require the provision of Boxing Day services, in particular to give access to local sporting events and shopping centres.
- 22 Although this is primarily aimed at major disruption caused by schemes such as Crossrail and Reading, we also need to consider more local rail infrastructure works. In the case of the Tarka Line we consider that the current franchisee's policy of minimising the usage of rail replacement bus services to those sections of the line actually being worked on, with a train services should operating over those sections of the route on which no work is planned, should be retained and incorporated as a requirement of the new franchise. It is essential, however, that in order to avoid complications for passengers, the franchisee consults with the local user group, in our case, of course, the Tarka Rail Association, on the level and timings of services during such work. As a general rule, the aim should be to maintain timings and frequency as near as possible to the norm when trains are running fully.
- 23 Clearly there are cases of overcrowding throughout the network, including the far south west as we emphasis in our Aspirations document - in which we specify individual services. We believe that a simple criterion should be that additional capacity is needed where there is evidence of regular standing in excess of seats for more than 20 minutes.
- 24 Long sections of single track can cause severe delays when even relatively minor things go wrong. The Tarka Line has some of the longest single track sections in Great Britain, and so additional passing loops would not only assist reliability, but would also offer scope for enhanced service levels in the future.
- 25 We do not consider that we are in a position to sensibly comment on this question other than to endorse the view that the railways of Britain should be run in the most cost effective way, but without any reduction in the size and scope of the network. However, we do believe that the procurement of rail replacement bus services should be closely examined to ensure that the best and most cost effective arrangements are put in place for both planned services and, more especially, for emergency services.
- 26 We consider that each station should be surveyed by the franchisee in the first year, in conjunction with Network Rail and the relevant local transport authority and other interested parties. The purpose would be to, firstly, assess what facilities, problems etc exist and then, secondly, determine what, if any, improvements are necessary and the best mechanism for doing so. Such work should embrace parking and interchange facilities as well as the station itself.
- 27 We very much welcome the proposed works at Newton St Cyres and Copplestone (and also Exeter St Thomas, Exton and Starcross which are also used by passengers from the Tarka Line). We would like to draw attention to the fact that the down platform at Crediton is quite low and would benefit from an easier access hump. Since preparing our Aspiration document, we have learned that there is a proposal to link South Molton and Torrington

with Umberleigh Station through the provision of a new bus service. This will require improved physical interchange at the Station, including turning standing and passenger waiting facilities are provided. These works should be provided as part of the new Franchise.

- 28 The CCTV coverage needs to be improved at Barnstaple and Crediton and should be installed at Eggesford.
- 29 As a relatively high proportion of tickets are issued on the train (because all stations except Barnstaple are unstaffed), we feel that revenue protection would be enhanced through a combination of the use of faster issuing machines and the possible introduction of zonal fares within the Exeter Travel to Work Area and/or an extension of the Carnet tickets to cover regular but not daily travellers. We also would recommend longer ticket office opening hours where it is cost effective to do so. Finally we support the expansion of SMART ticketing and interoperability between bus and train operations.
- 30 The recent introduction of the franchise wide CIS is welcomed. However, there remain instances where supposed provision of real time information has proved not to be the case at unstaffed stations and this really does need to be rectified. We welcome the increased use of social media for checking on train running and other issues before leaving home or place of work. We would also encourage the further development of train tracking systems.
- 31 We support the proposed mechanism. Apart from the NPS, local passengers can provide very useful feedback as well as keeping the franchisee on its toes. Accordingly, we would support the establishment of a Customer Forum (such as the existing Customer Panel) and also a manager responsible for liaison with local interests. This is especially important for the far south west counties of Devon & Cornwall.
- 32 There is no doubt at all that catering provision is essential for all journeys over two hours. All journeys to the south west are in excess of this and a substantial refreshment service is vital, especially as journeys to the west of Cornwall are in excess of five hours. The Pullman dining service is a greatly valued by business people and leisure passengers alike. The franchise should be specified in such a way as not to preclude suitable new private catering operators should a gap in the market be identified.
- 33 Please see our response to Question 26 which suggests a mechanism of which accessibility could form a key part.
- 34 A) We are strongly of the view that as many materials for rail use as possible should be delivered by rail and especially in the case of fuel oils to traction depots.
B) We would like to see the present system of recycling on train, station and depot waste materials continue and improved.
C) We would like the franchisee work with Network Rail to create “windows” in the line-side vegetation along scenic routes in order to enhance the enjoyment of passengers
D) We would like to see bus and rail integration developed further to embrace leisure/tourism initiatives such as bike and surf buses, and
E) Finally, we would recommend the installation of electric vehicle charge points in station car parks

This paper has been prepared on behalf of the Association by John Phillips, External Relations Officer, who will be pleased to respond to any queries. He can be contacted by e-mail at: j.phillips142@btinternet.com.

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