



**24<sup>th</sup> June 2014**

## **Response to the GREAT WESTERN SPECIFICATION CONSULTATION**

Please see accompanying covering letter

1. Respondents are encouraged to consider whether any additional objectives should be reflected in the franchise specification for the 5 year period from September 2015

*CPRE SW endorses the objectives for the franchise, with the following comments about ticketing and the related issue of revenue projection, and improved access to stations.*

*Introducing 'smart' and integrated ticketing should bring major benefits to passengers. We consider that the area with the greatest needs and potential for greatest benefits is that covered by the proposed MetroWest network centred on Bristol. It should be a specific aim to deliver these improvements in the Bristol area early during the period of the franchise extension.*

*We are concerned that revenue protection remains an issue over parts of the network with the difficulty for train conductors selling tickets on busy services where there are unstaffed stations. This issue should be specifically highlighted and tackled. It could be included and referenced as part of the first objective about the overall passenger experience where 'smart' and integrating ticketing will be part of the solution, or within the fifth objective about cost effectiveness. Alternatively it may merit a separate objective.*

*There is a need for a step-change in access to stations, particularly those that are a railhead for wide areas which is the case with many of the stations within the franchise area. Local bus services continue to be cut as local authority budgets are reduced and cycling is often dangerous on rural roads. It should be born in mind that super output area statistics show that up to 28% of households in the SW have no access to a private car and even where a household has one or more cars, they may be being used by other household members. Better bus links, well marketed, would improve passenger numbers and revenue. There is also a role for facilities/organisation for shared taxis.*

*Working with local authorities and businesses, more needs to be done to set up local travel plans to encourage greater rail use and to enable better access to stations without use of a car.*

*We acknowledge that progress has been made in recent years with improved bus links to some stations and with better provision for cyclists and access to stations on foot. Progress needs to be accelerated with better coordination and publicity of bus and rail timetables and further improvements for cyclists and pedestrians.*

*Inevitably, many passengers will wish to/need to drive to the station. Inadequate car parking provision remains an issue at many stations. We acknowledge that providing additional parking spaces is not always easily solved but it is a factor limiting rail use at some stations where parking spaces are fully taken up early in the day. There should be a requirement in the franchise specification to invest in further parking provision where necessary and practicable. This is particularly important for railheads serving rural areas where bus links are likely to be limited.*

2. Respondents are encouraged to consider and identify any specific local factors that they believe might influence the future level of passenger demand, which should be reflected in the specification for the new franchise.

*CPRE SW endorses the reference at paragraph 5.11 to the need to serve better the growing passenger demand of the Bristol economy. There is significant passenger growth potential on services serving Bristol where increased use of rail should be a strategic objective to help resolve severe traffic congestion across the greater Bristol area. See also the response to Q5.*

*Such a modal shift would also have benefits in improving air quality. Both Bristol, the new European green city, and the World Heritage city of Bath, are needing to take steps to dramatically improve air quality and thus encourage higher use of public transport within and around them.*

3. Respondents are encouraged to highlight interfaces with any other schemes that are likely to be delivered during the next five years, which the operator may need to consider.

*In addressing the need for resilience in the route to Plymouth and the far South West, issues with the lines across the Somerset Levels need to be tackled at Athelney and between Taunton and Bridgwater and capacity enhanced on the diversionary route via Yeovil. While primarily a matter for Network Rail, the operator should be fully engaged in these discussions. Capacity improvements to the diversionary route via Yeovil should be an early priority and would enable service enhancements between Exeter, Yeovil and on to London Waterloo. Enhanced services between Exeter and Honiton should be considered as part of the Great Western franchise, to form an element of the Devon Metro concept for which there is a good business case and strong local support.*

*There is heavy emphasis in the consultation document on investment in the Intercity and London suburban services, but little detail about the process by which the opportunities and needs of the commuter services into Bath/Bristol, Exeter and other locations will be achieved and further improvements made in rural services building on the successful work of the Community Rail Partnerships. (See also the response to Q12).*

*The consultation document rightly points out that the Great Western franchise plays a major part in driving the economies it serves. If government is to be seen to be taking seriously the national and local plans to regenerate Plymouth and the Riviera towns, as well as Southampton-Portsmouth, the franchise will need to identify means of improving the services to those areas. Simply throwing a great deal of capital at dualling the A303 will not solve the more systemic problems for local access and employment.*

4. Respondents are invited to identify any changes or reorganisation to the routes served by the Great Western franchise that they would recommend; and to explain their rationale.

*Given the shortage of DMU rolling stock, the very limited Great Western service to Brighton looks hard to justify when there is a regular interval service from Southampton to Brighton provided by a different operator. The stock would be better deployed to strengthen other services in the franchise area, in particular the services from Bristol to-Portsmouth. (See also the response to Q6)*

5. Respondents who wish to promote service changes should clearly identify these in their response to this consultation, as well as any supporting business case or value for money (VfM) analysis.

*There is strong local support for the MetroWest concept, with its potential to greatly improve rail travel quality and usage within the travel to work sub region, which now extends as far as Taunton to the south, Chippenham and Trowbridge to the east and Gloucester to the north.*

*While implementation of much of the MetroWest plan requires capacity improvements, both infrastructure and trains, there are some 'early wins' which should be implemented as soon as possible at relatively modest cost and where financial commitments from the operator would seem appropriate. These include the planned Portway Park and Ride station, the possible new station at Saltford recently subject to local consultation, and improvements to local stations, many of which have only minimal facilities and are a major disincentive to use.*

*Early priority should be given to re-establishing a service between Portishead and Bristol. Portishead will be the largest town in the country without a rail link when the current house building programme is complete. A further 8,000 people are expected to settle in the area over the next few years making Portishead the second largest town in North Somerset. Road traffic congestion between Portishead and Bristol is already severe and potential franchisees should be required to make clear their commitment to early re-*

*establishment of service.*

*There is a strong business case for the reopening of a station on the Gloucester – Bristol route at Stonehouse to serve the growing population of the Stroud Valleys and particularly to facilitate travel towards the south west to Bristol and beyond. This scheme has wide local support and has been promoted by the Gloucestershire Local Transport Board. At present rail users have to travel via Gloucester or use the station at Cam and Dursley. The scheme merits taking forward as a high priority. (See also the response to Q19).*

*CPRE Devon supports the proposed new stations at Marsh Barton and Edginswell which have been prioritised by the Heart of the South West Local Transport Board. Such additional stations would greatly enhance the value and use of the Exeter to Paignton service and encourage modal shift.*

*There would seem to be good case for a regular passenger service between Exeter and Okehampton which would enable rail access from north-west Devon. It is also hoped that progress can be made towards the reopening of the route from Bere Alston to Tavistock, a long-standing aspiration of Devon County Council, so enabling rail access to Plymouth from an area which has seen and is seeing considerable population growth and where road access to Plymouth is poor and increasingly congested.*

*We assume that re-establishment of the Okehampton to Tavistock link is being considered as an alternative route for the Exeter-Plymouth service, as part of the exercise to address issues over resilience in the light of the flooding events in early 2014 and the severance of the line at Dawlish.*

*CPRE SW was pleased to welcome the introduction in December 2013 of the enhanced service on the 'TransWilts' line from Swindon to Westbury. This is potentially an important rail corridor linking north and south Wiltshire with considerable traffic potential and we understand that user numbers already exceed expectations. It will take a number of years before the full potential of the route is realised. The current service provision should at least be maintained during this period, and preferably further enhanced, and there should be a sustained promotional campaign. In addition it needs to be supported by active joint working with Wiltshire Council to improve station quality and access along the route.*

*We are aware of, and support, aspirations for a number of other station re-openings and would look to the operator to contribute to feasibility studies. These include Chard Junction which would be facilitated by capacity enhancements on the Exeter to Salisbury line, Sparkford on the Weymouth to Bristol line, Somerton and Langport on the Paddington to Taunton line, Corsham between Chippenham and Bath, and Moredon which would be a new station north west of Swindon towards Kemble .*

*There would appear to be particular opportunity for service improvement and increased rail usage from Yeovil, population 45,000. Yeovil is an important and growing centre for*

*housing and employment in South Somerset. On the Bristol Weymouth route, the aspiration should be for a regular hourly service with improved interchange facilities for access to the station by all modes, and strong marketing.*

*In conclusion, we draw attention to the fact that the largest single element in the far South West economy is leisure/tourism, bringing in both short stay and weekend visitors. The present operational pattern focuses heavily upon weekend maintenance scheduling, when in fact the weekends are important for changeover of visitors. The franchise needs to reflect this different pattern of usage in this part of the franchise area, particularly in the summer when tourism is at its peak.*

6. Respondents are encouraged to bring to our attention research, evidence or publications which they believe should be considered in the development of the franchise specification.

*The important strategic route from Cardiff through Bristol to Southampton and Portsmouth features little in the consultation document despite serving major areas of planned growth. We draw your attention to the report “The Mainline they shouldn't ignore” (RPC 2004). Almost all its recommendations remain as relevant today as in 2004 but few have been implemented. The route desperately needs higher capacity and higher quality rolling stock. In the absence of an early cascade of more modern DMUs consideration should be given to use of loco hauled stock, at least on some services.*

*This route also merits special attention to intermediate station facilities, and access to the areas they serve. At Westbury, where passenger numbers and services have improved in recent years, there are particular problems with road access for buses and cars, as well as walking and cycling. The operator should invest and work closely with Wiltshire Council to resolve this situation.*

7. Respondents are invited to propose any changes to the current service pattern which they feel should be considered and to explain their rationale, for example by identifying specific local factors which might influence the future level of passenger demand which they consider should be reflected in a revised specification.

*The current service between Gloucester (population c 130,000), Cheltenham (population c 120,000) and Worcester (population c 100,000) is two-hourly. These are sizeable communities which merit a regular interval service between them at hourly intervals. If reliable and properly promoted the traffic potential is strong. All trains should also serve Ashchurch for Tewkesbury.*

*We note the aspiration by First Great Western to achieve a better service pattern on the North Cotswolds line, exploiting the opportunities presented by the recent re-doubling of parts of the route. This aspiration should be realised as soon as possible, in advance of delivery of the new IEP trains, and journey times improved.*

*Evening services from Bristol to Bath and beyond are erratic (regular services from*

*Bristol to Bath in the evenings up to 22.35 and then a long gap until 23.20, just at the time when they are most needed). They discourage use of the route for evening travel.*

8. Respondents are invited to say whether they value a faster headline journey time, or more intermediate stops, on a particular journey that they make (and to identify that journey)

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9. Should any elements of the indicative modelled intercity service pattern be mandated, and can it be improved? What should the priority be for intercity services where IEP trains are not planned to operate?

*Across the network there are major passenger benefits from a clockface timetable which is easily remembered by regular users.*

*The proposed pattern of IEP InterCity trains on the Cheltenham route of 1tph has been widely welcomed. The service specification should stipulate first and last trains. Under the present service pattern the last service on the Cheltenham line is 20-45 to Cheltenham and 22-15 to Gloucester both involving changes at Swindon which effectively rules out evening engagements in London such as theatre trips. A later through service to Cheltenham should be specified.*

10. What do you feel the Great Western operator's priorities on the suburban network should be once it is electrified in 2016 e.g. for additional higher capacity, fast commuter services, or improved journey times?

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11. After the electrification to Newbury, expected in 2016 would passengers' needs be best served by a diesel service from Bedwyn, Hungerford and Kintbury to Newbury connecting into a fast service to London Paddington, or a diesel stopping service from Bedwyn to Reading connecting to a fast service from Reading to London Paddington, or other options? The former would give faster journey times to London but add a change at Newbury for passengers to Reading.

*On the Paddington - Westbury line, which has become a popular service from N and W Wiltshire there is concern about what will happen when there is electrification to Reading and Newbury. If there has to be a change of trains the franchise must ensure that it is with the minimum of delay and inconvenience, as a "change" could mean a 5 minute well-coordinated transfer or a 30 minute unplanned wait. Commuters fear delays if they have to change trains.*

*Given the growing importance of Westbury on the fast, few stops route to Taunton/Exeter it is vital that electrification to Westbury is planned. In the short term the current level of service to Westbury must be retained and if possible it should be enhanced.*

12. Respondents are invited to suggest ways in which Community Rail Partnerships could deliver more of the beneficial outcomes for passengers achieved so far.

*We are pleased to note how successful Community Rail Partnerships have been in increasing passenger numbers and delivering significant improvements to station environments. It is imperative that the operator continues to support them and acknowledges their importance to the overall value of the wider franchise network. With possible cuts in local authority funding, it may be necessary for the operator to provide additional resources.*

13. While maintaining end-to-end service frequency, could the needs of passengers be better met by providing the operator with some flexibility over calling patterns on branch lines?

*This merits further discussion between the operator and the individual Community Rail Partnerships concerned.*

14. Respondents are asked to suggest what mitigating actions and steps the GW operator should be expected to take to meet the needs of its passengers both during the planned disruption to the GW franchise as a result of planned upgrade works and when ‘force majeure’ events such as extreme weather, impact the network.

*We would expect that standards for management during disruption would be addressed at a national level across all franchised services.*

*Passengers should be able to rely on a consistent and well publicised approach from all. At present the information supplied on the franchise can be patchy, and many travellers are left unaware of the options and compensation to which they are entitled.*

15. Where the provision of temporary, alternative service is unavoidable, respondents are invited to suggest what alternative provisions they would prefer the GW operator to put in place.

*Think of the customer: good facilities (toilets, refreshments, etc); plentiful information; and support with managing essential transfers.*

16. Respondents are encouraged to consider what steps the GW operator should be expected to take when reacting to changes in passenger demand, and what targets for capacity should be set.

*Targets should be set in the franchise specification; where these are exceeded on a regular basis there should be a requirement on the operator to provide additional capacity. In the event of declining take up of services there should be a full analysis of the causes, and any cuts should not be carried out without a period of full consultation.*

*On this topic we are aware from local surveys that a high percentage of the general public has poor knowledge of rail services. There is no substitute for good modern information services and publicity.*

17. Respondents are invited to highlight if there are specific stations or services where they feel particular attention should be paid to reliability or punctuality.

*There are particular problems on some of the sub-regional commuter services into Bristol, particularly of punctuality and reliability. This still often feels like a neglected, second class service, despite its obvious potential as part of a modern metro service.*

18. Are there any areas of the GW franchise where you feel cost savings could be made?

*See our comments relating to revenue protection in response to Q1*

19. Respondents are encouraged to consider which locations merit consideration for future improvement under these schemes.

*In Gloucestershire inadequate car parking remains an issue at Cheltenham, despite some recent work to provide additional spaces, and has become an issue at Cam and Dursley which is being used increasingly for commuter journeys from the Stroud Valleys to Bristol.*

*CPRE SW welcomes the proposals for major improvements at Taunton supporting its ambitious regeneration programme. As a rapidly growing community with increasing rail use, Bridgwater also merits improved facilities.*

20. Respondents are encouraged to consider how best to communicate information with passengers across the franchise and how best to keep passengers informed during times of disruption.

*There are good examples of communications among the operators. We suggest that the standards should become the universal norm. They should include*

- 1. training for all levels of staff in the systems of communication in such an event*
- 2. use of all media: via mobile services, websites*
- 3. regular on-train announcements about options where applicable*
- 4. a Help line*

*The roll out of WiFi is vital for all services within the franchise.*

21. Rail Executive is considering what the appropriate approach for monitoring and improving service quality in the new franchise would be. Respondents are invited to say what matters most to them (for example, cleanliness of trains and stations, or the helpfulness of staff) in terms of the service quality they receive.



*We consider ranking is inappropriate leading to a serious risk that lower ranking aspects will be neglected. [For example passengers experiencing poorly maintained and serviced toilets should be aware that this is in the “required” list and not a ranked option depending upon service-operation pressures.] A quality franchised service must encompass all aspects.*

*There are many local, responsible organisations and user groups that would welcome formal arrangements to monitor the quality of services against the franchise requirements. Coordination could be managed through Travelwatch SW.*

Please indicate if there are any additional areas that you think Rail Executive should consider consulting on and that have not already been addressed during stakeholder engagement.

*Potential franchisees should be required to indicate their plans for operating the railway in an environmentally sound manner that includes particular reference to economical use of energy in all aspects of their operation.*

*The franchise should involve careful linking with other forms of transport in the interests of reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and improved transport for all*