

Closing date for responses is 21<sup>st</sup> February 2018.

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Great Western Franchise Consultation

Department for Transport

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## **Response to the Public Consultation to the Great Western Rail Franchise**

### **From Wokingham Borough Council.**

Wokingham Borough Council is one of the six Berkshire Unitary Authorities and, while there are only 2 stations within the Borough operated by GWR, these being Twyford and Wargrave, Crowthorne Station (just within Bracknell Forest) is also operated by GWR and serves the part of this Borough within the settlement of Crowthorne. GWR operates stopping services on 4 lines passing through the Borough and GWR services call at Wokingham (where GWR provides about half the train services) and at Winnersh (a few services). The 4 lines are the Great Western Main Line, the Henley-on-Thames branch, the North Downs Line from Reading to Gatwick Airport and the Reading to Basingstoke line which, although it only traverses the Borough for about 1000m without a station in the Borough, should be heavily used if current plans for housing development and a new railway station are realised in the next decade.

#### **Consultation Question 1. Franchise Objectives for the 2020s.**

We generally **Agree with the majority** of the objectives proposed in the consultation. Although almost implicit in a number of them we would wish to see specific mention of:

- **Journey time reductions** - wherever possible and practical.
- **Frequency enhancements** – again where possible and practical.
- **Improved connectivity** - by having through services where practical or good connections between services where through services are impractical.
- **Station improvements** – to ensure they offer an attractive environment to grow passenger usage. (We appreciate that ‘Focus on the needs of the travelling public’ covers this to an extent.)

#### **Consultation Question 2. Splitting the Great Western Franchise.**

We **Disagree with this proposal**. We are aware that in passenger satisfaction surveys the Open Access Operators, such as Hull Trains and Grand Central, tend come top followed by the

small TOCs such as Chiltern Railways and the C2C Franchise (London, Tilbury and Southend) leading to the conclusion that ‘small is beautiful’, suggesting the way to proceed.

However, we understand the need to minimise interface problems within the railway and that is the primary aim of the Great Western Alliance between GWR and the Western Route of Network Rail. We consider that making the Alliance a success will be challenging not least as it is between a privately owned train operating company and a nationalised industry.

With that in mind, we consider that it is extraordinary to consider the splitting of the current GW franchise into 2 (or more) smaller franchises as that would inevitably increase the number of interfaces and, as Sir Peter Parker (a former chairman of British Rail) observed, “the railway falls flat on its interfaces.” This further fragmentation would only lead to a greater number of interfaces, the preparation for the splitting up of GWR would be a distraction for management and it would need the creation of yet another ‘Alliance’ between ‘NuTOC’ and the Network Rail Route. We can see no positives to justify this proposition.

We consider that the current management of GWR has done everything possible to develop the rail services in and to the South West (and elsewhere) with the refurbishment of the sleeper trains, the redevelopment of Long Rock Depot, the ordering of the Class 802 trains, the plans for the short formation HSTs, the transfer of the Turbo fleet to the West Country and GWR’s wholehearted support for Community Rail Partnerships many of which are in the South West. It is difficult to imagine just what more a separate TOC could have achieved.

We understand that the sleeper train was serviced at the GW Old Oak Depot but, with its closure, the train is now serviced at the Reading Train Care Depot which will belong to the residual Great Western or Thames TOC. While this can be covered by a Service Level Agreement, it is an example of the potential interfaces that would arise were the GW franchise to split as suggested in the Consultation.

The potential for competition is cited as one reason for splitting the franchise and there is currently a choice at Reading between the LDHS services operated by GWR and the service to Waterloo operated by South Western Railway. As the journey time to Waterloo is well over twice the time on fast services to Paddington this is hardly a competition. From December 2019, Elizabeth Line services will operate to Reading although we suspect that Berkshire commuters will prefer Class 387s to the Crossrail Class 345, with commuters choosing to change onto the Elizabeth Line at Paddington. But the Elizabeth line could potentially provide competing services although we understand that GWR sets the fares from Reading and, unless this changes, passengers will continue to choose to use LDHS services to Paddington.

### **Consultation Question 3. Transfer of Services to another TOC.**

**Greenford Branch.** As this is not in Wokingham Borough we basically offer ‘No opinion’ but can see the logic of transferring this service to the Chiltern TOC which has depots nearer to the branch and is an currently an all diesel TOC.

**Brighton – Southampton Services.** Again, as this is not in Wokingham Borough, we offer ‘No opinion’ on the possible transfer of these services and, not having access to MOIRA ticketing data, we have no information on how many passengers use these trains through Southampton and who therefore would be inconvenienced by having to change at either Southampton or, say, Portsmouth. We recognise the undesirability of operating diesel trains over this considerable distance of 3<sup>rd</sup> rail, particularly when there is shortfall of good quality DMUs and a likely surplus of relatively modern electric trains capable of operating from the 3<sup>rd</sup> rail.

**North Downs Line.** We are aware of various suggestions in the railway press that this line should more logically be part of the SW franchise. Recent history (Network SouthEast legacy) explains why it is now part of the GW franchise and we consider that, despite the ‘penetrating line’ argument, the North Downs line should stay in the GW franchise. While it remains diesel operated, it needs the high capacity Turbo Class 166s to meet the demand for travel and the residual fleet is maintained at the Reading Train Care Depot. We also note that the Great Western RUS of March 2010 (page 218) identified the potential of services from Gatwick Airport being extended through Reading to Oxford to make use of the re-instated eastern underpass at Reading. From personal observation, we are aware of the long trek interchanging passengers have at Reading, many with large suitcases, from Platforms 4, 5 and 6 along Platform 7 to get to the transfer deck, an interchange that would be significantly more convenient for passengers if Gatwick services used Platforms 14 or 15. This also formed part of the GWR Vision (see below) to develop services on the North Downs Line proposing “2 tph between Gatwick and Oxford (and beyond?)” Therefore, if Reading to Oxford remains in the GW franchise then there are logical reasons to leave the North Downs Line in that franchise.

#### **Western Rail Link to Heathrow.**

Western Rail Link is subject to funding and the granting of a DCO but is expected to open in 2024, very likely beyond the span of the next proposed DA franchise even with the 2 year option being exercised. But planning for these services needs to proceed and an operator for these services has yet to be agreed. We suggest that there are at least 3 obvious options: Heathrow Express, an extension of Elizabeth Line services or the GW TOC. Wokingham Borough Council considers a premium service to be unnecessary and undesirable at Twyford Station and therefore would not wish to see Heathrow Express being the operator. Elizabeth Line trains could loop through Heathrow serving both Terminals 2 and 5 to return to the GWML at Langley. However these trains are optimised for inner London metro use and are not best suited to high ambience airport services. Neither are these trains suitable for any extension west of Reading and therefore these services would reverse in Reading Station making sub-optimal use of platform capacity. Being unit trains of 9 x 23m cars, they would have excess capacity for early morning or late evening use when demand is expected to be reduced.

Consequently, we suggest that Western Rail Link services should be operated by the GW TOC and that Class 387s are the more suitable train for airport services, can operate as single 4 car sets in the off peak and can be extended through Reading to enhance connectivity. The Reading to Basingstoke line remains earmarked for electrification and, once this is complete,

we suggest that half the Western Rail Link services are extended to Basingstoke (the remainder to, say, Newbury) to serve Hampshire and with the potential to serve any new planned settlement at Grazeley, should that be approved (see below.)

#### **Consultation Question 4. Integration between the train operator and Network Rail.**

- a. **Main Challenges.** We consider the main challenges that would be addressed are managing any outside influence that leads to out of course running, improved visibility on the need for and managing the effects of possessions on the railway and to take a wider view on the management of vegetation to improve rail adhesion conditions in the leaf fall season.
- b. **Future Priorities.** We have no real visibility on future priorities other than the points outlined above.
- c. **Wessex and Sussex Routes.** The consultation refers exclusively to the Western Route of Network Rail. The closer co-operation should also be with the Wessex Route and indeed the Sussex Route to take account of the North Downs Line to Gatwick Airport and the Reading to Basingstoke line which becomes Wessex Route just south of Southcote Junction.
- d. **Single Point of Contact.** Local authorities have a single point of contact with GWR through their Regional Development Managers (appointments that will be replicated on South Western Railway). But there is no equivalent with Network Rail which is, from our viewpoint, a distant organisation without an obvious point of entry. Ideally the TOC's Regional Development Manager should serve the Alliance but we suspect the span of interfaces would overload these individuals and reduce their effectiveness. Therefore we suggest that the Network Rail Routes should identify an officer to liaise with local authorities and LEPs and work with the TOC Regional Development Managers to form a joint 'Point of Contact'.

#### **Consultation Question 5. Improvements to services and enhancements of frequency.**

GWR were able to publish their timetables in early December that began on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2018.

##### **GWML.**

- a. We were pleased to see that calls on fast services are maintained for the GWML from and to Twyford in the peaks. We are slightly surprised at the minimal changes in the Relief Lines services where we anticipated that the Class 387 acceleration would have permitted sharper timings. However we understand that the Relief Lines timetable will be subject to significant change over the next 2 years with the progressive introduction of Crossrail (retitled Elizabeth Line in December 2018) services replacing Heathrow Connect and with Elizabeth Line services being extended to Reading in December 2019.

- b. Fast services to and from Twyford should be retained in a new DA Franchise at, as a minimum, the frequencies in the current timetable..
- c. We have not seen a draft December 2019 timetable to give us the impact of Elizabeth line services being extended to Reading and whether it will be possible to arrange for the residual GWR services on the Relief Lines to run to a semi-fast schedule. This should be the aim and connections in and out of the Henley-on-Thames Branch should be with GWR services operated by Class 387s. Elizabeth Line Class 345s have, we understand, greater acceleration therefore the existing skip-stop pattern of service should, if possible, be modified to take advantage of this and pick up the calls nearer London to reduce journey times where possible by GWR services to Maidenhead and Twyford.

**The Henley-on-Thames Branch.** We are pleased that experience of operating a 2 tph service throughout the day has permitted the inclusion of calls at Wargrave on all services.

**5a. Train Frequency Enhancements Requested.** The North Downs Line timetable has been basically unchanged since the introduction of the Turbo fleet in the early 1990s. GWR report that this is one of their lines with greatest growth and this leads to severe overcrowding on some services and GWR proposed their 'vision' for upgrading the line at the beginning of their present franchise. This vision was supported by various studies that Arup had carried out for Surrey County Council. The 'vision', with a target completion of 2024 for the full programme, called for:

- Electrified service.
- Sub 1 hour journey times between Reading and Gatwick.
- 2 tph stopping service between Guildford and Reading.
- 1 tph between Guildford and London Victoria via Redhill.
- 24 hour express service (to Gatwick).
- 2 tph between Gatwick and Oxford (and beyond?).
- improved performance.
- sufficient supporting infrastructure (station facilities and car parks) to meet the demand generated by the service improvements.

We fully support GWR's vision and particularly the second Gatwick service (which has been an unrealised franchise commitment for some years) and the 2 tph service at Crowthorne. We also support the aspiration for electrification and consider that the pragmatic solution to be extension of 3<sup>rd</sup> rail electrification. Wokingham Borough has had 3<sup>rd</sup> rail services since the Reading line was electrified on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1939 and another 3 miles (to the Bracknell Forest boundary) is considered to be the obvious solution. We note and welcome that the Network Rail Wessex Route Plan for CP6 includes estimating the cost of electrification of the North Downs Line. However, we recognise that electrification may be some way off and stopgap solutions may need to be identified to achieve service enhancements. We acknowledge that the characteristics of the line (being partially electrified on 3 sections separated by 2 non-electrified sections of 12 miles and 17 miles in length) may mean that consideration of alternative solutions would be appropriate and we discuss this in our answer to Question 12e.

**Winnersh Triangle.** Winnersh Triangle Station serves the adjacent and expanding business park that employs some 5,000 people. With electrified services we would hope that a call on the stopping services to Guildford could be accommodated within the timetable to widen the pool of prospective employees who could travel there by rail, as well as offering a greater frequency of trains from this station which is being developed as a park and ride location.

**5b. Times of day or week.** The January 2018 timetable increases the frequency of the stopping service between Redhill and Reading from 2 hourly on Sundays to hourly which was one of our aspirations that we are pleased to see has now been implemented. As Sunday is a busy day for flights to and from Gatwick we wish to see the second Gatwick per hour on a 7 days per week basis and the 2 tph frequency for stopping services from Reading to Guildford on a Monday to Saturday basis.

**5c Why.** Quite simply to drive economic growth, to offer a better alternative to the car to relieve congestion both within the Borough, to make travel to Gatwick by rail the a more attractive choice and to serve housing development where some 1,500 are destined in Crowthorne alone over the next 6 years.

**5d. Maintenance Times.** We appreciate the increasing problems faced by Network Rail in getting access to the network for maintenance as result of more trains running for longer hours. We recognise the disruption caused by maintenance closures but, if additional access is needed, then weekday evenings may offer a window provided every effort is made to publicise any such closure effectively. Wherever possible, trains should run and re-signalling should look to offer bi-directional running where practical so that, for example, the 24 hour service from Reading to Gatwick could continue to operate with some single track sections closed for maintenance.

#### **Consultation Question 6. New Stations.**

**6a. Are you promoting a new station? Yes.** Wokingham Borough Council is promoting a new station at MP 41 on the Reading to Basingstoke line between the future Reading Green Park Station and Mortimer Station to serve a new garden settlement of some 15,000 homes (5,000 in West Berkshire District and 10,000 in Wokingham Borough). The aim is to serve this station by the existing 2 tph GWR stopping service.

The number of homes that are being considered at this location will be determined through the local plan process and is subject to future considerations and planning approval, once a master planning process is complete.

**6b. What actions are expected from the franchise in support?** GWR has written a letter of support for this new station to Wokingham Borough Council dated 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2017 and we will work closely with the TOC to develop plans for this station to open in around 2026.

### **Consultation Question 7 – Journey times versus station stops.**

**7a. Journey times to the South West.** Not relevant to Wokingham Borough.

**7b. Stations affected.** Not relevant to Wokingham Borough.

**7c. Application Elsewhere?** The principle would be appropriate for the North Downs Line. Indeed, GWR's outline proposal for the second Gatwick service each hour will omit certain stops to achieve an incremental journey time reduction.

### **Consultation Question 8. Direct Services and Connections.**

**8a. Direct services to be preserved?** Not relevant to Wokingham Borough.

**8b. Where should direct services be provided?** Direct services are desirable to give better train utilisation, to reduce platform occupation times, to make journeys potentially quicker by taking out connections times and increasing the attractiveness of the service by eliminating the need to change trains. We consider that 2 services serving Wokingham Borough should provide direct services:

- **Gatwick Airport to Oxford (or beyond).** As already described this forms part of the GWR 'Vision' for the North Downs Line and would use the re-instated eastern underpass at Reading to provide a direct service from Gatwick Airport to Oxford or beyond. Such a service would give Wokingham a direct service to Oxford and make changing trains with heavy luggage more convenient at Reading and Oxford. However, we realise that this would require suitable rolling stock and probably in-fill electrification between Wokingham and Reigate.
- **Heathrow Terminal 5 to Basingstoke.** We have already stated that we consider that Western Rail Link to Heathrow services should be part of the GW franchise, to ease the problems of platform utilisation at Reading and provide through services from Basingstoke with connections from elsewhere in Hampshire, we would wish to see at 2 trains per hour Western Rail Link services extended to Basingstoke. We realise that such services would require the deferred overhead electrification to be completed between Southcote Junction and Basingstoke (as well as the link from Langley Junction to Terminal 5) which would enhance connectivity from the proposed settlement at Grazeley.

**8c. Improved Connections.** The 2 stations in Wokingham Borough where connections take place are Twyford for the branch services to Henley-on-Thames and at Wokingham for services on the North Downs Line. The requirement at both locations is punctuality of services to help ensure the certainty of the connection with connections at Twyford into GWR Class 387 operated services rather than Elizabeth Line services.

**Consultation Question 9. Seasonal Services.** The new franchise must cater for the additional demand generated by the Henley Regatta because of the inadequacy of the road network to Henley and the shortage of car parking available near the Regatta site.

**Consultation Question 10. Other Train Service Enhancements?** The Great Western Modernisation Programme has meant extended possessions over the Christmas and New Year periods for some years now. With the modernisation programme nearing completion and with Boxing Day being a major shopping day with many sporting fixtures, we consider that the GW franchise should provide services on Boxing Day on all 4 of the lines through the Borough.

**Consultation Question 11. Freight.** Not relevant to Wokingham Borough.

**Consultation Question 12. Seats and Space for Passengers.**

**12a. Rolling Stock Priorities?** With the new Class 800/802 Intercity Express trains, the short formed HSTs and the new Class 387s on the Thames suburban services, we consider the priority is to get more workings using the overhead wires (or 3<sup>rd</sup> rail), where possible with further electrification, to release more Turbo DMUs for services based on Bristol. The next priority is to explore battery, bi-mode to assess whether they are mature technologies offering similar performance to modern EMUs and finally to explore the replacement of Class 150s as there appears to be a long term need for similar diesel powered fleets.

**12b. First Class on more routes?** We consider the current provision to be about right.

**12c. Specific Facilities on certain services?** We consider that there is no need to provide specific facilities on some services provided the train has adequate accommodation to meet the demand. Trains serving airports need adequate baggage racks as luggage, like people, seem to be getting larger and racks need to be positioned so that passengers can keep sight of their bags.

**12d. If so what.** Not applicable.

**12e. Benefits in new technology rolling stock.**

- The benefits may be no or fewer emissions at the point of use, lower whole life costs or avoiding the need for capital intensive electrification. But whole life costs must be assessed accurately and the performance (in terms of acceleration, top speed, noise levels and ride) must offer a step change to displaced diesel trains to avoid such technology being seen as very much second best to full electrification.
- We understand that a commitment within GWR's existing DA franchise was to consider the practicality of battery trains on the North Downs Line with the conclusion being that it was not mature technology. Advances in battery technology over these few years may suggest a different conclusion now.

- We are aware of the Porterbrook Class 319 Flex project which should offer a unit capable of operating off diesel power, 3<sup>rd</sup> rail or overhead wires. Units based on this concept would be capable of operating through services from Gatwick Airport to Oxford albeit with rather frequent changes of power supply. But we are also aware that the Class 319 pre-dates the Turbo fleet which is itself some 25 years old and is unlikely to be perceived as a train upgrade.
- We are also conscious that small fleets add to the maintenance problems of the operator who strives for, where possible, an homogenous fleet of trains. Consequently, a small fleet of trains specific to one route is undesirable and will add to costs.

**12f. Routes for Innovative Technology.** The Thames Valley branches (Greenford, Windsor Central, Marlow and Henley-on-Thames) could be suitable if, for example, battery technology accepted very high rates of re-charge to permit recharging during turn rounds but as some turn round times barely allow the driver to change ends, this could be challenging.

**Consultation Question 13. Accessibility.**

**13a. Priority for improving accessibility at stations?** Our 2 GWR operated stations (Twyford and Wargrave) are accessible as are Wokingham, Winnersh (served by GWR) and Crowthorne (GWR operated but in Bracknell Forest). In principle we support the Access for All programme to make all stations fully accessible which of course assists mothers with pushchairs and passengers with heavy luggage as well as the mobility impaired. The ORR station usage figures should be used to prioritise work tempered by the practicality of providing access.

**13b. Why?** Explained above.

**13c. Other improvements to make access easier for all? (There is overlap here with Question 14.)** Enhance stations – see our response to Question 14 – such as:

- Improved access by bus, cycle and foot.
- Improved car parking and secure cycle storage.
- Manning of stations where practical (like London Rail) and ease of buying tickets for travel and to park.
- Better quality stations – platform heights, platform canopies and shelters, and train information.

**Consultation Question 14. Stations.**

**14a. Correct Priorities?** Yes.

**14b. Change any Priorities?** No.

**14c. Stations where transport mode co-ordination could be improved?**

- **Twyford**, but this requires land to allow bus stands and turning. Twyford needs further car parking but the railway land is limited with road access through a conservation area and then under an awkward bridge. Car park capacity has been inadequate for a number of years. Car parking and a transport interchange has been the subject of discussions between GWR and Wokingham Borough Council and it is hoped to address this issue early in 2018
- **Crowthorne** – This station is just within Bracknell Forest but, as a result of a limited capacity station car park, there are problems with on-street parking in Wokingham Borough. We will work with Bracknell Forest and GWR to consider the provision of more parking and the interface with bus services that currently do not exist. We wish to see access to the station made easier as well as a greater frequency of services from the station.

**14d. Improved by timetable interventions or physical work?** To an extent both and we liaise with bus operators but mainly through physical work.

**14e. Relevance of best practice elsewhere?** It would be arrogant not to seek lessons from best practice elsewhere.

#### **Consultation Question 15. Fares, Ticketing and Marketing.**

**15a(i) Agree Priorities for fares?** Yes.

**15a(ii) Agree priorities for ticketing?** Yes.

**15b. Changes to the fares structure?** Addressing the anomalies of split ticketing so as not to disadvantage the passenger.

**Consultation Question 16. Community Rail Partnerships.** Although we have no CRPs in Wokingham Borough, we consider that GWR has been extremely supportive of CRPs elsewhere in the franchise and ridership on the majority of these lines has increased significantly.

**Consultation Question 17. Investing in the workforce.** Our impressions are that GWR develops its workforce, fully embraces the concept of modern apprenticeships and does everything reasonably possible to encourage wider industry skills.

#### **Consultation Question 19. Conclusions.**

**19a. Any other priorities to be addressed?** No.

**19b. The most urgent priorities for period 2020 to 2022?** Wokingham Borough Council's priorities are:

- Operational performance.
- Upgrading the North Downs Line.
- Improving Twyford Station and developing plans for a station at Grazeley.

**19c. Initiatives not currently offered that could be provided through improved technology?**

None.

**19d. Promotion of equality of Opportunity for people with:**

- Disabilities.?** Improvements to stations as already covered in Question 13.
- Other protected characteristics?** As above.

**19e. Any other comments?** No.

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