



South Western Franchise Consultation

A response by Passenger Focus

South Western Franchise consultation

Passenger Focus welcomes the opportunity to comment on the aims and objectives of the franchise and the base specification.

In compiling this submission Passenger Focus contacted local Rail User Groups, local authorities and MPs throughout the franchise area inviting comments. A list of respondents is attached as Annex 1. While these were used to inform this submission we would point out that as the consultation deadline for all responses, including ours was the same it has simply not been possible to reflect the views of *all* respondents nor to investigate the merits of each representation. Hence, copies of responses from rail user groups and passengers have also been sent direct to the Department for Transport for consideration.

This submission sets out our comments on the specific proposals within the consultation document but does so within the overall context of our aspirations for the new franchise. While some of these can be delivered within both the baseline specification and the 10-year timeframe of the new franchise, others will undoubtedly require a longer-term strategy and external funding.

Passenger Focus supports the amalgamation of the existing South West Trains and Island Line franchise into a single franchise entity. Wherever possible, aspirations common to both have been included under the same heading but occasionally a specific reference to Island Line services has been added for reasons of clarity.

For ease of reference, page numbers quoted in this response refer to the original paper version of the consultation document.

1. Capacity

Existing growth in passenger numbers of around 22% (between 1997/8 and 2002/3) has already created problems with overcrowding in the South West Trains area, especially in the morning peak into London¹. The challenge becomes even more acute when future unconstrained growth of 23% between 2003 and 2016 is taken into account.

Given existing levels of overcrowding it is clear that doing-nothing is not an option. Indeed, if nothing was done the increasingly overcrowded conditions would limit growth to a 19% increase (and potentially less within London itself) – a reduction of at least 4% points². This demand would either be lost completely or would be forced onto other forms of transport which, given the pattern of travelling in the South/South West, is likely to mean increased congestion on the roads or, in London, increased congestion on the Underground. Moreover, as the South Western franchise has a high commuter base turning demand away also has implications for employment patterns and regional development plans throughout the South.

Hence, Passenger Focus agrees that the key challenge facing the future South Western franchise is one of capacity. There are a number of potential options through which this can be addressed:

a) Peak management

The consultation document refers to the potential “use of electronic ticketing to encourage a change in passenger travel behaviour”.

Providing passengers with the incentive and the ability to travel earlier or later in the day could help to flatten the demand profile and reduce some overcrowding at the height of the peak. We are very clear, however, that this must be about providing incentives to travel earlier or later and not about disincentives for travelling during the 08.00-09.00 period. Commuters are a captive market and so Passenger Focus is fundamentally opposed to using fares to ‘price-off’ demand.

We believe that a peak management option must be part of an overall package of measures designed to address growth. As part of this there is a need for research to determine the extent to which passengers have the opportunity to travel earlier (i.e. whether their employers provide the option of flexible working) and what would constitute an attractive incentive (e.g. discount, guarantee of a seat etc). We will be conducting research into this.

b) Revised rolling stock configuration and deployment

The consultation document asks bidders to set out a rolling stock strategy. As a passenger representative body our natural preference is for additional carriages and extra services rather than re-deployment. However, we accept that timetables are not written in stone and that there will always be a need to balance service levels with demand. What is important is that such proposals include the knock-on effect of overcrowding (both now and in the future) and the loss of connections and through journey opportunities against any potential performance gains.

¹ South West Main Line Route Utilisation Strategy. Network Rail. November 2005.

² *ibid.*

We will comment later in this submission on the specific service proposals within the outline specification.

Passenger Focus also supports, in principle, the idea of re-configuring existing rolling stock. It is important that the design of carriages is fit for purpose and, on some routes that will inevitably mean that the needs of those passengers standing must also be taken into account. This means providing enough handholds and making it easier for people to get on and off. However, any such decisions should be made on a route by route basis and be subject to local consultation with passengers and their representatives.

c) More services and longer trains

Passenger Focus does not see peak management or reconfiguration of rolling stock as providing a solution on their own. Whilst there may be opportunities to shift demand and squeeze more out of the existing network, growth forecasts contained within the consultation document point to the need for investment in additional capacity to allow more trains to run and/or longer trains to be provided.

The franchise specification mentions two potential schemes designed to increase capacity – West of England Line and Airtrack. It does not, however, make any significant mention of other possible schemes - including those identified in the South West Main Line RUS (e.g. at Reading, Waterloo Station, Clapham Junction, as well as the general lengthening of platforms); nor identify any specific proposals for Island Line.

As a result Passenger Focus has doubts as to whether the proposals within the franchise specification will satisfy current and future demand. Failure to do so could lead to the scenario outlined in the South West Main Line Route Utilisation Strategy consultation document issued by Network Rail whereby passengers are forced to stand from as far out as Southampton, Eastleigh and Andover on peak services to Waterloo³.

Passenger Focus believes it is crucial, therefore, that the franchise specification states how it intends to address the fundamental issue of capacity and that it also identifies mechanisms through which enhancements can be delivered.

Desired enhancements include:

i) Airtrack

Passenger Focus supports the principles behind Airtrack. Not only is inter-modal integration an important benefit in its own right but it will also create additional capacity on the rail network and provide new through-journey opportunities in Berkshire-Surrey-Hampshire and South West London area.

ii) Capacity constraints on the West of England line (Salisbury to Exeter)

Passenger Focus has long called for enhancements on the Waterloo-Salisbury-Exeter line. Passenger Focus research⁴ has shown the importance of this line both as a means

³ South West Main Line Route Utilisation Strategy – Draft for Consultation. Network Rail. 2005.

⁴ Westcountry to Waterloo: the real alternative. RPC Western England. June 2005

of getting to and from London but also for short commuter journeys based on the major cities/towns e.g. Exeter for travel to work and education from East Devon.

SWT services along this line also provide genuine competition with Great Western services to London Paddington – something that has provided passengers with a range of competitively priced fares. It also, however, provides an alternative route during periods of engineering work – something that would become even more valuable should the Crossrail project be approved. Passenger Focus research⁵ into engineering possessions showed that passengers would prefer to travel by an alternative rail route even if it takes longer than a replacement bus service.

As part of the 'Westcountry to Waterloo' report passengers were asked to prioritise a list of optional aspirations. The priorities were:

- a higher-frequency service
- reduced overcrowding; and
- improved train performance

In an ideal world, double tracking the entire West of England Line would best deliver all three aspirations. However, Passenger Focus is aware of a series of previous studies and reports over the past 10 years looking at doubling the track between Salisbury and Exeter, all of which struggled to pass value for money analysis. Hence we would agree that the provision of additional passing loops - at a cost of £10-£25million is likely to be a more cost-effective option. While this would not offer all the benefits of full double-tracking it would allow for an hourly service from Waterloo to Exeter supported by an additional hourly local service from Axminster to Exeter. This would provide real benefits to passengers and is something that we strongly support.

iii) Capacity constraints at Waterloo Station

The personal experience of Passenger Focus staff confirms that the concourse at Waterloo station is already congested, especially during the evening peak hours, and that even minor perturbation to services can quickly result in the concourse becoming uncomfortably crowded. Given growth projections of between 19% and 23% over the next 10 years there is clearly a need to address this issue – why spend £millions on increasing capacity along the route if passengers cannot get into or out of the key terminus?

In the short term the removal of some retail units will help but Passenger Focus would argue that there is a case for the major re-development of Waterloo station.

The potential commercial development of Waterloo International provides an opportunity to lever-in external funding that could facilitate this work. Even if this is to be progressed outside the franchise contract its impact on the franchisee and passengers will be such that we believe it ought to be covered within the specification.

iv) Network capacity constraints at Clapham Junction

The South West Main Line RUS raised the idea of remodelling platforms 7 and 8 at Clapham Junction such that more trains could stop there in the peak.

⁵ Passengers attitudes towards engineering works - August 2003

Passenger Focus believes there is a benefit to passengers from this. Clapham Junction is an important interchange. It provides links to other services (e.g. to Gatwick Airport, South Coast and, via the West London line, to Watford) without the need to travel into Waterloo – and as a result can lead to much cheaper (route not-London) tickets. It also provides access to other London mainline termini and so can help to relieve/spread demand.

v) Capacity at Reading

Passenger Focus agrees with the conclusion in the South West Main Line RUS that performance and capacity on the Reading line needs to be addressed. This is an important and sometimes undervalued line that already experiences high levels of demand. It is also one of the highest areas of projected growth – 41% unconstrained growth in morning peak trips from Bracknell and East Berkshire into London and 38% from Wokingham and South Berkshire⁶.

The line also provides alternative access to London should there be engineering possessions on the Great West Main Line – the importance of which will again be magnified should the Crossrail project receive the go-ahead.

vi) Platform lengthening

Passenger Focus acknowledges that running more and longer trains is an expensive option requiring work on the platforms, extra carriages, track and potentially further work to upgrade the power supply. In saying this we are mindful that Network Rail has recently upgraded the power supply – although questions must be asked why the opportunity was not taken at that time to allow for current requirements (i.e. ability to exploit fully the performance characteristics of the Desiro trains) and to allow for future growth. We are also mindful that the original order for Desiro included 120 additional Class 450 vehicles that were subsequently reallocated elsewhere.

Nonetheless, we do feel that the case for lengthening platforms - as identified in the South West Main Line RUS - is worthy of further consideration.

Based on the passenger loading figures quoted in the RUS document the most pressing need would appear to be in the London suburban area. That is not to say, however, that capacity constraints in the main line area can be ignored. The regional growth figures – also shown in the RUS - clearly show that growth is generally higher in outer suburban and main line areas. This too must be addressed – initially by utilising the potential for running 12-car services on certain routes and ultimately by investing in additional capacity.

vii) Alton Line

Passenger Focus has anecdotal evidence of specific performance problems on the Alton Line. Some would appear to be caused by stretches of single-track and others by trains entering/leaving the depot at Farnham impeding the basic passenger service. Passenger Focus notes that the Farnham area is scheduled to have its signalling and track assets renewed during 2007/8 with this being combined with significant sections of switch and

⁶ South West Main Line Route Utilisation Strategy – Draft for Consultation. Network Rail. 2005

crossing track renewal. Passenger Focus believes that this provides a perfect time to address – and resolve - the fundamental problems facing the Alton Line.

viii) Island Line

As might be expected, the majority of the base specification concentrates on SWT services. However, capacity is also an issue on Island Line services.

We are pleased that the consultation document itself recognises that existing loadings are under-reported. Using average loadings also ignores the overcrowding that occurs at peak commuter times, at school times and during the summer holiday season.

This leads directly onto the need for replacement rolling stock for Island Line. The existing stock is over 65 years old and is, quite literally, a museum piece. Hence Passenger Focus believes that there is an urgent need for the new franchise to include a commitment to replace this rolling stock and, when doing so, to cater for the additional demand outlined above.

2. Fares and revenue management

a) Fares regulation

Passenger Focus notes the assumption that protected fares are to be capped at RPI+1% throughout the franchise term, consistent with the SRA's fares review conclusions. We are aware, however, that the current period of regulation only applies until 2007 and that bidders are invited to propose changes to the regime as part of the mandatory High Return Alternative Tender (page 35).

If road congestion is to be reduced then rail travel at an affordable price is essential. However, the National Passenger Survey indicates that only 38%⁷ of South West Trains passengers are satisfied with the value for money for the price of their ticket. Stated preference research carried out in May 2005⁸ invited rail passengers to prioritise the service aspects that most need to be improved. The 'value for money for the price of your ticket' was rated as the second most important improvement required from 30 possible service attributes; only punctuality/reliability was rated as a bigger priority for improvement. This was the case amongst all passenger groups (business, commuter and leisure) who rated this as the second largest priority to improve.

Hence our stated policy is that fare rises should be broadly in line with inflation and be subject to fares regulation throughout the life of the franchise, especially as direct competition is likely to remain limited. Passenger Focus is not opposed to using fares to help spread demand but opposes rationing of space by increasing prices. Therefore, we are in favour of lowering fares to encourage travel when trains are less crowded, but oppose raising fares in an attempt to price passengers off certain services

Furthermore, we also believe that there is a case to see fares regulation strengthened. The original programme of fares regulation looked to protect a key commuter fare and a key leisure fare for each flow. Commuter fares are largely covered through the protection offered to season tickets but in the area covered by the new South Western franchise there is no effective regulation of off-peak fares. Hence we believe there is a case for regulating the Cheap Day Single and Return fares.

We recognise the arguments of train companies that off-peak fares offer train companies their only real opportunity to experiment and innovate – and also to grow business and profits – but we see no reason why some new off-peak fares should not be introduced alongside the Cheap Day tickets (e.g. in the same way that SWT introduced the £1 'Megabus' fare from London to Portsmouth and Southampton).

b) Ticket integration

Passenger Focus supports the concept of smart-card technology. We feel it is crucial that this follows a common industry approach.

⁷ National Passenger Satisfaction Survey. Wave 12. Spring 2005.

⁸ Prioritisation of required improvements. Paired preference survey. SRA. May 2005.

c) Ticketless travel

Passenger Focus has also long argued that much-needed revenue is lost to the industry through ticketless travel, which results in passengers who do pay having to subsidise those who do not.

Hence Passenger Focus supports the idea of 'gating' stations. However, any programme of gating must also address the potential impact on retailing at those stations. For instance: will staffing levels within the ticket office be sufficient to cope with the increased demand; are more/better ticket machines required; will ticket office queuing times be met and how will these be monitored?

In addition it is important that accessibility requirements are also addressed at the time of gating – e.g. will it result in existing side-entrances being closed or require lengthy detours to the ticket office?

It is also imperative that adequate staffing requirements are factored into franchise negotiations. There is limited value in installing gates if they are simply left open as a result of no staff being available.

d) Generic fares aspirations

Passenger Focus also has a number of generic fares aspirations that we would like to see incorporated into the South Western franchise.

i) The introduction of carnet tickets

There are many people who only travel three days a week or less. It does not pay generally to buy a weekly season ticket and so three daily tickets must be bought. This, in turn, helps to clog up ticket queues. A carnet-style ticket would allow books of tickets to be bought in advance, presumably offering a small discount, thus improving ticket queues and allowing companies to receive the money up-front.

ii) Discount fares for students aged 16-18 in full time education

Children in Britain benefit from reduced-price travel from a later and until a higher age than in many other countries. However, the railway has failed to keep pace with social change. More 'children' now continue in secondary education and, indeed, it is Government policy to encourage this. It seems incongruous that 16- and 17-year-olds pay full fare travelling to and from school or college while New Deal Railcard-holders, in work, receive a reduction. In some areas children of this age receive local/County Council grant support to subsidise fares; in London such children have reduced rate underground and bus fares. In other areas (e.g. large parts of non-Underground connected south London and the rest of the country) such children must pay full fare. This contributes to the school run by car which Government is keen to curb as well as failing to instil a 'public transport habit' in those who are probably about to take their driving tests.

Passenger Focus would like children in full-time secondary education to receive half-rate travel for journeys in connection with their education until the end of their final school year. This concession should not apply to leisure journeys for which either the full rate is applicable or Young Person's Railcard reductions.

iii) National Railcard

Passenger Focus undertook research⁹ into the potential market for a National Railcard available to anyone. The results forecast that a product priced £30 for 50% reduction on off-peak fares, could encourage additional off-peak travel and generate some £70m incremental profit. It could also:

- be an effective tool for smoothing demand over different times of day and reduce crowding in the peak;
- reduce fuel consumption, noise pollution, road congestion and accidents;
- promote social inclusion as train fares would be more affordable;
- substitute a series of competing off-peak tickets, simplifying the current complexities of rail travel discounts.

Passenger Focus would reiterate its call for the introduction of such a National Railcard

3. Improving performance

a) Balancing performance and capacity

Passengers want improved performance. Research¹⁰ by the SRA in 2005 asked passengers to list their priorities. The results in the table below show that punctuality and reliability are the highest priority across all sectors and regions.

| Passenger Priorities - Factors | ALL | Long Distance | Regional | London and South East | Commuter | Business | Leisure |
|--|------|---------------|----------|-----------------------|----------|----------|---------|
| | rank | rank | rank | Rank | rank | rank | Rank |
| Punctuality/reliability (i.e. the train arriving/ departing on time) | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| The value for money for the price of your ticket | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| The frequency of the trains on that route | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 6 |
| Provision of information about train times/platforms | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 |

Passenger Focus acknowledges that SWT’s December 2004 timetable has led to an increase in performance. However, the new timetable was not without its drawbacks in terms of restricted capacity for additional services and increased journey times. Indeed, in the spring 2005 National Passenger Survey passengers were asked about the impact of timetable changes on their route. In the SWT area 28% of respondents said that it led to increased levels of crowding and 35% that it had led to a longer journey time¹¹.

Hence, while Passenger Focus obviously wishes to see continued improvement in performance, we believe that there is still a need to review the existing timetable principles to

9 National Railcard Economic Research. Railway Consultancy Ltd. 2003

10 Prioritisation of required improvements. Paired preference survey. SRA. May 2005.

11 National Passenger Survey. Wave 12 – Spring 2005.

see if there are opportunities to achieve a better balance between performance and capacity in some areas.

b) Provision of performance information

Passenger Focus has also long argued that access to disaggregated information is essential when discussing performance. Research conducted by the Rail Passengers Council in 2004¹² confirmed that passengers wanted information that was relevant to *their* journey and not some broad average. Such information exists and could be made available at little or no additional cost. Hence Passenger Focus reiterates its calls for performance information to be made available on a route by route basis and for this to be written into the future franchise agreement.

c) Engineering access

Passenger Focus is pleased to see that engineering access is being considered as part of the franchising process (page 33). On behalf of passengers we understand that engineering work is a necessity if the rail industry is to deliver its promise of a safe, reliable and efficient rail network. The consequence, though, is disruption to services and inconvenience for passengers. The crux of the issue therefore is achieving a balance between engineering efficiency and passenger requirements.

Decisions on a future possessions strategy cannot simply be based on cost and engineering convenience, important as they undoubtedly are, but must be linked back to the ultimate customer – the passenger. For instance, a policy of decimating evening services may make routine maintenance work more efficient and cheaper but would not be acceptable to passengers.

Passenger Focus was concerned that little research had been conducted to determine how engineering work could be planned and managed to cause minimal disruption to passengers. Hence, together with Network Rail, the Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC) and the Rail Safety and Standards Board (RSSB) we commissioned some research into passengers' views. The report discusses what the rail industry could do when planning, managing or executing engineering work, to lessen the effects of disruption to passengers. Key findings of the research were:

- Passengers were more tolerant of planned works that will deliver long-term improvements than unplanned 'patch-up jobs.' Following disruption to services, passengers expect to be shown the benefit of the improvements (e.g. in terms of new platforms or signals or details of how punctuality or reliability has improved). One respondent commented: "They do engineering works all the time but it makes no difference." In short, passengers are willing to accept periods of disruption if they can be sure they will reap the benefits of an improved rail network afterwards
- Although 'major' disruptions are rated as inconvenient, there was evidence to suggest that passengers would prefer work to be over as quickly as possible. If notified enough in advance, many passengers can plan around longer blockades or weekend closures – although for commuters the absence of a viable alternative is a real issue

¹² Research into rail passengers' perceptions of rail performance information. RPC. 2004.

- Passengers want to make informed choices about their travel plans. Information about alternative arrangements, length of disruption and increased journey time must be available well in advance. The provision and enforcement of T-12 is essential if this is to be met

The key to all three points is good information – it is essential to tell people: what the work is going to deliver; how to plan alternative journeys in advance and/or on the day; and then explain what has been achieved (e.g. "for this disruption you have now got x)."

There is also a need to ensure that possessions are co-ordinated across regions so that adequate diversionary routes are available – passengers would generally rather stay on the train for longer than change to buses.

4. Service patterns

This section includes our comments on the specific proposals raised within the consultation document and also raises some aspirations of our own.

a) Removal of SWT services West of Exeter

Passenger Focus acknowledges that this involves relatively few services and that there are alternative connections to/from Exeter. However, the proposals will reduce through-journey opportunities – the value of which is recognised by the Passenger Demand Forecasting Handbook (PDFH). They will also have an impact on local services – for instance, removal of the SWT service to Plymouth creates a big gap in services from Exeter calling at Ivybridge (e.g. the 16.41 SWT arrival fills a gap between the 13.56 and 17.50 Wessex arrivals Monday to Friday, and between 13.56 and 18.48 on Saturdays). Moreover, SWT services to Paignton can help to alleviate some of the overcrowding experienced on Wessex services to Paignton in the summer.

So it is clear that the proposal will have negative consequences. What is not clear, however, is the rationale behind the proposed cuts. The document states that the main purpose of the proposed service pattern modifications is to re-assign resources to the more demand-intensive parts of the network but it fails to mention how this would apply. We assume that SWT would not be operating West of Exeter if it cost more to run than the passenger income generated. It is also hard to see any other operator making use of the paths released. So we must ask what resources would be saved by terminating SWT services at Exeter and, perhaps more importantly, where/how would these be reassigned?

Passenger Focus understands that there are ‘trade-offs’ when it comes to service provision. For instance, if the resources saved would help provide the hourly Exeter-Waterloo or Axminster-Exeter services then it is something Passenger Focus could support. Without this information it is not possible to form a balanced judgement and so Passenger Focus must view the proposals purely as service cuts to which it is opposed.

If, however, the final decision is to withdraw these services then Passenger Focus would ask that the Department for Transport:

- ensure that the Greater Western timetable identify and address any gaps in service (e.g. such as at Ivybridge)
- ensure that disabled assistance arrangements at Exeter are able to cope with increased demand
- consider retaining the through services to Paignton in the summer

b) Removal of SWT services between Salisbury and Bristol

Our report ‘Westcountry-Waterloo: The Real Alternative’¹³ sets out the case for Waterloo-Bristol services, namely:

- better direct access to Westminster, the City and South London
- a slower but cheaper and therefore more socially inclusive service
- a valuable strategic through-service to London for growing West Wiltshire towns and
- potential to relieve pressure on the main line as it nears capacity

¹³ Westcountry-Waterloo: The Real Alternative. RPC Western England. June 2005.

The proposal would now require passengers to change at Salisbury. As we have said before, passengers value through services. This is demonstrated by the fact that the service has generated custom despite its on-off history and a lack of awareness on the part of passengers. Questions must also be asked about the overall capacity on Wessex services to/from Bristol and Salisbury¹⁴.

Moreover, once again there is no attempt to provide a balanced rationale behind the proposals or to set out an alternative view as to where the resources saved could be reassigned.

Passenger Focus must again object to the proposals.

c) Withdrawal of the Wareham-Brockenhurst shuttle service and the acceleration of the Waterloo-Weymouth service

Passenger Focus understands the principles behind this option. Indeed we support the idea of an additional hourly service to Weymouth, with one of these being a faster service than currently provided. A faster, more joined-up main line could offer benefits to passengers – especially if services were to run later into the evening than at present. However, the line also provides for local, shorter-distance journeys and it is important that the needs of these passengers are not ignored.

It is, however, difficult to assess the balance between these aspirations without seeing the details of the proposed stopping patterns. For instance, what will be the impact on existing through journeys; will good connections be available? (not just between SWT services but also between other operators such as Virgin and Wessex Trains)

Passenger Focus is willing to discuss these issues in more detail with the Department for Transport and the franchise bidders.

d) Operating the Romsey-Southampton-Totton service as a shuttle between Romsey and Eastleigh only

Passenger Focus believes that plans for a local Romsey-Eastleigh service would be a retrograde step. At present the main flows from Romsey/Chandlers Ford appear to be to Southampton Airport and Southampton Central. Rail is ideally placed to compete with car and bus use on these routes but a shuttle service to Eastleigh and then a connection to the airport or the centre of Southampton is unlikely to be so attractive and could stifle the newly created traffic from Chandlers Ford.

Passenger Focus notes the desire to improve performance by eliminating some of the congestion within the Southampton area. However, we also note that this was considered in the South West Main Line RUS consultation. While the RUS accepted that reducing the overall service level was likely to alleviate congestion and improve performance it also said it could lead to overcrowding and a reduction in the competitiveness of rail. For these reasons the RUS recommended that this option would not be taken further.

Passenger Focus concurs with these conclusions and objects to the proposal to terminate the service at Eastleigh.

¹⁴ The Mainline they couldn't ignore. RPC Western England. April 2004

e) Removal of direct services between Reading and Brighton

Passenger Focus accepts that few passengers make end-to-end journeys. However, anecdotal evidence points to pockets of demand – such as Winchester to Chichester. The route also offers opportunities for strategic, connective links throughout the south consistent with the policy framework set out within the South East Plan¹⁵.

Hence, Passenger Focus would agree with the Department for Transport that further analysis of the services within the Reading-Basingstoke-Southampton-Brighton axis is required before any decision is made to withdraw this service.

f) Swanage rail connection

Passenger Focus would endorse the aims behind this project and is pleased to see that it has been included as a priced option within the outline specification.

g) Isle of Wight

Passenger Focus is keen that the needs of Island Line passengers are also addressed in the new franchise. To this end Passenger Focus has taken the opportunity of reiterating the following franchise aspirations:

- maintain the existing timetable and the existing connectional arrangements, including the average Waterloo-Shanklin journey time
- ensure early liaison with all ferry and bus operators to ensure optimum connections
- provide convenient connections at Portsmouth Harbour to/from Southampton, Chichester and other important regional centres
- provide additional services for key local events and on peak summer Saturdays
- a passing loop in the Brading area to enable the introduction of a 30 minute clock face timetable

¹⁵ www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/southeastplan/plan/part_1_july05/section_d4-transport_formatted.pdf

5. Stations

A dirty, dimly lit station in which it is difficult to find out times of trains is, for example, unlikely to encourage the occasional traveller to use the train rather than the car. It can also be a threatening environment, which does little to enhance a passenger's sense of security - something that is particularly relevant in respect to travel late at night (especially for vulnerable passengers travelling alone)¹⁶. For the regular rail user, poor communication facilities add to the sense of frustration and helplessness often experienced during periods of delay and disruption.

For these reasons Passenger Focus has always attached a great deal of importance to station facilities. Passenger Focus undertook research¹⁷ in Spring 2005 to assess passenger perceptions of the current provision of facilities at stations and their priorities and preferences for improvement. Prior to this Passenger Focus had published a guide for Local Authorities setting out a number of areas that they could address within their Local Transport Plans (LTPs). The focus of the report¹⁸ was on improving modal integration. Both reports are available via the Passenger Focus website.

We were pleased, therefore, to see that bidders "will be expected to demonstrate a continuing improvement in service levels at stations, address issues of safety and security, accessibility...and interchange." We look forward to working with the bidders in developing these concepts.

Passenger Focus was particularly pleased to see reference to car parking in the outline specification. Rail passengers' journeys start from home, not from the station, and for many the only way to get to the station is by car, some to be dropped off, but some to park for the day. If passengers cannot park, whether because there is no space or it costs too much, they might choose to drive all the way to their destination, instead of just the few miles to the station. This is not to say that Passenger Focus is against improving local bus links, cycle provision and pedestrian access at stations – we would like to see all of these improved. However it remains a fact that, for many rail passengers, car to station remains the most viable and practical means of travel.

We are aware that some local authorities have reservations about increasing parking provision in the belief that this will add to congestion on roads. Passenger Focus has, however, long maintained that the provision of car parking at railway stations should be seen as a separate issue in its own right and not part of wider discussions on car parking in general. In many ways a railway station car park is the original 'park and ride' scheme and it is important that it is acknowledged as such. There is also the need to work closely with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on issues of regional planning and housing development. Car parks at stations are a prime example of where regional and local housing policy impacts on transport planning.

Research commissioned for the Rail Passengers Committee Southern England in May 2005¹⁹ reported that most car parks in the South were operating at or near capacity with SWT in particular reporting waiting-lists for car park passes for season-ticket holders. With growth of around 23% expected in the next 10 years²⁰ this problem will only get worse.

16 Surveys by Crime Concern and the Soroptimists have shown that neglected, run-down and ill-lit stations and station approaches, covered with graffiti and full of litter, actively deter potential passengers

17 What Passengers Want from Stations. RPC. June 2005

18 Strategy to Reality. Using Local Transport Plans to deliver on rail. RPC. February 2005.

19 The Demand for Car Parking at Stations. Railway Consultancy. May 2005

20 South West Main Line Route Utilisation Strategy – Draft for Consultation. Network Rail. 2005

Whilst commuters may be price-inelastic, and pay higher charges, it is unfortunately the later-arriving leisure passengers who are both less likely to find a space and more likely to be deterred from travelling as a result of there being no space (since road congestion tends to be less acute outside the peaks). Off-peak passengers are carried at a low additional/marginal cost but provide revenue which can make a huge difference to profitability, so the lack of car-parking spaces is also a potential constraint on the development of a TOC's business.

Hence, Passenger Focus believes that there is scope for enlarging existing car parks where required. It is also important that work at stations contains an element of 'future-proofing' (i.e. the ability to extend or upgrade facilities in the future with minimal disruption). Consideration ought to also be given to multi-storey car-parking facilities at stations (even if on a pilot basis). To achieve this it may be necessary for Network Rail and the Department for Transport to consider financial mechanisms where any investment is discounted over the life of the car park rather than the short-term length of the franchise.

6. Staffing

Passenger Focus notes that bidders are invited to submit a 'bottom-up review of staffing requirements'. We believe that a staff presence is a vital factor in making passengers feel secure, in collecting unpaid fares and in deterring vandalism and anti-social behaviour. This can have quantifiable benefits – for instance research by Crime Concern and Transport & Travel Research (1997) suggests that the introduction of additional safety measures can lead to a significant increase in patronage on public transport. Respondents were asked to estimate the number of extra journeys they would make if safer measures were in place; the average was an increase in trips of 10.5%. This shows that perception of safety and security is a significant factor when travelling by public transport.

Hence we do not expect this 'bottom-up review' to be a euphemism for a programme of major staff reductions in ticket offices, on platforms or on trains. To this end we would endorse the statement on page 29 that staff resources must be deployed in such a way that it improves customer service quality on trains and at stations.

Significant investment in staff training should also be a condition of a new franchise, the objective being to develop an organisational culture change to one that is directly focussed on passenger services and continuous performance improvement. Results should be measurable in terms of fewer complaints about wrong information, rude staff or slowness in dealing with complaints.

While the new franchise combines SWT and Island Line into a single body we believe that there is still value in operating a separate local management structure on Island Line as at present.

7. Accessibility

Improving access and facilities for disabled people will benefit not only those with disabilities but also families with young children and elderly people with mobility problems. Much of the problem lies in stations that were simply not built with accessibility in mind and the scale of the problem is such that it may take years to improve access radically and therefore requires long-term commitment.

Passenger Focus looks forward to discussing detailed proposals from the franchise bidders in due course.

8. Passenger's Charter

Passenger Focus looks forward to discussing specific proposals with the bidders but believes the Department for Transport should take the opportunity to significantly revise the terms of the existing Passenger's Charter.

Passenger Focus has long been critical of aspects of the Passenger's Charter, both in its nationalised and privatised form. The concept of a Charter is good; it is proper that passengers are informed of their rights and of the obligations and aspirations of the train company. However, the central core of the Charter – the establishment of performance targets and compensation arrangements - is flawed.

We would, therefore, like to see the following changes to the existing SWT and Island Line regimes:

- Relaxation of the existing 60-minute delay threshold. Passenger Focus advocates a system whereby a delay of 30 minutes generates a 50% refund on the cost of that journey, while a delay of 60 minutes generates a 100% refund.
- Review of the existing system for compensating season ticket holders. Currently holders of monthly or longer tickets are generally eligible for a discount only if, at the point of renewal, average performance for the previous 12 months fell below the trigger level for punctuality and/or reliability. The effect of this is to make discount available according to when a ticket was purchased rather than the level of service experienced. For instance, persons A and B have travelled together on the same train for years. Person A buys his ticket in September at which point average performance is above trigger levels and no compensation is due. By the time person B renews his ticket in December, however, performance has dipped and compensation is due. Despite sitting next to each other and experiencing the same level of disruption, one is eligible for compensation and one is not.

Passenger Focus believes that there may be a case for abolishing the system of triggers and targets and introducing a single, more equitable method whereby season ticket holders claim if they are actually delayed in much the same way as day-of-travel ticket holders. This would require the scheme to be well publicised and claim forms to be made easily accessible but, in turn, would remove the need to calculate Passenger's Charter performance figures – something that has no real value otherwise.

If, though, the decision is taken to retain the current system of targets and triggers then Passenger Focus would expect to see an increase in both punctuality and reliability targets over the life of the franchise. Performance has risen over the past year such that SWT will soon be able to stop providing a discount to season ticket holders. However, some of this has no doubt been achieved through changes to the timetable and scheduled journey times rather than through increased efficiency. If timetables are to be changed in such a way it is right that Passenger's Charter targets are also subject to a similar process of revision

9. Community rail

Passenger Focus supports the concept behind Community Rail Partnerships and looks forward to further discussions over the future development of schemes for the Lymington Line and for Island line.

However, while recognising that the Community Rail status is designed to provide more flexibility we believe it is still important that such services are viewed as part of the National Rail network when it comes to the provision of fares and timetable information.

Passenger Focus is aware that the Department for Transport is consulting separately on Community Rail designation for the Island Line and we will be responding to this.

Annex 1 - list of respondents

Alton Line Users Association
Andrew Mead
Bob Bowman
Chris Grayling MP
D W Prior
D Tent
David Laws MP
Dorset County Council
Friends of Bruton Railway Station
G Evans
G Harrison-Watts
Isle of Wight Council
J Read
Janet Repton
Jan Wilson-Ward
John Friedberger
Keith Bailey
L Jennings
M Hicks
Melksham Without Parish Council
Nicholas Field
North Bradley Parish Council
North Devon Rail Users Group
P J Taylor
P J Warry
Paul N Tomlinson
Peter Mulley
Philip Crook
R Dodson
R Hearnden
Railfuture
Railfuture – Wessex and London and South east Branches
Richard Tranter
South Hampshire Rail Users Group
T J Nevell
Tony Boulton
Torbay Line Rail Users Group
Transport 2000 – Devon Group
West Wiltshire Rail Users Group



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Passenger Focus is the operating
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