



South Western Franchise and Draft South West Mainline Route Utilisation Strategy

Summary of the response by Passenger Focus

February 2006

Passenger Focus responded to the South Western Franchise consultation document issued by Department for Transport and the draft South West Mainline Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS) consultation issued by Network Rail. The main themes raised were:

1. Capacity

Passenger Focus said:

- 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. This must, however, 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.

Passenger Focus will be conducting 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).

- Growth forecasts point to the need for investment in additional capacity to allow more trains to run and/or longer trains to be provided. We welcome two schemes mentioned in franchise consultation designed to increase capacity– West of England Line and Airtrack. There is not, however, any significant mention of other possible schemes - including those identified in the draft South West Main Line RUS (e.g. at Reading, Waterloo Station, Clapham Junction, as well as the general lengthening of platforms); nor is there any attempt to identify 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. We believe it 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.
- Passenger Focus wants to see additional carriages and extra services rather than the re-deployment of existing services. 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.

2. Fares

Passenger Focus:

- called for fares regulation to continue throughout the life of the franchise with fare rises being broadly in line with inflation
- supported the development of smart-card technology – provided this follows a common industry approach.
- supported the idea of gating stations – both as a means of reducing the level of ticketless travel and as a way of providing a visible staff presence at the station. Any programme of gating must, though, address the potential impact on accessibility and retailing facilities at those stations.

3. Improving performance

Passenger Focus:

- acknowledged that South West Trains' December 2004 timetable led to an increase in performance. We believe, however, that there is still a need to review the existing timetable principles to see if there are opportunities to achieve a better balance between performance and capacity in some areas.
- called for access to disaggregated performance information (i.e. performance on a line-of-route basis rather than a company wide average that means little to passengers).
- emphasised the need for a possessions strategy that recognised the needs of passengers and was not just an engineering led exercise.

4. Service proposals

Commenting on specific proposals by the Department for Transport, Passenger Focus:

- opposed the withdrawal of SWT services West of Exeter and between Salisbury and Bristol
- supported the principle behind proposals to rationalise services to/from Weymouth
- opposed the removal of the Romsey-Southampton-Totton service.
- agreed with the need for further analysis on through services within the Reading-Basingstoke-Southampton-Brighton axis.

5. Stations

Passenger Focus:

- emphasised the importance of staffing, facilities, accessibility and security at stations.
- supported the development of car parks at stations. Consideration ought to 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. 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.



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