



*Campaigning for better services
over a bigger rail network*

Great Western Franchise Consultation
Department for Transport Zone 4/19
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
LONDON SW1P 4DR

please reply to:
23 James Way
Hucclecote
GLOUCESTER
GL3 3TE

For the attention of the GW Consultation Coordinator
consultation@dft.gsi.gov.uk

nigel.bray2@railfuture.org.uk

18 February 2018

Dear Sir or Madam

Railfuture response to Great Western Franchise Consultation

I am pleased to enclose Railfuture's unified response to the Great Western Franchise Consultation, representing all seven Railfuture Branches in the GW Franchise Area and our national Passenger and Freight Groups.

Where population figures are quoted, these are the latest available from the official websites or Wikipedia for the local authority areas concerned, unless otherwise stated.

If anything requires clarification, please let me know.

Yours sincerely

Nigel Bray

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Railfuture
Sevenside Branch Secretary and Great Western TOC Liaison

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Railfuture response to DfT Great Western Franchise Consultation Questions

1 (a) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the Franchise Objectives and why?

We agree in principle with the stated objectives, although we have some concerns as to how these might be achieved. In particular, we believe the environmental, financial and operational performance of the railway would be enhanced by further electrification.

1 (b) Are there any priorities you would change or add and, if so, why ?

Services should be sufficiently frequent and at times that passengers want to travel.

Customer focus must become part of the culture, such that staff at all levels make decisions and act in the best interests of passengers.

Ticket and journey choices must be clearly explained at the point of purchase, and fares should provide value for money. These additions are required to drive home the message that customers come first.

The franchisee should work with other TOCs to improve connections and create regular interval services on shared corridors, eg Newport- Swansea.

Increasing rail's modal share should be a specific and monitored objective of the franchise because modal shift will deliver benefits including reduction in pollution and road congestion.

2 (a) Do you agree or disagree with the proposals for splitting the Great Western franchise into smaller franchises ?

We disagree.

2 (b) Why ?

We concur with the disadvantages stated on page 24 of the Consultation Document and would add the following.

Splitting the franchise will have the effect of fragmenting services as passengers will lose out in terms of connectivity, through ticketing and services, and marketing of through journeys, resulting in longer and more expensive journeys which will have the effect of reducing passenger numbers. It would also involve instability through restructuring and lose a product brand recognised by passengers and stakeholders. There is no identification in the Consultation Document of how a split would benefit passengers.

Franchise risk comes from bids based on invalid assumptions about infrastructure delivery and traffic growth, as has been demonstrated recently on the East Coast franchise. The key to reducing franchise risk is to assess the deliverability of franchise bids and not to award franchises to over-enthusiastic bidders. A single franchise is also better able to manage risks which impact just one of the service groups. If the Department needs visibility of the cross-subsidy between service groups, the franchisee should be required to operate them as separate business units. A smaller franchise would attract fewer bidders because the costs would be greater and the gains would be smaller. It would also be less likely to attract sufficient managers of the required calibre.

Rather than split the Great Western franchise, we believe it would engage more effectively with its diverse and widely spread territory through a Divisional or business unit structure

with budgetary devolution. These outbases (eg for Devon & Cornwall, North Cotswold Line, Thames Valley, South Wales, West of England) would have greater local knowledge than a single HQ based in Swindon while remaining under a single, well-resourced franchise.

The transfer of some Thames Valley commuter services to Elizabeth line will reduce the scale of the franchise in any case.

The proposed split runs counter to the concept of better integration between “Track and Train” in para. 3.8 of the Document. It is likely to result in different fares structures and standards of rolling stock on the same route. A smaller franchise would have fewer resources with which to respond to major disruption or unexpected heavy peaks of traffic. It might have to outsource much of its administration, as did the former Wessex franchise. A split would create problems in the management of stations, resulting in yet another operator to consider. This would almost certainly take longer to deliver station enhancements.

3 (a) Giving reasons, do you agree or disagree with the options for transferring Greenford branch services to the Chiltern franchise; and transferring the Brighton-Southampton portion of the Bristol- Brighton service to the Thameslink, Southern & Great Northern franchise ?

We agree with transferring the Greenford branch to Chiltern. With the reinstatement of the through platform at Greenford, this would enable services between High Wycombe and West Ealing, where connection with Elizabeth line would provide more journey opportunities to Heathrow and central London.

We disagree with transferring the Brighton - Southampton portion of the Bristol - Brighton service to TSGN. This would result in poorer connectivity, slower journeys and potentially higher fares for passengers between South Wales, the West of England and Sussex. These services (two each way Monday to Saturday and three each way on Sundays) link the West with stations on the South Coast without the need to travel via London. This has been particularly useful since the withdrawal of Cross Country Trains services to Brighton and the Reading - Brighton service some years ago. These trains are also popular with passengers travelling between Cornwall or Devon and the South Coast connecting at Westbury, particularly since the South West franchise ceased to operate west of Exeter.

Brighton is a significant generator of travel throughout the GW franchise. If truncation at Southampton had to take place, any replacement Southampton- Brighton service needs to continue to be faster than existing Coastway trains. There is a strong case for retaining through services to / from Bristol at weekends, when a different market is served and loadings are heavier.

3 (b) What other locations or routes do you think should be considered for adding to the franchise, or transferring to another franchise and why ?

Dean, Mottisfont & Dunbridge and Romsey stations should be transferred to the South West franchise. The first two are not served by any GWR trains. Whilst Romsey is served roughly equally by GWR and SWR, the town has much closer links with Southampton and Salisbury than with Westbury, from where the three stations are currently managed. Their inclusion in the GW franchise is a historic anomaly, which was overtaken in 2007 by the reorganisation of services in the Salisbury- Southampton corridor.

There may be a case for transferring the management of Worcester Shrub Hill to the GWR franchise as this station provides the main connectivity between GWR and the other main operator in the city.

The existing Chiltern Stratford-upon-Avon- London service should be transferred to GWR and routed via Oxford. Extension of certain Paddington- Oxford fast trains to Stratford, calling at Slough, Reading, Oxford, Banbury, Leamington Spa and Warwick, would connect four major tourist destinations, ie Windsor (by changing at Slough), Oxford, Warwick and Stratford. The Chiltern route does not serve this market and Chiltern has failed to develop the market on its own Stratford services. One way to deliver our proposal would be to run a ten-car IET to Oxford, which would then divide into North Cotswold line and Stratford portions.

Swansea, Neath, Port Talbot and Bridgend need through trains to / from Bristol Temple Meads and beyond which cannot be provided by the Wales & Borders franchise. The high commuter demand between South Wales to Bristol and Bath will continue after the removal of Severn Bridge tolls. South Wales has a strong tradition of business and holiday travel to the South West, including day trips to Bath and Bristol. There is also significant travel by service personnel between South Wales and Plymouth.

Additional routes with limited services should be considered for Shrewsbury- Hereford- Bristol and Lydney - Bristol via Severn Tunnel Junction.

4 (a) What do you think are the main challenges that might be addressed through greater co-ordination and integration between the train operator and Network Rail ?

For co-ordination and integration with Network Rail to work, financial, strategic and tactical objectives must be aligned. Enhancement schemes would be achieved more quickly if both Network Rail and the train operator agreed a unified approach with shared objectives. The three NR Routes within the GW franchise need to be closely aligned with the operator with a common basis for monitoring delivery against objectives.

The primary challenge is the conflict between the long-term need to maintain and enhance the infrastructure and the short-term need to keep the service running. There is a need for a culture change within NR that encourages development schemes. It is unclear whether this will be achieved solely by greater co-ordination. A redefinition of NR's remit is necessary so that it shares the same objectives as the TOC.

Reduction in delays from leaf fall and freight train failures, and managing disruption when it does occur, are also major challenges. The franchisee and NR should collaborate to minimise, rather than argue about, delays.

4 (b) What do you think should be the future priorities for strengthened partnership working between the franchise operator and Network Rail ?

The priority for partnership working must be to reconcile the long- and short-term needs whilst maximising performance and cost-efficiency of both service and project delivery. There needs to be greater flexibility in NR's time-consuming GRIP processes to speed up enhancement projects. For a more efficient franchise delivering value for money for taxpayers and passengers, the operator should define the next opportunity for NR to implement further electrification. This could include Cardiff- Swansea, for which all the necessary power feeds and surveys had been provided before the decision to cancel wiring west of Cardiff.

The franchisee should be required to engage and work with stakeholders and NR to progress the rebuilding of Oxford station, which is now barely fit for purpose, has woefully inadequate facilities and suffers from congestion (both trains and people) at busy times.

Oxford needs a station that reflects the city's global status, delivers a fitting experience for its users and is future proofed for further traffic growth including from East West Rail and potentially extended North Downs Gatwick services. By previously published timescales, rebuilding should have been completed before the start of this franchise but this requirement should be factored in so that the franchisee is involved from the start.

Partnership should exploit opportunities to introduce new or enhanced services on existing infrastructure, eg all loops on the GWR network should be upgraded for both freight and passenger trains to allow InterCity and freight trains to overtake stopping services. The franchisee should identify with NR where line speeds, signalling headways and other infrastructure enhancements would improve services.

Better disruption management and information is needed, in order to make the best arrangements for passengers at times of disruption, such as making use of alternative routes rather than bus substitution.

Other priorities should be service reliability and resilience; integrated passenger services between TOCs, eg Swindon- Southampton jointly between GWR and SWR (see our response to Q 5 and Q 8); and restoration of capacity in the Severn tunnel.

5 (a) Which routes do you believe could benefit from improvements to train frequencies ?

Bristol - Gloucester- Worcester.
Exeter - Paddington semi-fast services.
Reading - Redhill- Gatwick Airport.
Swindon - Westbury and beyond (TransWilts route).
Hereford /Worcester- Oxford- Paddington.
Cardiff - Paddington.
Bristol - Brighton.

5 (b) What times of the day or week are these improvements needed ?

Bristol- Gloucester- Worcester needs an hourly service throughout the day and week.
Exeter- Paddington semi-fast need additional services to cover long gaps during the middle of the day.
Swindon- Westbury needs a later weekday evening train in each direction.

Reading- Redhill needs an increase from two to three trains per hour, 07.00 to 19.00 Mondays to Saturdays. The additional service should stop at all stations between Wokingham and Guildford, then Dorking Deepdene and Reigate, extending to Gatwick.

A later and faster service than the existing 21.48 Paddington- Worcester is needed Monday to Saturday.

Cardiff- Paddington needs to be half-hourly on Saturdays and also on Sunday afternoons.

Bristol- Brighton needs to be hourly all day and all week.

5 (c) Why ?

In the 21st Century, Britain is a seven day society and needs a consistent seven day service pattern. On main lines later trains are needed on Saturdays, corresponding to last trains Monday to Friday. We need to offer passengers more opportunities to travel.

Worcester has only a two-hourly service to Cheltenham, Gloucester and Bristol, despite its importance as a county town, railway hub and major centre of tourism. Gloucester is also a major centre of population, administration and tourism but has only an hourly local service to Bristol. We support extension of MetroWest to Gloucester, not only to improve connectivity for the city but also to enable opening of additional stations such as Charfield, Stonehouse Bristol Road and Hunts Grove.

The existing frequency of GWR services north of Cheltenham treats the route as a branch line, despite the large populations (2016 estimates) of Gloucester (128,000), Cheltenham (117,000) and Worcester (100,000). The linkage of Worcester to the South West is a priority advocated by Midlands Connect. Ashchurch for Tewkesbury station also has a suppressed demand due to the inadequacy of its service. An earlier stopping train from Bristol is needed to give stations south of Gloucester a service to suit normal office hours in Cheltenham.

Newbury has a poor service to /from the South West despite being the largest town (2017 estimated 41,000 population) on the route between Reading and Taunton. A more frequent semi-fast service could give much improved westward connectivity for Frome and serve new or reopened stations at Devizes Parkway and Langport. Expanding the semi-fast service would allow longer-distance trains to run non-stop between Taunton and Reading.

A third hourly Reading- Redhill service will increase ridership both at the smaller stations between Wokingham and Guildford and to Gatwick.

The TransWilts route links all the largest towns in Wiltshire including Swindon, which is a separate unitary area from that of Wiltshire Council. It has seen massive growth in passenger numbers since frequencies were increased in 2013

The North Cotswold line needs a faster and more frequent service between Worcester and Paddington because journey times have lengthened despite redoubling of much of the line. Because it is the slowest InterCity route in the country, many people from Worcestershire drive to Oxford Parkway or Warwick Parkway to catch trains. The existing last service from Paddington (21.48) to Worcester is too early for attending entertainment events in London; the resulting cost of an overnight stay is a barrier to using the trains.

Hanborough station could become a park and ride location for Oxford if its train service were increased to three trains per hour, including extension of a local service that would otherwise terminate at Oxford.

Currently there is unfulfilled demand for more services on the line to Hereford via the Malverns to Paddington which will be exacerbated by the building of 29,000 homes in the South Worcestershire Development Plan and a further 14,000 homes in South Herefordshire. The timings of the existing trains should be reviewed to see whether they meet customer demands.

A more frequent Bristol - Brighton service will draw traffic away from the congested A27 road between Southampton and Brighton and avoid the need for rail travel via London or Reading.

5 (d) If the only way of achieving earlier first trains or later last trains was to curtail services at other times of the week or year so Network Rail can carry out essential maintenance, what times would you suggest ?

Services between main centres should be rerouted where possible, even if journey times are longer. If a shutdown of a route is necessary, the last trains Sundays to Thursdays should be sacrificed in order to protect the last trains on Fridays and Saturdays. This has been successfully employed in South Wales, on the London - Brighton main line and the London Overground.

6 (a) Are you proposing a scheme for a new station or line which has a realistic chance of being funded ? If so, please provide brief details here.

We support new stations / services / lines for Devon Metro, MetroWest, Okehampton, Salford, Tavistock, Wantage Science Vale Parkway, Wilton Parkway and Witney. Some of these may be dependent on housing development in their respective areas. Devon Metro includes Edginswell, Marsh Barton and extension of local services to Taunton, with reopened stations at Cullompton and Wellington. Salford is not included in MetroWest Phases 1 or 2 but is being considered by the West of England Combined Authority, subject to a favourable business case. We look forward to a further round of awards from the New Stations Fund.

Wantage Science Vale Parkway is a priority because of housing and employment growth planned in its catchment area. If additional quadrupling of the GWML is required for the opening of this station, the necessary investment should be progressed by the franchisee with Network Rail and other partners in the delivery of the additional housing which the station will serve.

We support the introduction of a shuttle service between Honeybourne and Long Marston; and extension of some Cardiff - Taunton services to Bishops Lydeard, linking with the West Somerset Railway, and others to Exeter (see our response to Q 8b).

New services from Swansea and Cardiff to Bristol and beyond. There are plans for additional stations between Cardiff and Severn Tunnel Junction, eg Cardiff Parkway, Llanwern and Magor, all of which will have passengers wishing to travel into or through Bristol.

6 (b) What actions would you like the franchisee to undertake in order to support the development of this scheme ?

We would expect the franchisee to actively co-operate with stakeholders and support the development of the proposals and to operate the service if the proposal comes to fruition in the franchise period. We welcome the Secretary of State's instruction to GWR to prepare plans to introduce regular daily services between Exeter and Okehampton as soon as reasonably practicable.

The GW Franchise should require bidders to provide costed options for the reinstatement of passenger services initially between Honeybourne and Long Marston (Meon Vale) with subsequent extensions to Long Marston Garden Village, Stratford-upon-Avon Racecourse and ultimately Stratford station.

The franchise should also require negotiations with West Somerset Railway plc and local authorities to agree dates for a trial extension of some Cardiff- Taunton services to Bishops Lydeard, on the lines of that operated into Wareham by the Swanage Railway in 2017.

An agreement in principle is needed to serve new stations between Cardiff and Severn Tunnel Junction with a new all-stations service and not by making additional calls in existing services.

7 (a) Do you agree or disagree with reducing journey times to destinations in the South West by reducing stops at intermediate stations ?

We agree, subject to no reduction in journey opportunities or frequency at intermediate stations. There needs to be a hierarchy of services, timed as far as possible to maximise connectivity at interchange stations.

7 (b) Which services or stations would benefit or be disadvantaged by this approach ?

Some smaller stations on the London - West of England Route might lose their fastest trains if stops were removed from Paddington - Plymouth / Penzance services. These stations would, however, gain more frequent stops in semi-fast trains if our suggested service pattern were introduced, ie

- (i) Paddington - Plymouth- Penzance, non-stop Reading to Taunton.
- (ii) Paddington - Exeter semi-fast, hourly, calling at Reading, Theale, Thatcham, Newbury, Hungerford, Pewsey, Westbury, Frome, Castle Cary, Taunton, Tiverton Parkway, but with some element of skip stopping if necessary to maintain even intervals at start and end points.
- (iii) Local all stations services such as Reading - Newbury and Exeter - Paignton.

A similar approach should be adopted on the Cardiff- Portsmouth route. Additional faster trains could call only at the cities plus Westbury. Stops removed at smaller stations must be reallocated to other services if this suggested train plan is to be effective. Severn Tunnel Junction, which is a major generator of commuting to Bath and Bristol, needs two trains per hour each way.

7 (c) Are there any specific locations or routes elsewhere, where it could be appropriate to reduce station stops in order to speed up longer-distance journeys ?

Paddington- Oxford- Worcester and Cardiff- Portsmouth are strong candidates.

Why ?

Reduction in intermediate stops should not be used as a way of making the journey time savings that would have been made by electrification.

The priority for the North Cotswold line for the franchise is the establishment of a reliable regular service with a clockface interval timetable, except for the small Oxfordshire halts. This should be achieved by hourly fast trains in addition to hourly trains serving all stations bar the small halts. These frequencies should drive growth and reduce the level of driving to the Parkway stations at Oxford and Warwick which will in any case need more parking capacity for their own more local markets.

A fast Cardiff- Portsmouth service could attract business travellers to a route which links seven cities (11 if Worcester, Gloucester, Chichester and Brighton & Hove are included with the associated Great Malvern- Brighton service) and could offer enormous journey opportunities without the need to travel via London or Reading. See also our response to Q12b.

8 (a) Which direct services such as those described above should be preserved in the next franchise ?

All existing through services should be preserved, especially Cardiff - Portsmouth, Bristol-Brighton, Swindon - Southampton and cross-Bristol services generally.

Why ?

It is well proven that having to change trains deters passengers from travelling by rail, so breaking the through service between these major regional centres will reduce rail passenger numbers and increase road traffic. Direct services Great Malvern / Worcester-Bristol and beyond provide an essential linkage between Worcestershire and the South West. Cross-Bristol services are needed not for operational convenience but to make rail travel more attractive in a conurbation which has a high level of congestion and pollution.

There are strong flows on existing direct TransWilts services between Swindon, Salisbury and Southampton, with potential to increase them.

8 (b) Are there any other stations between which you feel direct services should be provided ?

Swansea, Neath, Port Talbot and Bridgend to /from Bristol Temple Meads and Bath.
Abergavenny, Cwmbran, Lydney, Chepstow and Caldicot to /from Bristol.
Cardiff to Exeter Central, integrated with Devon Metro.
Plymouth to Paignton.
Swindon to Romsey via Salisbury, Southampton and Eastleigh.

Regular through services every day via the Swansea District line to Carmarthen using IET sets could be an extension of the Paddington - Cardiff service or a portion of the Swansea service if this has two five-car sets. Some of these should be extended to Pembroke Dock on summer weekends and one weekday service could be extended to Haverfordwest.

Some Worcester - Paddington services could start back from Kidderminster.

Some Swansea / Cardiff - Paddington services should call at Severn Tunnel Junction in the peak hours.

Why ?

Faster and easier journeys are needed between west of Cardiff, Bristol Temple Meads and Bath. There is a proven demand for work, leisure and educational travel. Direct services will increase journey opportunities and increase rail modal share.

Cardiff - Exeter services would attract more passengers between these major regional centres and reduce road congestion. They would also improve journey times and opportunities from Bridgwater and Weston-super-Mare to stations west of Taunton.

A Plymouth - Paignton service would link Devon's two largest conurbations, ie Plymouth (2016 est. population 264,000) and Torbay (2011 population 131,000). Both are major centres of tourism, while Plymouth is a university city.

A joint GWR / SWR service between Swindon and Southampton via Eastleigh would link all the larger towns in Wiltshire directly with Southampton Airport, which is adjacent to the station. It would also relieve pressure on Cardiff- Portsmouth services south of Trowbridge.

West Wales needs better connectivity with major conurbations to improve its economy. There is also local political support for new stations at Llandarcy and Swansea Parkway on the Swansea District line.

Worcestershire County Council has undertaken a business case for a Kidderminster- Paddington service which it says would generate up to £14m of GDP per annum for the local economy.

Severn Tunnel Junction serves a growing area of Monmouthshire and has great potential as an interchange between the Chepstow and London lines which would avoid the need to connect via Newport.

8 (c) At which locations should connections between different services be improved ?

The franchisee should be required to carry out an analysis of journey times between major centres in its network, and also between such stations and major centres outside its network, to determine where journey times are adversely affected by poor connections. It should use this information to recast its timetable to reduce overall journey times, working with other TOCs as necessary.

Improved connections from South Wales are needed between GWR and Cross Country at Bristol Parkway, including provision of a half-hourly service from Cardiff to Paddington on Saturdays and Sunday afternoons. This is possible now that the fourth platform has been completed.

Improved connections between Worcester Shrub Hill and Foregate Street are essential for interchange with West Midland Railway. Timetabling at Worcestershire Parkway needs to be designed to maximise connectivity between GWR and Cross Country.

The timetables for the Henley, Marlow and Windsor branches should be required to connect into and out of GWR Paddington services rather than with Elizabeth line trains. This should be achievable with two trains per hour on the branches and two GWR services per hour on the relief lines between Reading and Paddington.

Why ?

Passengers want good overall journey times. It is not enough to speed up individual services if there are not good onward connections. For this reason, it would be inappropriate for the Henley, Marlow and Windsor branch line timetables to be built around connections with the Elizabeth line, whose trains will call at all stations, have mainly standing accommodation and no toilets.

The existing track and signalling infrastructure in Worcester is not fit for purpose, being fragile and subject to frequent disruption. The franchisee should be required to work actively with Network Rail to improve its capability and performance. GWR trains terminating at Worcester should run through to Foregate Street to facilitate connections to / from Birmingham, the Malverns and Herefordshire. Worcestershire Parkway will be a missed opportunity if it does not provide good connectivity between the two InterCity routes serving it.

9. What additional seasonal train services do you consider to be particularly important to retain or improve in the next franchise ?

Paddington - Newquay and Pembroke Dock services should be retained and improved. Additional or strengthened services should be provided for Cheltenham and Newbury race meetings, Glastonbury and Reading pop festivals. Additional services should be provided for major events at the Principality Stadium, Cardiff, so that normal users are not disadvantaged. Special stops at Parson Street are needed for Bristol City FC home matches. Bristol - Weymouth trains need to be strengthened in the summer and the semi-fast summer Saturday service should be retained. Boxing Day services are needed in major urban centres.

Why ?

Demand for the seasonal services above is well proven, eg 60,000 of the 300,000 people attending the Cheltenham Gold Cup travel by rail. On Boxing Day, the retail, sporting and entertainment industries are a significant market opportunity. Many people working in these industries would use the trains.

10. What other train service enhancements do you believe should be considered for inclusion in the next franchise ?

Bristol - Weymouth services to become hourly or, failing that, hourly Bristol - Yeovil Pen Mill, extending alternately to Yeovil Junction (two-hourly) and Weymouth (two-hourly). Extension of Gatwick Airport - Reading services to Oxford. Through services between East West Rail and west of Oxford. The franchisee should be required to work with Network Rail and the train operator of East West Rail to provide through services west of Oxford.

Why ?

Bristol - Weymouth has been treated as a branch line with short, slow, infrequent trains for many years. An hourly service would improve connections at Castle Cary between South Dorset and the far South West. Alternate trains omitting the smaller stations would provide more attractive services for through passengers. Yeovil is a major centre of employment and needs trains timed to suit normal office hours. We understand that if the TransWilts and SWR Chandler's Ford services are combined as we suggest in Q8b, this would release a set for a Yeovil commuter train.

Extension of Gatwick and Bristol services to Oxford would improve connectivity with East West Rail, providing long-distance journey opportunities avoiding London. Oxford is not the logical western terminus of the EWR route. There is known demand for through trains to Swindon, Bath and Bristol. The inability to travel west from Oxford without changing at Didcot inhibits growth already, let alone in the future.

11. If you are a freight operator or represent the freight industry, please set out your expectations of likely future demand for freight capacity across the routes served by the franchise.

Railfuture is aware of the parcels traffic pioneered by InterCity Freight on East Midlands Trains services. The GW franchisee should explore ways of developing parcels business, in view of the growth of internet shopping and the success of time sensitive parcels traffic on EMT.

The franchisee should work with Network Rail to upgrade freight loops for use by passenger trains to assist pathing of enhanced passenger services.

12 (a) What do you think are the main priorities that we should seek to address in relation to rolling stock ?

Rolling stock must be reliable and comfortable, provide sufficient capacity and be cost-effective. Wi-fi and mobile connectivity are also important, as is personal safety and security. A mixture of airline and table seating should be provided to cater for the preferences of different passengers, and seats should align with windows. On the Cardiff-Portsmouth route in particular, the key issue is the need for longer trains.

Users need to be given a stronger voice to influence the design and specification of rolling stock. The franchisee should establish a Design Panel which would engage early enough with Transport Focus, local authorities and representative user groups to be influential. The Panel's recommendations must be implemented as far as possible and reasons explained where they are not.

A new build of rolling stock for inter-urban journeys such as Cardiff – Portsmouth should include gangway corridor connections throughout, air conditioning, refreshment facilities, sufficient luggage and cycle space, tables and toilets. There must be explicit financial penalties for unavailable toilets, set high enough to incentivise the operator to ensure availability at all times.

12 (b) Are there any routes which do not currently have First Class accommodation where you think it should be provided ?

Cardiff- Portsmouth deserves First Class accommodation because of its potential to attract business travellers if the service were faster. This should be considered for all the longer regional routes, eg Bristol – Southampton - Brighton.

12 (c) Should the franchisee provide specific services and facilities for (a) business travellers or (b) families travelling with children or (c) other passengers ?

The franchisee should provide services and facilities tailored to the route in question, such as whether the provision of catering, tables, Wi-fi and First Class seating is justified. This said, the level and quality of services need to be adequate for all passengers.

12 (d) If yes, please provide more information on what should be provided.

If necessary, First Class accommodation could be declassified to relieve overcrowding in Standard Class.

12 (e) What benefits or disadvantages do you think innovative technologies for rolling stock, eg hydrogen or battery power, could bring.

There is currently no source of cheaply available hydrogen in the UK, so hydrogen power is not a viable option. Hydrogen fuel cells will add weight, cost, complexity and unreliability to trains using them. However, battery power is now a realistic option for services over limited distances which are either partially electrified or where a high power electric feed can be provided at the end of the service. Battery powered trains are no heavier than diesel ones. Conventional electrification is our preferred option for longer routes with higher traffic density.

12 (f) Are there any routes which would be particularly suitable for these types of innovative technology ?

In the absence of full electrification the Reading - Gatwick route is a good candidate where battery power could be used to cover the electrification gaps from Wokingham to Ash and Shalford Junction to Reigate. This would also make extension of the service beyond Reading to Oxford more attractive.

A Long Marston - Honeybourne service could provide a showcase for such technology. Stratford-on-Avon District Council has just commissioned a study into the feasibility of introducing a rail shuttle service between Honeybourne station and the new Garden Village settlement at Long Marston Airfield.

13 (a) Which stations do you think should be a priority for improving accessibility ?

Bridgwater, Cheltenham Spa, Dorchester West, Kemble, Kingtonham, Stroud, Torquay, Trowbridge, Weston-super-Mare, Worcester Shrub Hill.

13 (b) Why ?

The criteria should be high footfall, high holiday traffic, a concentration of mobility impaired people locally and a high proportion of elderly passengers. Torquay, a major resort with a large retired population, arguably meets all these criteria but its station has no lifts and only convoluted level access via a road bridge. Weston-super-Mare is also a major resort but its station has no level access between platforms. The only level access between platforms at Worcester Shrub Hill is a barrow crossing requiring staff to accompany users.

Kemble and Stroud serve a large of the South Cotswolds but have only indirect level access via narrow road bridges. Trowbridge, a county town and interchange station, is in a similar situation. Kingtonham is the only GWR station on the North Cotswold line without step free access. Cheltenham Spa has access via steep ramps; lifts need to be provided when the station is upgraded. Dorchester West serves the main general hospital for much of Dorset.

Bridgwater is the second busiest station in Somerset but lacks step free access between platforms. It would be feasible to add ramps to the footbridge.

13 (c) What other improvements could help to make rail services easier to access and to use for all passengers ?

Smart Travel Plans, such as those developed by Gloucestershire County Council, need to be introduced throughout the franchise with a view to increasing the number and proportion of passengers reaching stations on foot, by bicycle or bus. This will relieve some of the pressure on station car parks, although there will still be many stations where additional parking spaces are required (see our response to Q14b). Station signage needs to show the correct position for passengers to board specific areas of a train.

Safer pedestrian and cycle access is needed at Ash, Bramley (Hants), Cam & Dursley, Pewsey and Tiverton Parkway. In the first two cases, the access between platforms is via a level crossing. The station approach at Pewsey has no pavement for much of its length and very poor visibility where it joins the main road. The franchisee should expedite the provision of a safe walking route which has been agreed in principle by Wiltshire Council. Tiverton Parkway needs safer access by foot or cycle particularly from the Uffculme direction as there is no safe crossing point of the busy M5 slip roads.

14 (a) Do you think these are the right priorities for stations in the new franchise ?

Yes.

14 (b) Which priorities would you change or add and why ?

Sufficient secure car parking should be provided at all stations (except where this is physically impossible to provide at a few small urban stations such as Reading West), with spare spaces always available, so that passengers are not deterred from travelling by rail. There is a pressing need for more parking capacity at all of the North Cotswold line stations because they have wide catchment areas with little or no onward public transport. We consider that demand for rail services is suppressed by the real or perceived lack of parking. The franchisee should be required to extend car parks which become full at any time of day. Where parking is chargeable, it should not be priced so high that it costs more to park than to use the train.

Secure cycle parking should be available at all stations.

At larger stations, passenger information screens showing both destination and platform for departures, and the next service to significant stations, should be provided on the concourse outside the ticket gates, on circulating areas inside the ticket gates and on all platforms, so that passengers do not have to know the final destination of the service they need or have to traverse the station to find out which platform their connecting service departs from.

In the interests of personal safety and security, adequate staffing is needed at major interchange stations when passengers are waiting for late evening trains. The franchisee should work with British Transport Police and local police forces to maintain the necessary cover for stations.

14 (c) At which stations do you think coordination between transport modes could be improved ?

Bridgwater, Castle Cary, Gloucester, Newton Abbot, North Cotswold line stations, Stroud, Taunton.

14 (d) How do you believe that these areas could be improved, eg through timetabling connections or through physical works at the location ?

The prominent map of local bus routes displayed at Bridgwater bus station needs to be at the railway station also. Castle Cary needs a clearly defined bus stop outside the station so that intending bus passengers know where to stand. Gloucester station is separated from the bus station and city bus stops by a busy dual carriageway. The franchisee should be required to progress plans for a footbridge over Bruton Way with G First (the Gloucestershire LEP).

Newton Abbot needs buses from towns such as Ashburton and Buckfastleigh to call at the station instead of terminating in the town centre. At Stroud there need to be more clearly defined walking routes between the station and bus stops. More buses in Taunton could be rerouted to call at the station.

The non-standard pattern of rail services on the North Cotswold line makes it difficult to achieve coordination with other modes at present. This situation also exists at Castle Cary. Introduction of a more regular service pattern would improve the situation but local authorities and the franchisee need to promote connecting bus services. The franchisee

should be required to work with bus operators to improve integration, eg by including feeder bus services in rail timetables (as GWR does in its pocket timetable for Cornwall); agreements to hold specific bus services for say five minutes for late running trains; or even running bus services itself with the potential for through ticketing. The franchisee should also be required to employ sufficient senior staff with responsibility for integration to promote it effectively.

An example of where integration should be introduced is Kingham - Chipping Norton, where there is plenty of housing development but the bus service was recently withdrawn. Seamless integration with bus services will attract more passengers and reduce pressure on station car parks.

In areas such as central Somerset, where the main towns are 12-15 miles from their nearest railway stations, buses (in this case from Glastonbury, Street and Wells) need to serve the stations directly, so that people do not have to walk or catch a second bus to reach the trains.

14 (e) What do you believe are examples of best practice elsewhere which could be relevant for stations on the Great Western franchise network ?

The London Overground concession arrangement specifically addresses three issues vital to passengers, ie station staffing; personal safety and security, partly on account of staffing but also lighting and reliable CCTV; a good state of upkeep including enhanced access, particularly for persons with impaired mobility.

Nederlands Railways (NS) focusses strongly on stations and has pioneered sale of tickets in shops and retail outlets. It is well worth looking at what NS has achieved particularly at smaller and medium stations. Merseyrail's M Shops are a good example of a welcoming presence on a suburban network.

15 (a) Do you agree or disagree with these priorities for (i) fares and (ii) ticketing ? Which priorities would you change or add and why ?

We agree with these objectives but the most important objective is not covered: passengers need the range of tickets available for the journey they wish to make to be clearly explained at the point of purchase. This does not mean simplifying ticketing, which would reduce choice and flexibility for passengers, but explaining the options for routes, fares and validity so that they can make an informed decision on which ticket best suits their needs. Smartcards should be introduced only when they can support 'pay as you go' like Oyster and can be used across operators; without that, they provide little benefit to passengers but add costs into the operation.

Staffed stations provide the fastest way of offering travel information and appropriate ticket sales. Additional ticket machines should be provided at stations but not at the expense of ticket offices.

15 (b) What changes to the fares structure could be of benefit to you ?

The perception is that rail travel is expensive and indeed this is true for Anytime fares, which are among the highest in Europe and have probably influenced a recent slowing of passenger growth in the South East. Passengers need to feel that their fare is value for money. The regulation of fares means that changes in journey quality since privatisation have not been reflected in fare levels on different routes, creating inconsistencies which need to be corrected; in particular walk-on fares to Paddington are higher than on other

InterCity routes to London. There are also historic anomalies whereby some fares are priced by a TOC which no longer serves the route in question, eg Gloucester or Cheltenham to Worcester or Malvern fares are priced by Cross Country, whose fare levels are significantly higher than those of GWR, which operates this route. In the GW franchise area, many longer-distance fares set by Cross Country, eg Gloucester to Taunton, are significantly cheaper with split ticketing. Anomalies which create an impression of unfairness and lead to split ticketing need to be resolved without forcing passengers to pay more than the split ticket price. Unless these anomalies are corrected, a 'pay as you go' Smartcard cannot work.

Restrictions on off-peak and super off-peak travel and for railcards should be made consistent, provided that time restrictions do not unduly disadvantage limited service routes and stations. Travel restrictions for journeys to London should be based on arrival times at Paddington and not on departure times from originating stations.

16 What more do you feel the franchise could be doing to help the Community Rail sector increase its contribution to society and the railway, for example in harnessing local community relations and outreach into the community ?

The franchisee should also employ sufficient senior resources to work with local stakeholders and CRPs to engage the public to support the railway. GWR is already working with Railfuture and Worcestershire County Council to establish a Worcestershire CRP.

17 What more should the franchise do to invest in the workforce and wider industry skills ?

The franchisee must create a customer service culture within its workforce so that staff at all levels take decisions and act in the best interests of the passenger. This will pay dividends in terms of the outcomes that passengers want, eg punctuality, reliability, comfort and value for money. The franchisee must also work with its staff to develop operating practices so that it can deliver high quality services as efficiently and cost-effectively as possible. It is essential that staff morale is high and that staff are proud to work for the franchisee.

More staffing at stations, including cover at ticket gates throughout service hours, would help increase revenue and improve the passenger experience. It is known to deter anti-social behaviour and reduce trespass and vandalism.

18 (a) Are there any other priorities you would wish to see addressed ?

We welcome the Consultation Document's comments about resilience of the network (section 2.3, page 19). In view of the damage to the economy of Plymouth and Cornwall during the two-month closure of the line at Dawlish in 2014, the franchisee should be required to collaborate with Network Rail and other partners to continue to develop and articulate the case for reinstatement of an alternative route to the far South West.

18 (b) Which of the priorities identified in Chapter 4 do you think should be pursued most urgently in the period between 2020 and 2022 ?

The most urgent priority is to develop a genuine customer service culture, as that will enable the other priorities. MetroWest is the most urgent enhancement scheme because the longer it is delayed, the more difficult it will be to persuade people in the Greater Bristol area to leave their cars at home and use the train.

18 (c) What initiatives not currently offered can, in your opinion, be provided through improved technology to meet the changing requirements of passengers?

More flexibility with ticketing should allow passengers to travel out from one station and return to another, for instance if there was no onward bus service in the evening at the station where the journey commenced.

Request stops at halts could be activated by passengers pressing a button on the platform to alert the driver or conductor of the approaching train.

18 (d) In what ways do you think the franchisee could promote equality of opportunity for people with disabilities or other protected characteristics within the meaning of the Equality Act 2010 ?

When engineering work involves replacement buses, these should be low floor types. The franchisee should consult with Network Rail to avoid using stations without step free access for train / bus transfers.

18 (e) Do you have any other comments ?

The work of the North Cotswold Line Taskforce to improve services is supported.