

Franchise Consultation Manager
Department for Transport
Zone 3/14
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR

Direct line:
01823 357174
Email
modowdjones@somerset.gov.uk

GWconsultation@dft.gsi.gov.uk

29th March 2012

Dear Sir or Madam,

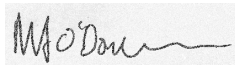
Somerset County Council's response to the Great Western Franchise Replacement Consultation

Thank you for this opportunity to engage in the re-franchising process and for the assistance Department for Transport staff have provided during the preparation of our response.

Somerset County Council's response to the consultation is formed of two parts. The first is a joint response, agreed with neighbouring authorities, which sets out our shared high level priorities for the Great Western franchise. This is followed by a series of more detailed responses to the specific questions posed in the Department's consultation document. These more detailed responses build on the issues raised in the high level response.

If you would like to discuss any element of our response or need any more information on the issues it raises please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M O'Dowd-Jones".

Mike O'Dowd-Jones
Service Director Physical Regeneration

Part 1 - High level priorities for the franchise

Our High level priorities for the franchise are set out in the letter reproduced below, which was issued jointly by the Local Authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships in the area.

Councillor Stuart Hughes

The Rt Hon Theresa Villiers MP
Minister of State for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR

102 Temple Street
Sidmouth
Devon
EX10 9BJ

Tel: 01395 578414
Fax: 01395 519178
E-mail: stuart.hughes@devon.gov.uk

26 March 2012

Dear Minister

Joint LEP, LA and MP Greater Western Rail Franchise Overarching Consultation Response

We are writing to you jointly as representatives of the South West peninsula, to set out our priorities for the new Great Western Rail Franchise. The current franchise is due to end in April 2013 and the Department for Transport is consulting on the awarding of a new franchise.

The South West is a fast growing area, and whilst it has relatively high employment levels its wealth creation, in gross value added per head, is below the national average. Tourism is a bedrock of the south west economy and has a significant impact on the population and the demand to travel. The area's high quality environment can mask the fact that it has pockets of deprivation in places such as Cornwall, Plymouth and Torbay. Studies have shown that low productivity can be a clear consequence of poor connectivity to business markets, particularly London.

What is more, as planned transport improvements in other areas of the country, such as rail electrification, reduce their journey times to London, the South West will become more peripheral. We are strongly of the view that the South West needs improved rail services to maximise its growth potential and its contribution to the national economy.

The improvements listed below would provide the connectivity needed to help the South West prosper. They could all be provided through the new Great Western Rail Franchise at modest cost, particularly when compared to their considerable benefits and the scale of expenditure on rail improvements in other areas.

- **Better connections to London** – Faster and more regular services between the South West and London. Planned improvements (such as those at Reading Station) and reduced padding of timetables by the current operator to reduce delay minute penalties will allow operators to begin meeting this challenge and other relatively low cost infrastructure improvements could deliver further benefits. Studies indicate that such improvements to create faster and more frequent clock-face services would provide sound value for money. The new franchise needs to capitalise on these opportunities.
- **Better local rail services** – Local rail patronage has been growing quickly in the South West, despite the economic downturn. We need a comprehensive network of frequent clockface local train services operating a seven day railway to support the expanding

economies of our towns and cities and provide a gateway to longer distance services. An essential element required to serve these needs, and to avoid stifling future patronage growth, is relatively modest investment from the DfT in some line infrastructure improvements.

- **Rolling stock** – The growth in rail use in the south west has been achieved on a limited stock of ageing trains for both InterCity and local services. Services are crowded and provide an unsuitable environment to work in, which will get worse. We need sufficient trains, of a suitable quality, to ensure that rail travel is attractive to potential car drivers and productive for business travellers. DfT has stated that all rolling stock will need replacing during the new franchise period. While the existing HST stock will be cascaded, we want to ensure that the franchisee operates good quality refurbished HSTs that offer passengers a comfortable and enjoyable rail experience. We are also aware that the IEP stock will be able to operate on the length of our network and wish to see this secured as part of the required upgrade.
- **Electrification** – Under current plans the South West will miss out of the benefits of electrification. We believe that incremental extensions to the planned electrification to the South-west Peninsular, during the life of the new franchise, would help deliver the improvements to London services, local connectivity and the passenger environment discussed above. Network Rail's analyses show a widespread extension of electrification in the South West would have a Benefit to Cost Ratio of 5 to 1 and that key links would effectively have "infinite" benefits. Such extensions should be considered and programmed now to give greater certainty and help the new franchise deliver the improvements the South West needs.
- **Managing disruption** – The Government investment in improving the Great Western rail network with capacity improvements at Reading station, improvements to Paddington station, electrification between London, Bristol and Cardiff is welcome. However, during this work it is important that disruption to services and passengers is kept to a minimum. Construction work should be designed around the rail services with the objective of keeping people on trains, not transferring to other modes.
- **Capacity and overcrowding** - Overcrowding is a very real issue for passengers, particularly on peak services. In order to deal with capacity, the South West peninsula needs to secure two trains per hour in and out of Paddington. As well as overcrowding on the peak business journeys, the particular problem in this region during the tourist season includes services that leave London from 16.00 hours to 20.00 hours. These services need to be augmented significantly to ensure passengers can find seats and local knowledge should be used to address these urgent issues. The improvement works at Reading station should ensure track capacity is no longer a constraint, but other local infrastructure improvements can also assist capacity on the network and we are willing to explore these further with the DfT to provide an increased level of service that facilitates economic growth.
- **Decentralisation of local rail services** – patronage growth on the South West's local rail services is amongst the fastest growing in the UK. The South West authorities have made significant investment locally in enhanced rail infrastructure and services which have delivered benefits to passengers. We are interested in the potential for decentralisation of rail services to build on this commitment, and seek ongoing engagement with the DfT to ensure decentralisation can work. The new franchise agreement must ensure that mechanisms are included to allow any of the devolution options being considered by DfT to be implemented during this franchise.

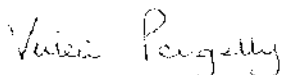
- **Demand forecasting** – There is considerable concern that industry demand forecasting is insufficient to deliver sustainable services and does not reflect the level of passenger growth experienced in the south west during the current franchise and the further growth expected, and in particular the implications of pro-rail land use policies. With a 15 year franchise it is imperative that accurate forecasting is used, or the ability to review demand at regular intervals is incorporated, to ensure capacity is not a constraint on rail travel. Through the franchise, TOCs need to be responsible for addressing the capacity requirements on the services.
- **Service level specification** – we believe that the new franchise should build upon the existing base specification. This should include those enhanced services, currently subsidised by local authorities, which have demonstrated their benefit through significant passenger growth, but funded by the DfT. We welcome the opportunity to see the proposed service specification prior to its incorporation in the ITT and seek assurance that the franchisee will have the flexibility to review and infill gaps in service where appropriate in order to meet the demands of travellers. We ask for the opportunity to see the proposed service specification prior to its incorporation in the ITT and seek assurance that the franchisee will have the flexibility to review and infill gaps in service where appropriate in order to meet the demands of travellers.
- **Service enhancements** – The Far South West authorities have sent through service aspirations for assessment by DfT consultants to provide information on the costs and feasibility of incorporating these into the rail network. We seek further ongoing engagement with the DfT and feedback to ensure that the opportunity to include these services into the ITT is not lost as the competitive tendering process provides the most cost efficient way of securing these services.

We welcome the opportunity to input into the specification for the new franchise and to help ensure it delivers what the South West needs. We would be very happy to discuss any of these issues further in further detail.

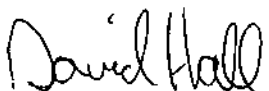
Yours sincerely



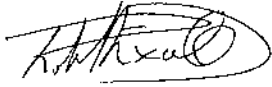
Councillor Stuart Hughes
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation



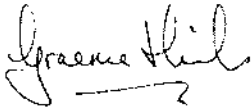
Councillor Mrs Vivien Pengelly
Leader, Plymouth City Council



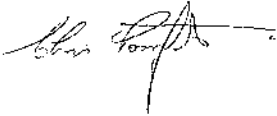
Councillor David Hall
Cabinet Member, Strategic Planning and Economic Development
Somerset County Council



**Executive Lead for Safer Communities and Transport
Deputy Leader for the Conservative Group
Torbay Council**



**Councillor Graeme Hicks
Portfolio Holder for Transportation and Highways
Cornwall Council**



**Mr Chris Pomfret
Chairman of Cornwall LEP**



**Mr Tim Jones
Chairman of HOTSU LEP**

Part 2 - Detailed responses to specific questions posed in the consultation

1. Respondents are encouraged to consider whether the proposed franchise objectives are an appropriate expression of the priorities that should apply to the new franchise.

We support the objectives that are set out. However, the objectives tend to focus on the effective management of services and existing proposals. It is vital, particularly over a 15 year period, that the franchise looks to grow with and actively stimulate demand.

Growth in demand has consistently exceeded forecasts made before and during the current franchise and the Great Western Route Utilisation Strategy (published in 2010) continued to forecast lower levels of growth than had been experienced. It is, therefore, vital that the franchise objectives promote accurate demand forecasting, as the basis for a successful franchise (perhaps within the second objective listed).

Furthermore, the objectives should encourage the operator to be proactive about growth. With a longer and more flexible franchise, bidders should not simply look to accommodate the passengers that come to them. They should seek to increase demand, particularly in underdeveloped markets. This should not be seen (simply) as a policy or environmental objective but as a central part of their business.

More frequent, regular and faster services will be a key part of meeting the franchise objectives (and the additional challenges set out above). This issue is separate from the capacity and passenger experience objectives currently set out and should be captured by the franchise objectives.

It would also be helpful to know the criteria against which bids will be assessed.

2. Respondents are encouraged to consider any specific local factors that they believe might influence the future level of passenger demand and to comment on any specific HLOS recommendations that they believe the franchisee should be required to implement.

As noted above, we are concerned by the ongoing under-forecasting of demand for rail travel in and around Somerset. Forecasts in the current franchise and subsequent studies (such as Network Rail's 2010 Great Western Route Utilisation Strategy) have predicted significantly less growth than has been realised. Although we are reassured by the recognition of this issue in statements by DfT officials, we remain concerned that forecast are

unlikely to capture the full picture. Specific local factors that might influence this include:

- The inability of forecasting tools to accurately forecast local, infrequent or rural services properly (like many of those seen in Somerset).
- A range of significant developments that are purposefully located to offer excellent access to stations and designed to encourage more sustainable travel patterns, including greater than average rail use. These include the Firepool development around Taunton Station and eco-urban extension at Monkton Heathfield (linked to Taunton Station), as well as urban growth in other large settlements as such Yeovil. It also includes development in Wellington, where proposals for a new station are a key aspect of the town's future sustainability (Details of all developments can be made available on request.)
- Proposals for a new nuclear power station at Hinkley Point, which will have a significant impact on demand at Bridgwater Station over the franchise period.

We would also like to highlight the fact that the Bristol to Weymouth line does not currently receive a two-hourly service, as is noted on page 40. A pattern of this type was instigated but failed to meet local needs and has subsequently had to be revised to a less regular timetable that meets local needs better. Whilst subsequent responses explain our aspirations for this service, it is important to make it clear that a regular pattern service will not be appropriate on this line whilst frequencies remain so low.

3. Respondents are encouraged to consider issues arising from the planned schemes and identify any local factors that should be considered.

These schemes have the potential to improve the franchise greatly, however, it is important that they are managed correctly to avoid negative impacts on Somerset. It is vital to ensure that they are properly managed to minimise disruption during construction. However, it is also important to consider the impact on areas beyond the edge of the improvement once operational. Somerset is located just beyond the reaches of planned electrification in particular and these improvements should not lead to a deterioration of its services or the county being made relatively more peripheral when compared to electrified areas.

Throughout the implementation of these schemes full, timely and clear information will be vital. It is important that the provision of this information forms a part of preparations at an early stage, if unacceptable impacts are to be avoided.

Electrification does, however, present a real opportunity to Somerset. We would call for the consideration of future electrification schemes to begin now, to get the best value out of the current proposals. The extension of electrification to Taunton on both the lines to Bristol and London would offer clear local and operational benefits (particularly in the light of proposals by our

neighbouring authorities for a 'Bristol Metro') but also greater flexibility and diversionary capacity of value to the wider network.

Statements by department officials (TravelWatch SouthWest meeting 27th January 2012) suggested that Network Rail's Route Asset Management Plan (RAMP) funding may be available to extend electrification. We suggest this extension proposal should be considered for implication in this way.

4. Respondents are encouraged to consider any specific local factors that they believe might influence the future level of passenger demand and to comment on any specific RUS recommendations that they believe the franchisee should be required to implement.

As noted in response to Question 2, we are concerned by the ongoing under-forecasting of demand for rail travel in and around Somerset. Local factors that might influence this include the suitability of forecasting procedures for the lines and services Somerset has and planned developments designed to encourage rail travel in a way not considered by forecasts. (See response to Question 2 for more details).

Given the concern that the RUS is likely to understate demand, the franchisee should be required to develop and implement proposals for all appropriate RUS options. These should include:

- Option G - Improve connectivity and increase capacity on the West Midlands to South West corridor.
- The range of options that are designed to improve capacity or services around Bristol, where they have potential to benefit Somerset. These include Options H, I and J.
- Option M – Improve linespeeds and change calling patterns on interurban journeys. Particularly the high value proposal for increased linespeeds between Bristol and Taunton.
- Further improvements designed to support the objectives set out in our responses to Questions 7 and 21.

5. Respondents are encouraged to consider investment priorities for the franchise and are asked to highlight interfaces with any other schemes that are likely to be delivered during the life of the next franchise. We also welcome proposals for alternative approaches to enable the proposed investment programme to be achieved at a reduced cost.

Somerset County Council's aspirations for the franchise period have been developed through the writing of our Local Transport Plan (Somerset's Future Transport Plan) and through engagement with neighbouring authorities. They include (further details are provided in response to Questions 7 and 21):

- Fast services - A standard pattern hourly service from Paddington calling in Somerset at Taunton and serving similar strategic

destinations in neighbouring authorities (integrated with Cross Country service patterns).

- Semi-fast services - An hourly semi fast service from Exeter to London calling in Somerset at Taunton and Castle Cary (with a level of service at Frome at least comparable to present).
- An hourly stopping service between Exeter and Taunton - with the potential to serve any new station that may be developed at Wellington (and any station developed at Cullompton by Devon County Council). This service should connect with a similar service between Bristol, Highbridge and Burnham, Bridgwater and Taunton (including any additional services as part of a 'Bristol Metro').
- More frequent services on the Heart of Wessex line - between Bristol and Weymouth, serving Frome, Bruton, Castle Cary and Yeovil Pen Mill in Somerset. Research commissioned by the Heart of Wessex Community Rail Partnership highlights the demand for this improvement and identifies viable methods of achieving it. The partnership has presented this information to the Department separately but Somerset County Council would also like to commend its inclusion in the franchise here.

We (and neighbouring authorities, as discussed in Questions 7 and 21) expect these issues to be investment priorities for the franchise. Delivering these aspirations is likely to require a number of other related investment priorities to be addressed, including:

- More rolling stock.
- Infrastructure to reduce journey times and increase capacity, particularly the linespeed improvements between Bristol and Taunton detailed in the Initial Industry Plan (IIP), between Taunton and London and the four tracking of Filton Bank.
- Station quality and accessibility (as highlighted in the IIP).

We support Western Rail Access to Heathrow since it is vital to Somerset's economy. We would also support the extension of electrification plans, as noted in response to Question 3 and passive provision for extended electrification in any other works undertaken in the meantime.

NOTE – Only services in excess of current provision are listed here, our aspiration would be for all other services to be maintained at least at current levels or improved.

6. Respondents are encouraged to consider any changes to the services included in the Great Western franchise that they would like to propose as part of a remapping exercise.

This may be relevant in some areas but care should be taken to avoid the erosion of benefits associated with longer franchises by working with the operator / bidders at the earliest possible point. No specific comments, beyond those made in response to Question 18.

7. Respondents who wish to pursue increments or decrements should make these clear in their response to this consultation. Further information on the Department's requirements for increments/decrements can be made available on request.

Somerset County Council has worked with neighbouring authorities and DfT officials to identify services we feel should be included in the franchise. These were submitted to the department ahead of our formal consultation response at its request, to allow time for them to be considered by their technical advisors. We believe there is a strong business case for these services to be included in the baseline specification. If this is not possible, however, we have requested that they are considered as priced options.

By working with other South West Peninsula authorities (Somerset, Devon, Cornwall, Plymouth and Torbay) we were able to submit a single set of longer distance services. Viewed from a Somerset perspective these included:

- Fast services - A standard pattern hourly service from Paddington calling in Somerset at Taunton and at similar strategic destinations in neighbouring authorities (integrated with Cross Country service patterns). This would offer more frequent, regular and quicker fast services.
- Semi-fast services - An hourly semi fast service from Exeter to London calling in Somerset at Taunton and Castle Cary (with a level of service at Frome at least comparable to present). This would allow local connectivity to be maintained alongside the improved fast services.

By working with these authorities, as well as the West of England Partnership and the Heart of Wessex Community Rail Partnership we also submitted a separate list of local priorities (coordinated with and linked to those listed above):

- An hourly stopping service between Exeter and Taunton - with the potential to serve any new station that may be developed at Wellington (and any station developed at Cullompton by Devon County Council). The service should connect with a similar service between Bristol, Highbridge and Burnham, Bridgwater and Taunton (including any additional services as part of a 'Bristol Metro'). This would close an existing gap between these areas, strengthening their economies and opening the rail network up to more people.
- More frequent services on the Heart of Wessex line - between Bristol and Weymouth, serving Frome, Bruton, Castle Cary and Yeovil Pen Mill in Somerset. Research commissioned by the Heart of Wessex Community Rail Partnership highlights the demand for regular services on this line and identifies viable methods of providing them.

This would make a huge difference to the line, use of which has grown considerably but is beginning to be constrained by the gaps in its

timetable. These gaps, of over three hours in places, stop the line from being a practical option for work and education trips to key centres such as Yeovil. The report identifies ways to address these problems and provide a regular service with no extra subsidy requirement. The partnership has presented this information to the Department separately but Somerset County Council would also like to commend its inclusion in the franchise here.

Further details of these submissions can be made available on request.

8. Respondents are encouraged to consider:

(a) Which responsibilities and types of services on the Great Western franchise might be suitable for more local decision-making?

(b) Which options for devolving decision-making should be considered further and which should be rejected?

(c) To which bodies might decision-making be devolved and how would governance, accountability and transparency be demonstrated, especially if consortia of sub-national bodies are formed?

(d) How might risk be dealt with if responsibilities are devolved?

Somerset County Council is open to considering the opportunities devolution of rail responsibilities may offer. We are happy to work with the Department for Transport to understand what this might mean for Somerset as options develop.

A successful devolution rail responsibility would be dependant on the identification of a suitable and distinct service (or group of services) as all of Somerset's rail services form part of longer national and regional rail services. Therefore, devolution would be likely to require close partnership working with other authorities. Considering any opportunity for a transfer of powers of this type would also be dependant on:

- A.** The transfer of sufficient funding
- B.** Access to appropriate information and expertise, comparable to that afforded to train operators.

It will also be important to consider how authorities that do not take on devolved powers will be able to engage in the franchise. Given the length and flexibility of the franchise, it will be increasingly important that Local Authorities have a formal method of engaging in its management during the franchise period. Authorities bordering those that do take on devolved powers will also need comparable opportunities to engage with that authority's management of rail services under these powers. Provision for some form of independent arbitration between such parties would also seem to be a sensible precaution.

9. Respondents are encouraged to bring to our attention research, evidence or publications which the Department should consider as part of this refranchising process.

We commend the consideration of evidence from a wide variety of groups, particularly Passenger Focus, as an important addition to more traditional demand data. However, it is also important to remember those who do not travel by rail at present and tend not to be considered by Passenger Focus. These people form an important part of the franchise's future market and are likely to have different needs to existing travellers (see response to Question 1). Other sources of information that should be considered include:

- Community Rail Partnerships – these groups are well informed and collect extensive data on line use and user needs. They should be considered alongside the other stakeholders noted. Specific documents that give an example of the information they hold include:
 - Severnside Community Rail Partnership Progress Report, January 2012 (<http://www.severnside-rail.org.uk/index.php?pid=30>).
 - Heart of Wessex Rail Partnership Report, December 2011.
 - 'Heart of Wessex line case for service improvement'. Commissioned from independent consultant Image Rail by the Heart of Wessex Community Rail Partnership in 2011 and discussed further in response to Questions 7 and 21 (<http://www.heartofwessex.org.uk/partnership.html>).
- TravelWatch South West "Greater Western, Lesser Western" report, September 2011.

10. The final specification will seek to avoid a prescriptive approach and to balance passenger, taxpayer and stakeholder interests. Respondents are encouraged to consider which aspects of the specification they believe should be mandated and which could be left to greater commercial discretion.

Somerset County Council supports the less prescriptive approach pursued. However, it is important to note that (as the consultation document recognises) that the implementation of this approach will need to vary. Somerset enjoys a range of services which it would not be appropriate to leave to commercial discretion. These services play an important economic role and are vital to Somerset's communities but their benefits would not be captured by a purely commercial consideration.

We feel it would be appropriate to employ a relatively high degree of specification to our services, providing the vital increase in freedom in areas that are more commercially attractive. Equally, there are some issues for which more discretion could be appropriate in all areas. The lists below show how we think this should work in areas like Somerset.

Mandated

These requirements try to focus on the attributes required to achieve our / the franchise's key objectives:

- Service frequency (clockface and a minimum of hourly intervals where possible) at each station.
- First and last trains at each station.
- Level of capacity.
- Connectivity between key trains (particularly between local and longer distance services).
- Essential rolling stock attributes (see responses to Questions 13, 18, 28, 29, 30, 32 and 33).
- Free and sufficient carriage of bicycles.
- Station staffing (station staff play a vital role at smaller stations, well beyond their obvious commercial role and these functions need safeguarding).

Suitable for greater commercial discretion:

Issues where flexibility should be provided in achieving the outcomes described above:

- Innovative ticketing products.
- New ways of working, particularly on community rail lines.
- Exact times of services.
- The ability to procure extra rolling stock.
- Type of rolling stock (including traction type) and maintenance arrangements.
- Extra services to meet local demand (such as events, seasonal peaks and medium term sources of demand like major construction projects).
- Increased control of stations by train operators (see response to Question 26).

11. What balance should be struck between end-to-end journey times and intermediate stops on long distance services?

Quick journeys and good connectivity between a wide range of destinations are both important to encouraging more rail travel. These two aims are not mutually exclusive and can be progressed simultaneously through improvements to linespeed, rolling stock and working practices. Somerset County Council would be very supportive of this type of improvement. However, we also recognise that the right balance needs to be found between end-to-end journey times and intermediate stops on long distance services.

Quicker journeys to key destinations, particularly London, are vital to helping Somerset to grow and strengthen its economy. However, any improvements need to be genuine wins judged on their whole impact, not just headline reductions. They would need to demonstrate the ability to balance a range of factors:

- They would need to maintain at least current connectivity to an appropriate range of destinations. Failing to do this would lead to

longer journey times for travellers at intermediate stations and devalue the operator's business.

- Their benefits need to be real and properly valued. Small time savings need to be considered carefully in the light of debate over their value (and compared to the cost of any reduction in service elsewhere, including opportunities to connect with other services).

By working with other South West Peninsula authorities (Somerset, Devon, Cornwall, Plymouth and Torbay) we developed the proposal set out in response to Questions 7 and 21, which we feel balances these needs. These proposals, for an hourly fast service from Paddington to strategic destinations (including Taunton) and a hourly semi fast service calling at intermediate stations (including Taunton, Castle Cary and Frome), aim to reduce end-to-end journey times whilst maintaining good connectivity. We believe this will provide the best possible balance between these needs, boosting the economy of the whole region.

What we would not wish to see is the improvement in headline journey times being at the expense of key stopping destinations being removed; being able to reach Exeter or Plymouth a few minutes quicker at the expense of missing out strategic stops such as Taunton (or indeed Exeter if travelling to Plymouth) would be wholly unacceptable.

(This response considers long distance services; please see our response to Question 19 for a similar discussion of other services.)

12. Can the indicative modelled intercity service pattern be improved (noting the IEP availability in Table 3.5 and the availability of other fleets)?

Somerset County Council welcomes the Intercity Express Programme (IEP) and the opportunities it will offer. However, we feel the flexibility afforded to the operator should be used to make the following improvements to the indicative modelled service pattern:

- The Parkway services proposed to be extended to Weston-super-Mare should all be extended to Taunton, not just the peak services currently noted. This would support Taunton's businesses and the significant new development planned around its station (see response to Question 2). More broadly, it would also help to maximise the value of the programme by facilitating more connections and extending the reach of the IEP. Taunton currently sees 10 times more interchanges than Weston-super-Mare (ORR data for 2009-10) and offers connections to a range of onward services, making it a far more effective terminus for these services.
- The semi-fast services to Westbury should be extended to Taunton wherever possible. Taunton has passenger flows three times higher than Westbury (ORR data for 2009-10) and connects with a wide range of services. Combined with the preceding comment and our response to Question 3 re' electrification, this would deliver considerable

benefits. Any extension further west, beyond Taunton, would also be encouraged in order to support the south west's wider economy.

- Given the resources committed to the Paddington-Bristol corridor, services to Paddington, Taunton and further west seem to justify the improvements above and potentially more. The value of providing these services should be considered carefully.

13. Whether and, if so, how many of the current HSTs should be subject to life-enhancement refurbishment and what would be their revised life-expectancy be?

AND

14. Should other InterCity rolling stock, either new or cascaded, be procured for these services?

The services noted need more and better quality rolling stock to meet passenger needs. This needs to be of a quality that makes them an enjoyable and productive place for people with all types of accessibility needs. This is vital to attract drivers from their cars but also to allow the region to continue competing with other areas that already enjoy (or will enjoy) this type of travel experience.

Even if this can be achieved with the existing rolling stock, it will be very expensive and likely to have a short lifespan. Therefore, we would question whether it could offer good value for money. We urge the government to consider the long term implications of this decision, in terms of rolling stock costs and the detrimental impact on the south west's economy. Given the long term nature of this decision it would seem most appropriate for Government to intervene and procure new, fit for purpose, rolling stock for the franchise area.

15. What should be the future of the overnight service between Paddington and Penzance, given that the sleeping cars and, especially, the locomotives, are ageing?

No comment.

16. What is the best balance between fast outer commuter services and intermediate stops? How could the residual suburban services best be optimised once Crossrail services start?

No comment.

17. Under current plans for electrification, direct services from the Henley and Bourne End branches to Paddington would still have to be diesel-operated. Respondents are encouraged to consider if these services would represent a good use of scarce timetable slots on the main line, given that these slots could be used by higher-capacity electric trains.

No comment.

18. Are the services that extend eastwards from Portsmouth to Brighton the best use of Great Western diesel rolling stock, in view of the fact that there are frequent electric services provided by Southern on this route, or could this rolling stock could usefully be redeployed elsewhere?

The scarcity of diesel rolling stock will continue to be a key constraint on improvements to rail travel in and around Somerset. This stock should be prioritised to areas where it is currently the only option. Given the alternative services available between Portsmouth and Brighton, this rolling stock should be redeployed and used to deliver the services noted in response to Questions 7 and 21.

19. Should branch line services continue to call at all branch line stations, or could the needs of most passengers be better met by omission of some of the intermediate stops on some or all of the trains, so that the final destination is reached more quickly?

Whilst Somerset has no actual branch lines, it is served by stopping services on the Bristol to Weymouth and Bristol to Taunton lines, which could be susceptible to consideration in a similar way. Our response to this question considers these lines.

As noted in response to Question 11 regarding long-distance services, whilst reducing journey times is important, journey time savings have to be genuine and considered in the context of the costs they impose. With low running speeds, time savings from omitted stops are likely to be low, particularly in the context of the relatively long end-to-end journey times on this type of route. These services provide vital local links and are relied upon by their passengers. Therefore, it is felt for this type of service the value of consistent and regular calling patterns outweighs the benefits of possible time savings which are likely to be a few minutes at best.

Therefore our proposals, set out in response to Questions 7 and 21, prioritise regular services at all of our stations. We would not want to see calls omitted at any of our stations on this type of line, where consistency, convenience and connectivity should take precedence.

(See our response to Question 11 for a discussion of long-distance services.)

20. Do the medium-distance regional services (e.g. Cardiff to Portsmouth and Worcester/Gloucester to Weymouth) adequately serve the needs of all passengers along their lines of route, or would shorter-distance services, targeted on local travel requirements, be more beneficial?

Where good connectivity can be maintained (for travellers with differing accessibility needs), it may be appropriate to consider changes to medium distance services which offer significant overall improvements to users.

Our responses to Questions 7 and 21 summarise our view of the best way to provide the improvements the Bristol to Weymouth line needs. Research commissioned by the Heart of Wessex Community Rail Partnership highlights the demand for this improvement and identifies viable methods of achieving it. Its preferred options maintain long distance connectivity but are creative in the way they do this, using attachments and connections as well as traditional through services. Therefore, we recognise that there may be other ways to provide these services and would, specifically, commend the recommendations of the Heart of Wessex Partnership's research.

Improvements to services between Bristol, Taunton and Exeter noted in our responses to Questions 7 and 21 would also have the effect of improving medium-distance regional connectivity.

21. Taking in to account the current service pattern and the future changes, respondents are encouraged to suggest train service changes that they believe will be affordable, deliver value for money and provide a strong commercial, social or economic case.

As noted in response to Question 7, Somerset County Council has worked with neighbouring authorities and DfT officials to identify services we feel should be included in the franchise. These were submitted to the department ahead of our formal consultation response at its request, to allow time to consider their potential.

We believe there is a strong business case for these services to be included in the baseline specification. They are good value improvements that meet the needs of local people and would strengthen the operator's business.

By working with other South West Peninsula authorities (Somerset, Devon, Cornwall, Plymouth and Torbay) we were able to submit a single set of longer distance services. From a Somerset perspective these included:

- Fast services - A standard pattern hourly service from Paddington calling in Somerset at Taunton and similar strategic destinations in neighbouring authorities (integrated with Cross Country service patterns). This would offer more frequent, regular and quicker fast services.
- Semi-fast services - An hourly semi fast service from Exeter to London calling in Somerset at Taunton and Castle Cary (with a level of service at Frome at least comparable to present). This would allow local connectivity to be maintained alongside the improved fast services.

By working with these authorities, as well as the West of England Partnership and the Heart of Wessex Community Rail Partnership we also submitted a separate list of local priorities (coordinated with and linked to those listed above):

- An hourly stopping service between Exeter and Taunton - with the potential to serve any new station that may be developed at Wellington (and any station developed at Cullompton by Devon County Council). The service should connect with a similar service between Bristol, Highbridge and Burnham, Bridgwater and Taunton (including any additional services as part of a 'Bristol Metro'). This would close an existing gap between these areas, strengthening their economies and opening the rail network up to more people.
- More frequent services on the Heart of Wessex line - between Bristol and Weymouth, serving Frome, Bruton, Castle Cary and Yeovil Pen Mill in Somerset. Research commissioned by the Heart of Wessex Community Rail Partnership highlights the demand for regular services on this line and identifies viable methods of providing them.

This would make a huge difference to the line, use of which has grown considerably but is beginning to be constrained by the gaps in its timetable. Gaps, of over three hours in places, stop the line from being a practical option for work and education trips in key centres such as Yeovil. The report identifies ways to address these problems and provide a regular service with no extra subsidy requirement. The partnership has presented this information to the Department separately but Somerset County Council would also like to commend its inclusion in the franchise here.

Further details of these submissions can be made available on request.

22. Respondents are encouraged to consider appropriate train times and service frequencies during planned disruption for the life of the new franchise. Respondents are also encouraged to consider alternative service propositions.

For rail to attract more passengers it needs to be a full time, consistent, seven day service that they can rely on. Whilst maintaining and improving the network will have to impact on services, customers should expect the same choice and quality of service at all times. This means:

- Operating trains whenever possible. When buses are the only option they should be accessible, have suitable luggage capacity, be of an appropriate quality and be well organised (see third bullet point).
- Services should cover broadly the same period as the regular timetable and maintain the same principles of regularity and frequency where possible.
- Whatever services are run should be well planned and high quality information should be provided. The experience should be no more difficult or distressing than planning and undertaking the same journey under normal conditions (even if it takes longer etc). Information at the station and before travelling is important. Well informed staff with good customer service skills are also vital during disruption. Whilst none of

these things can change the ultimate impact of disruption, they can make the difference between bearable and unbearable trips.

23. Respondents are encouraged to consider:

(a) the steps which bidders should be expected to take to meet passenger demand and the most appropriate mechanisms for ensuring additional capacity is provided when it becomes necessary;

A wide range of measures for increasing capacity are available and should all be considered by bidders. In particular rolling stock and increased service frequencies would be expected to play an important part in this (as set out in our responses to Questions 7 and 21).

Regardless of the method(s) of provision employed, the key is that operators take a proactive approach to providing capacity for increased demand. Previous operators have acted reactively, simply dealing with capacity problems as they emerge. With a longer and more flexible franchise, bidders should not simply look to accommodate the passengers that come to them. They should seek to increase demand, particularly in underdeveloped markets. This should not be seen (simply) as a policy or environmental objective but as a key part of their business.

It is also important that the provision of sufficient capacity to encourage growth is well monitored by the Department for Transport, with appropriate opportunities to address underperformance at an early stage. We would expect this to include a regular scheduled franchise review, secured by the franchise agreement, to consider capacity (and other issues).

(b) how capacity should be measured and appropriate targets set.

Measurements of capacity and related targets would need to recognise the diversity of the franchise. They should consider the different peaks experienced on lines with leisure uses, growing weekend travel and the different needs of passengers on different types of line (the capacity of the same stock would be different on long distance services and shorter urban services, for example).

This will also mean that the related data and targets need to be subdivided to a suitable level to allow analysis at this resolution. Current data collection and targets tend to mask the diversity discussed above, reducing incentives to address underperformance in some areas.

24. Respondents are encouraged to highlight any performance areas of particular concern.

Somerset County Council recognises the improvements in performance made during the current franchise; these levels must be maintained and built upon. However, even a small number of cancellations (or part-formations) can cause significant problems due to the infrequent services at many of our

stations. Put simply, where a cancelled train means a three hour wait it becomes particularly significant. Therefore, there needs to be continued improvement (and scrutiny of) performance in relation to cancellations. Rolling stock reliability has become apparent as a particular concern. See also our response to Question 22.

Overcrowding is a problem on peak hour services into employment centres. It is increasingly a problem for services on the Bristol to Weymouth line too, not only in the summer but around public holidays and key leisure events throughout the year. As with cancellations, the inability to board a train is particularly problematic on lines, like this, with infrequent services. The timing of works by Network Rail, that impact on services, should also consider these periods of high demand and when they will have least impact on performance. We would expect the issues raised in Question 25 to incentivise this.

25. Respondents are encouraged to consider how best to improve the overall efficiency of the rail industry to enable reductions in unit costs to be achieved.

Somerset County Council supports the principle of giving operators and Network Rail an interest in each other's activities as a helpful addition to the more flexible and longer term approach to franchising adopted. However, it is important to ensure that any such change is realised in a way that doesn't erode the efficiencies predicted to arise from the longer franchise or greater commercial freedom. The prospect of such major changes during the franchise period could be unattractive to bidders and should be discussed at the earliest possible stage.

More specifically, costs could be reduced by:

- Greater standardisation – standardisation of stations, rolling stock and other provisions would benefit passengers and reduce costs.
- Greater train operator involvement in station management (see response to Question 26) – will incentivise station improvements but should also promote the adoption of working practices that fit the location. Low cost solutions that meet the needs of rural stations or community rail lines but would not have met network rail's global standards, could be a good use of this flexibility, for example.

26. Respondents are encouraged to consider the best method for funding major station enhancements and are encouraged to consider any local accessibility issues that they believe need addressing.

Giving operators long term full repair leases for their stations would increase their confidence to make the investments encouraged by the longer more flexible franchise. They should also be encouraged to work more closely with other funders, such as developers working around stations.

We would support the station standards set out in the 2009 Stations Review. The following accessibility issues should also be considered:

- Car parking and parking management
- Cycle parking and facilities to stimulate demand
- Station travel plans where significant developments take place near stations
- Good quality information – this will vary depending on the station, with well considered but simple solutions being suitable at many quieter locations (where they are often lacking at present).
- Accessibility for those with reduced mobility. This includes the provision of appropriate infrastructure and facilities but staffing also plays a key role at many stations. Information will also be important. (See also response to Question 27.) Access should be provided to all facilities, particularly toilets, not just platforms and trains.

27. Respondents are encouraged to consider which merit consideration for future improvement under these schemes and how such schemes could be funded.

The table below summarises the stations in Somerset that do not have sufficient level access for people with mobility problems. This is unacceptable and should be addressed through the National Stations Improvement Programme and / or Access For All funding.

Station	Step free access
Bruton	Platform one only
Bridgwater	When staffed only (otherwise platform one only)
Castle Cary	When staffed only (otherwise platform one only)
Yeovil Pen Mill	When staffed only (otherwise platform one only)
Yeovil Junction	When staffed only
Templecombe	When staffed only
Highbridge and Burnham	Via long and un-signed route

Access should be provided to all facilities, particularly toilets, not just platforms and trains.

28. Respondents are encouraged to consider how security and safety might be improved, together with any local safety issues that they believe need addressing.

Safety and security are crucial to encouraging rail travel and Somerset County Council supports improvements in CCTV and increased support for the British Transport Police. However, it is also important to address the wider context of crime and fear of crime. A well maintained and cared for environment is an effective part of preventing crime and reducing fear. Work with community rail partnerships has already begun to show results at stations where safety is a real concern. For example, the Severnside Community Rail Partnership has provided new artwork from a local school, ground clearance works and planting at Bridgwater Station, which has significantly improved the station's appearance as well as addressing safety concerns. Operators should be

required to consider the station environment alongside other safety improvements (see response to Question 26 re' station improvements). Furthermore, a staff presence is one of the most important safety considerations for passengers and safety implications should be considered as part of any staffing changes.

It is also important to consider the different needs of different stations, particularly quieter stations. In our more urban areas these can become centres of anti-social behaviour (as experienced at Bridgwater and Highbridge and Burnham) and need appropriate preventative measures and enforcement. Quiet rural stations also need to be considered, as fear for personal safety can discourage potential users of these stations, especially at night.

29. Respondents are encouraged to consider how ticket purchase could be made easier and how to minimise revenue loss across the franchise.

Ticket purchasing needs to keep pace with other types of retail and customer expectations. New technologies offer the opportunity for more flexible and attractive products, on local and rural lines as well as in urban areas. It is important that whatever approach is adopted is standardised and integrated with other modes.

However, traditional retail methods remain important, particularly for infrequent travellers and those less able to use technology (who may be more reliant on public transport). New technologies should be in addition to, not instead of, existing retail methods. Ticket office staff also provide a far wider function at many of Somerset's stations, which would otherwise be completely unstaffed. They answer enquiries, provide access to track crossings for those who need step free access, and increase safety and security. This wider role needs to be recognised in the franchise.

Improved revenue protection is encouraged but should recognise the need to put customer service first in order to avoid deterring legitimate travellers. This is particularly acute on lines where the guard or revenue protection officer will be the only member of staff passengers meet, and thus their only source of assistance.

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

We support the measures proposed but are concerned that the needs of all users are not addressed. There is a danger that a two-class system could be created, with larger stations receiving (as they should) improved information, whilst smaller stations that cannot justify this investment move backwards. Getting the basics right is key for many of our stations; clear timetables, maps and appropriate local information. Ensuring this is provided at all stations would provide a basic level of information that passengers can rely on.

Having well briefed, trained and helpful staff is also vital, as noted in response to Question 22. Having specific plans in place for different types of disruption, as developed following recent heavy snow, is invaluable and should be expanded.

31. The Department is considering the appropriate approach for monitoring and improving service quality in the new franchise, and respondents are encouraged to consider the proposals suggested, to highlight any alternative proposals and to make recommendations on any issues that may be identified.

Somerset County Council would support an approach based the outcomes that affect customers. This should include:

- The full breadth of customers needs, from traditional factors such as punctuality to more innovative ones associated with the on train environment.
- The full range of needs of different lines and passengers.

It would be helpful to consider examples of door to door journeys from different types of real world destinations in evaluating services.

It will also be important to consider how authorities (particularly those that do not take on devolved powers) will be able to engage in the franchise. Given the length of the franchise and increased flexibility, it will be particularly important that Local Authorities have a formal method of engaging in its management during the franchise period.

Allowing local authorities to access more of this data on service quality independently would also help empower them to engage in the franchise. This would support the government's objectives for devolution of rail powers and open data. We would support an open database of performance data.

32. Respondents are encouraged to consider what level of catering provision should be provided.

Catering provision is, as is suggested, very important and needs to meet the growing expectation of passengers if it is to compete with other modes. It is also important that facilities are available to travellers in the evening and at weekends.

On-train facilities should be provided on all longer distance services, particularly to and from London but also on sub-regional services like those between Bristol and Weymouth.

Station retailing should also be encouraged and is a good opportunity for local small businesses. Synergies between station businesses and other local demand should be sought, as should opportunities to link stations with existing nearby businesses.

33. Respondents are encouraged to consider local accessibility and mobility issues and suggest how improvements could be made.

We support the provision of a minor works fund and suggest that this considers a wide range of accessibility works. Small amounts of funding for staffing or information can provide accessibility benefits comparable to the larger capital projects traditionally pursued and should be encouraged. We would also encourage the operator to bid for Access for All funding for Somerset's stations (see response to Question 27).

It is important that the accessibility of trains is improved alongside stations. As noted in response to Question 13, even if this can be achieved with the existing rolling stock, it will be very expensive and likely to have short lifespan. We urge the government to consider the long term implications of this decision. Given the long term nature of this decision, it would seem most appropriate for Government to intervene and procure new, fit for purpose, rolling stock for the franchise area.

34. Respondents are encouraged to consider what environmental targets could be set within the franchise specification.

Environmental targets are a vital counterpart to the increased flexibility offered by this franchise and should be aligned with wider national targets, particularly those established in the UK Climate Change Act. It is also important that these targets consider the full range of activities included in the franchise. These include treatment of waste, station and depot energy efficiency and the impacts of engineering and improvement works.

The operator should be required to co-operate with any relevant Air Quality Management Areas and any plans for relevant areas identified in DEFRA's Noise Action Plans.

Detailed issues not covered in responses to the specific questions posed.

Taunton Station is an important node within the franchise and should be listed amongst the 'key locations' noted in Paragraph 2 of Chapter 3. Office of Rail Regulation station usage data confirms that Taunton Station has a status at least equal to a number of those included in this list.

Tor Quarry should be included alongside Merehead and Whatley Quarries, which are noted as aggregate suppliers, in the freight in the freight section of the consultation document (bottom of p.35).

Community rail – Somerset County Council supports two excellent community rail partnerships which provide exceptional value for money and have made real improvements to demand, station quality, personal safety and information provision. The operator should be required to engage with and contribute to

these partnerships (as they currently do). Operator's funding contributions should be required to match the sum of the contributions made by other partnership members (generally local authorities) as a minimum. For more information on the importance of these partnerships please see the note submitted to you by Community Rail Partnerships in the West and South West of England titled 'Funding of Community Rail' (copies available on request).