railfuture

DEVON AND CORNWALL

Newsletter **December 2016**

The 16:25 Plymouth to Leeds HST approaches Cullompton on Saturday 9th April 2016. More High Speed Train units such as this should be allocated to CrossCountry. This would enable the planned half hourly service between Birmingham and Exeter to run from December 2017, but not at the cost of cutting trains to Paignton.

THIS ISSUE

Promoting Britain's Railway for Passengers and Freight

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

Heavy rain and flooding disrupted train services on Monday 21st November 2016, with trains unable to run between Liskeard and Looe. Exeter to Honiton was also disrupted, but services were nearly back to normal the next day. However, by Tuesday the railway had been closed at Cowley Bridge Junction, as flood water had swept ballast from the tracks.

Damage was not so bad as in November-December 2012, but it is disappointing that our advice to widen culverts beneath the 'V' of the junction has still not been heeded. Nothing is likely to happen until 2018! Fortunately quick repairs by Network Rail meant that services started to be restored from around 13:00 on Wednesday 23rd November. The first trains through Cowley Bridge are thought to have been the 13:04 to London Paddington (the 10:00 Cornishman from Penzance), 13:27 to Barnstaple and 11:06 London Paddington to Plymouth.

Also disappointing is the failure to build more passing places on the diversionary Exeter to Yeovil Junction section of the Waterloo line. Diverted trains for London Paddington are limited to 2 hourly paths between the existing hourly Waterloo to Exeter service. Given that these paths are tight and subject to a necessary 20 minute delay en route, this might help explain why so little use of them was made. However, the 20:12 from Reading to Plymouth (the 19:45 from Paddington cancelled as far as Reading) did run. With fewer trains to pass on the Yeovil line at this time of the evening, arrival in Exeter was only 23 minutes late. This clearly demonstrates the potential of the line for diversions. Earlier in the day the 10:06, 12:05 and 17:03 trains from Paddington are thought to have run to Exeter via Castle Cary, Yeovil and Honiton.

Railfuture Devon and Cornwall

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Network Rail busy on the tracks leading up to Cowley Bridge Junction on 22nd November 2016.

Exeter Bus Station Proposal

There are plans to develop the entire bus station site in Exeter and replace the current bus station with a smaller one built off Cheeke Street. Currently every bus stand is dedicated to a particular service, but the new bus station would have fewer. Even regular users would need to check the departure stand every time they travelled. The bus station would also be

The bus station with dedicated stands and timetables for each service. Stand 3 buses to Crediton and stand 4 buses to Tiverton both go via or close to Exeter St Davids station.

further from Exeter's two main railway stations.

The 52B bus to Sidmouth and Honiton is seen leaving Exeter bus station (far right) with (far left) the service 5 to Crediton. Linking these two services across Exeter would benefit connecting rail passengers. So would running the 369 (front left) Moretonhampstead bus inbound via St David's station.

Whether the bus station should be developed or not is not a matter for Railfuture, but bus/rail connections are. We have pointed out the disadvantages of the plan in a letter to Exeter City Council and suggested that linking bus services across Exeter would reduce the number of bus stands needed. It would also bring more services to or closer to the Exeter railway stations. Our letter text follows.

(The 52B is now service 9 & 9A is to Lyme Regis via Sidmouth)

Letter to Exeter City Council 28th April 2016

Dear --------------

railfuture

Campaigning for better services over a bigger rail network

please reply to:

Mr Howard Smith, Principal Project Manager
Planning Department
Exeter Bus Station Project
Exeter City Council
Civic Centre
Paris Street
Exeter EX1 1JN

28th April 2016

gerard.duddridge@railfuture.org.uk

Dear Mr Smith

Exeter Paris Street Bus Station Development

The proposal to replace Exeter's Paris Street bus station, with a smaller one near Cheeke Street, will disadvantage rail passengers making onward journeys by bus to places such as Sidmouth, Chudleigh and Ashburton. Railfuture is particularly concerned that:

1) the distance to the bus station from both Exeter Central and St David's railway stations will be increased. The distance from Exeter St. Davids station is already too far at 1 mile.

2) pedestrian access to the bus station via Sidwell Street, or through the new development, will not be perceived as safe at night even with CCTV cameras. Exeter city centre is not free of begging, intimidating behaviour and occasional fighting.

3) the reduction in the number of bays at the new bus station may displace buses to other streets, making it more difficult for visitors to find their service. The proposal no longer to dedicate bays to particular services, so as to manage with a smaller bus station, will create problems for those in a hurry, the partially sighted and less able.

The new bus station proposal for Cheeke Street should not go any further, unless it can be shown that it will be better for bus passengers than the existing bus station or other alternatives. For example a new bus station concourse could be built in Paris Street, opposite the Civic Centre, and with the bus bays behind and on street bus stops in front. This option would maintain the existing distance from the two railway stations and provide safer pedestrian access at night. Paris Street would need to remain open for buses.

Whatever option is chosen for the bus station we suggest that a number of services are linked across Exeter to improve connectivity. This incidentally would also reduce the number of terminating bays required at the bus station. Services which could be linked across Exeter include Stagecoach 5 from Crediton to Exeter with Stagecoach 52A/52B to Sidmouth and beyond. This example would improve links from Exeter St Davids station and the University (using the New North Road stop near the Imperial) to Sowton and Sidmouth.

Yours sincerely,

Gerard Duddridge, Chairman Railfuture Devon and Cornwall Branch

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www.railfuture.org.uk www.railfuturescotland.org.uk www.railfuturewales.org.uk
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Network Rail's Plans for Dawlish to Teignmouth

In mid October 2016 brief details emerged of a Network Rail plan to rebuild a short stretch of the coastal line at Teignmouth on a causeway further out from the cliffs. This caused confusion, as pictures of Dawlish were shown in the press and a line nearer the sea would seem less secure from rough seas.

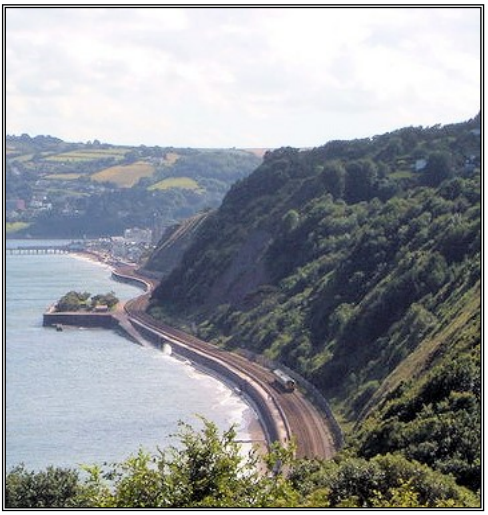
Things have became a little clearer in the last month, as Network Rail held a series of consultation meetings to outline their proposals. They have also published the executive summary on their website of their report 'Exeter to Newton Abbot Geo-environmental resilience study'.

One option is to reduce the slope of the cliffs, but this would cut back into properties on the cliff above. In addition the main A379 Dawlish to Teignmouth road is also rather too close at one point above the cliffs.

So rebuilding the railway further out to sea might be better, as it gives space to stabilise the foot of the steep 45 to 50 m high cliffs immediately above the railway. They are far too close to the railway near Sprey point between Parsons Tunnel and Teignmouth station.

The rock (Teignmouth Breccia) is weak and there have been a number of rock falls. The most recent was the so called Woodland Avenue landslip. Fortunately it occurred when the railway was also closed during the 2014 sea wall breach at Dawlish. It was more than a minor rock fall. A large section of the cliff slipped downward leaving a visible back scarp and 25,000 tonnes of detached rock was artificially removed by high powered water jets.

Site of the Woodlands Avenue landslip of February – March 2014 on 7 November 2014. Photo by Geof Sheppard, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported licence.

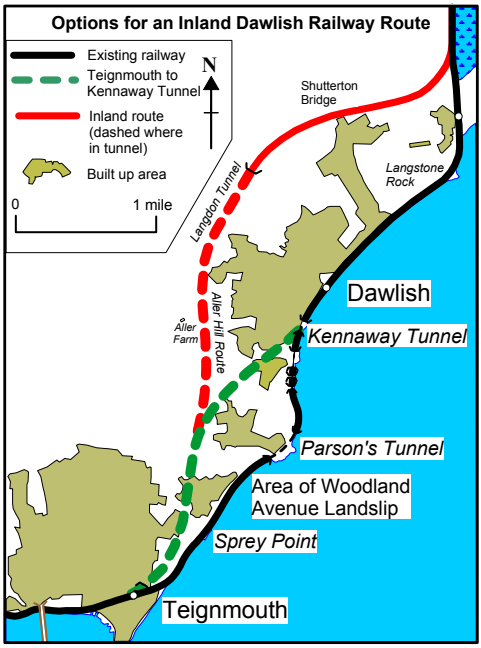


Above. *Steep high cliffs between Parson's Tunnel and Clerk's Tunnel to north in view. The rock is competent (strong) so unlikely to slip, but small rock falls are a potential hazard.*

Right. *Between Parson's Tunnel and Teignmouth to the south (middle background) the cliffs are 45 to 50 m high, and of weak rock liable to land slipping. This is where Network Rail are proposing a causeway 30 m seaward. Photo by Derek Harper 9th July 2006. Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 Generic license.*

The top right hand picture shows the railway line between Parson's Tunnel and Teignmouth and the high cliffs alongside. The new causeway would take the railway about 30m seaward and would include a realignment of the curved exit of Parson's Tunnel on the Teignmouth side.

The possibility of 3 tracks, allowing fast trains to pass stopping services, has been mentioned. This would be a clear advantage of the scheme.



Work is also needed between Kennaway Tunnel and Parson's Tunnel. Here the cliffs are steep, as seen in the top left picture (page 7) showing Clerk's Tunnel. Large scale landslips are unlikely as the rock is not so weak here, but minor rock falls are still a potential hazard. This was the reason for the Great Western Railway extending Parson's Tunnel in 1920-21 with a rock shelter for about 147 yards on the Dawlish side. A rock shelter between Clerk's and Phillot Tunnel was planned but never built.

The proposed causeway is a valid geological –geotechnical solution to the cliff stability problem between Parson's Tunnel and Teignmouth. However, the railway would remain vulnerable to the sea and all the work involved would not make the route any easier to electrify in the future. Furthermore, the unique and historic coast line would be changed for ever, together with loss of 1 mile of the existing beach. It would be a large construction project requiring a Transport Works Act order.

A cost of around £500 million has been mentioned for the causeway, but the recent report mentions a Present Value Cost of £239 million and a Benefit Cost Ratio of 2.03. This ratio does not take into account the wider benefits that a more resilient railway will have to the South West economy.

Whatever the actual cost of the work proves to be, it is unlikely to be much less than that of boring about 1 mile of tunnel. It would only need 2 miles to go completely inland from Teignmouth station to Kennaway Tunnel where it could emerge within the existing bore.

Such a scheme was shown as an option in our March 2000 Rail Strategy. Railfuture Devon and Cornwall Branch proposes that this option is also evaluated and an updated map is shown on page 7.

The new route is shown in green and may cost around £680 million, but hopefully less. However, once built it permanently removes a considerable threat to the railway from the sea and cliffs. It would also allow an electrified railway to stay energised throughout storm conditions.

The new tunnelled line could not be extended any further towards Exeter without cutting right through Dawlish town centre. Instead, at some point in the future, the first mile of tunnel could be transformed into an inland route completely avoiding the coast at Dawlish. This line is shown red on the map. There would be a further 1¾ miles in tunnel and 2 miles in the open to a junction with the existing line north of Dawlish Warren.

The separation of the routes would be on a grade separated junction within the tunnel. An example of a main line railway junction such as this can be found near Orte in Italy. Here trains on the high speed Rome to Florence line are able to diverge from it, within the hillside, to serve Orte on the original line.

Station Access Stakeholder Meetings

Great Western Railway, in conjunction with Atkins, organised a number of Station Travel Plan Workshops in November. These were held in Truro, Plymouth and Exeter. Your editor attended the one held on Friday 11th November 2016 and covering the two main Exeter stations and Newton Abbot.

Others at the meeting put forward ideas for better cycle access and storage at the stations. Given that the workshops are not linked to large scale funding for improvements, comments from Railfuture were limited to things that would make a difference to onward journeys by bus.

(i) Firstly that each main station in Exeter and elsewhere should have a large map in the foyer showing where the nearest bus stops are. This is a particularly important at Exeter St. Davids, as the stop for most buses to Tiverton is up the hill in New North Road.

(ii) Secondly more buses should go to the railway stations. For example the Stagecoach 88 service from Buckfastleigh and Ashburton should run to Newton Abbot station instead of terminating half a mile away at Sherborne Road. In Exeter the Sidmouth buses should continue across Exeter to Crediton to bring passengers nearer to the railway.

A Look at the Sidmouth Line

In this issue Sidmouth is seen as best linked to Exeter St. Davids by bus. However in the longer term the railway should be restored to this large town which has a population of around 13,000. Substantial sections of trackbed remain, as shown in the top picture which is between Tipton St. John and the Bowd.

Unfortunately the lower picture reveals that, as elsewhere on the route, houses have been built directly on the trackbed. Therefore the Sidmouth line would be much more difficult to reopen than the line from Bere Alston to Tavistock, Barnstaple to Bideford or Tiverton to Willand (the old Tiverton Junction station).

On a positive note the houses in the picture could be avoided by deviating the line to the left. The view is looking down the 1 in 45 graded trackbed from the Bowd. The houses are in Tipton St. John. Railfuture (as the Railway Development Society) objected to the building of the houses.

2017 Meetings

Our AGM is to be held on Saturday 22nd April 2017 at the Unitarian Church, Notte Street, Plymouth, PL1 2AQ. From 13:30 to 16:15.

Saturday 25th November is the provisional date for our Autumn meeting (otherwise 4th November) and will be at the Boniface Centre in Crediton.

Cornish News

Bodmin Parkway signal box is now Grade II listed. It has a café operated by the Bodmin and Wenford Railway. Photo © Copyright Tom Jolliffe and licensed for reuse under this Creative Commons Licence

The former signal box at Bodmin Parkway station which has housed the café for a number of years, has been Grade II listed by Historic England (List Entry Number: 1430613).

The box dates from around 1896 and was last used as a signal box in May 1985, shortly after goods facilities were withdrawn from the branch line to Wadebridge in 1983. Bodmin Parkway is now on a long section of line between signals at Largin (single line) and Lostwithiel. Rather too long for developing services in the future.

On 10th March 2016 a lorry hit the Goss Moor railway bridge which takes the Newquay branch across the old A30 road. Both driver and bridge were OK on this occasion.

Observations on The Peninsula Rail Task Force (PRTF) Publication 'CLOSING THE GAP'

The PRTF document proposes some quite costly studies, but they do say, 'Our plan is not a quick fix, a long term view is required.' This sends a message that might be interpreted as no work needs to be done now. Instead they should say '*Our plan identifies key problems and solutions in priority order for the railways in the South West of England. Each solution is a component of the longer term vision that will achieve:*

- *improved capacity to cater for growth in passenger numbers,*
- *improved journey times to boost the South West economy,*
- *and a railway much more resilient to severe weather events'.*

A sum of £5 million is said to be needed for Waterloo to Exeter line options. However, we already know that extending the Tisbury loop to Dinton would enable 2 trains to run every hour each way between Waterloo and Yeovil Junction. Loops at Crewkerne and Whimple would double capacity between Yeovil Junction and Exeter to 3 trains per hour each way. This would provide valuable diversionary paths for Penzance to Paddington trains unable to travel via Taunton, for example when flooding or planned engineering work has closed the route.

The PRTF proposes cutting Waterloo to Exeter journey times by 36 minutes, by only stopping trains at Salisbury between Clapham Junction and Yeovil Junction. However, spare line capacity to and from Waterloo is extremely limited, therefore the PRTF proposal may require cutting a service somewhere else.

Between Salisbury and Yeovil Junction the line would have to be virtually redoubled to accommodate the current service plus their planned fast one as well. If money is available for track doubling on such a scale then it should be between Yeovil Junction and Exeter, so as to give capacity for both Great Western and CrossCountry diversions.

However, with new faster accelerating trains (probably electric) one minute per station stop might be saved. With some 100 mph running

this could give a 20 minute time saving and a 3 hour Waterloo to Exeter St Davids journey time. In the up direction it would be around 3 hours 5 minutes, if the excessive performance allowance between Clapham Junction and Waterloo is retained (currently 13 minutes for 4 miles)

The PRTF Plymouth to London journey time ambition of 2 hours 15 minutes is unrealistic unless Pendolino type tilting trains are to be used. Railfuture believes that Paddington to Plymouth in 2 hours 40 to 45 minutes is achievable.

Under their short term strategy the PRTF mention**, '**electrification to Bedwyn and major capacity and line speed improvements between Newbury and Westbury'. However, the AT300 trains will not easily achieve much above 100 mph in diesel mode, so for 125 mph running the PRTF should be asking for electrification through to Westbury as well. Reading to Westbury via Newbury is also the diversionary route for Paddington to Bristol trains, when they are unable to travel on their normal route via Swindon and Didcot.

The PRTF short to long term projects should be -

1. Ensure that the new AT300s can operate from Exeter to Waterloo. They could provide more passenger capacity on the existing XX:25 service from Exeter and XX:20 from Waterloo, when the Great Western route via Taunton is blocked.

2. A regular passenger service on the Exeter to Okehampton line. This would be stage one of restoring the second route from Exeter to Plymouth.

3. Salisbury to Exeter 6 mile Whimple loop. This would allow 2 trains per hour between Exeter and Axminster, as part of the local metro service. Even with these extra trains the existing 2 hourly diversionary path between Exeter and Yeovil Junction would remain, but it would be speeded up by around 20 minutes. Without the Whimple loop this path can only be used with long delays en route. The 2 hourly path could also be used to develop services between Exeter and

the Weymouth line at Yeovil Pen Mill. East Devon District Council has aspirations for a Cranbrook 2 station, about a mile to the east of the existing one to support East Devon new housing. This could be served by the Exeter to Axminster shuttle which would also serve Cranbrook 1. Stopping the XX:25 Exeter to Waterloo at Cranbrook 2 would tend to compromise the Axminster to Pinhoe timing and should be avoided.

4. On the Exeter to Taunton line it is urgent to undertake culvert widening work at Cowley Bridge Junction. This would reduce flooding from the River Exe. In addition the line should be raised about 1 metre to clear normal flood levels at Hele and Bradninch level crossing.

5. On the Waterloo route they should extend the Tisbury loop east to Dinton and west to Tisbury station. This would allow a full 2 trains per hour service each way between Waterloo and Yeovil Junction.

6. Electrification from Newbury to Westbury including a cut-off line at Crofton (not mentioned in the PRTF report) and some curve realignment. This would allow AT300 bi mode trains to reach 125 mph and achieve a 4 minute time saving. With the better acceleration of AT300 trains, a service such as the 14:06 from Paddington to Exeter would achieve an approximate 2 hour 2 minute timing to Exeter with stops at Reading, Taunton and Tiverton Parkway. For a train calling only at Reading a 1 hour 55 minute timing to Exeter would be possible.

7. Reopen the Bere Alston to Tavistock line for a service to Plymouth, but with infrastructure compatible for onward extension to Okehampton.

8. Overhead electrification of the up line of Hemerdon bank (Plymouth to Wrangaton).

9. Complete the Exeter to Plymouth diversionary route via Okehampton.

10. Build a 2 mile tunnel from Teignmouth to Kennaway Tunnel at Dawlish.

11. Build a 5 mile cut-off line eastwards from Wrangaton alongside the A38, then under it and rejoin the existing line east of Marley Tunnel. This saves 1 mile of track and with selective curve realignment to Totnes 3 to 3½ minutes of travel time. The old line can be abandoned through South Brent. If a new station is needed at South Brent it can be on the new line south of the village.

12. Extend electrification from Wrangaton to Totnes.

13. Realign curves between Totnes and Newton Abbot and extend electrification to achieve a 2½ minute time saving. Coupled with all the above improvements a 50 minute journey from Exeter to Plymouth would be possible and with stops at Newton Abbot and Totnes. Non-stop it would be around 45 minutes.

14. Complete an inland Langdon tunnel route behind Dawlish. Time saving of this short Dawlish inland route would be about 1½ minutes.

15. Between Frome (Blatchbridge Junction) and Wellington there are existing stretches of 100 mph line that could fairly easily be increased to 125 mph running and achieve a 3 minute time saving. However, this does require electrification for the AT300s to comfortably attain this speed. Where line speed is increased to 125 mph, level crossings should be replaced with bridges as at Victoria and Bradford on Tone. Also re-quadruple track from Cogload Junction to Taunton.

With all these works in place the South West would gain a much more resilient railway. The journey time for Paddington to Plymouth would be around 2 hours 52 minutes for a service such as today's 14:06 with 6 intermediate stops. With stops only at Reading and Exeter, the fastest trains would reach Plymouth in 2 hours 45 minutes.

Picture Gallery

1) The former Teign Valley railway level crossing at Lower Ashton on 25th June 2016. The black column next to the wall is part of the crossing gate support. The much extended station building survives to the right on the Newton Abbot side of the road and the building in the middle distance is the Manor Inn. It is 58 years since the last passenger train crossed on the 7th June 1958, a great loss for South Devon especially when the coastal line through Dawlish has been closed by the sea or work on the track. Today our main priority is reopening from Exeter to Plymouth via Okehampton.

2) The 14:04 Paignton to Manchester CrossConntry train leaves Dawlish and runs alongside the 2014 rebuilt sea wall. This is one of the services threatened with being cut back to Exeter from the December 2017 timetable change.

3) On 20th April 2015 an afternoon CrossCountry train runs alongside the River Teign