

THURSDAY, 16 SEPTEMBER 2021

South Western Railways Consultation

To inform the Committee of the South Western Railways Consultation for proposed rail services in the county from December 2022 and to agree a response to this consultation.

Introduction

1. South Western Railway (SWR) is undertaking a strategic review of their rail timetable with the aim of providing reliable train services that meet forecast future passenger demands and offer value for money. This review will consider service frequencies and train capacity, with changes planned to be introduced in December 2022. The proposed new timetable will, SWR state, reflect the predicted changes to travel pattern because of the pandemic. A consultation was launched on 31 July 2021 and will close on 19 September 2021. Ahead of any changes to services SWR are seeking the views of stakeholders. The SWR December 2022 Timetable Consultation is appended as Annexe 1.
2. Surrey County Council as a key stakeholder has been invited to comment. This report provides a broad overview of the consultation including the impacts of the proposals.

Background

3. SWR operates a wide network of suburban and longer distance train services across the South West Mainline. The whole SWR operating area is shown on the map in Annexe 2.
4. SWR were awarded the franchise to operate the South Western Mainline network from August 2017. During Spring 2020 with passenger demand across their network falling to some 10% of normal travel patterns the government entered into an Emergency Management Agreement with SWR and this has been in place since. With uncertainty around passenger fares revenues it is not financially viable for the commercial private sector train operating companies to continue with the pre-pandemic contracts. Thus, in June 2021 Great British

Railways was formed by the government. This is a new public body that aims to integrate the railways and to deliver a financially sustainable network.

5. On 30 March 2021 the County Council's Cabinet adopted a New Rail Strategy for Surrey. This set out our future ambition and priorities for rail across the county. The New Rail Strategy supports the council's objective of growing a sustainable economy, how we may help residents and businesses respond to changing demands, and also supports the council's priority objective of enabling a greener future with net zero carbon a strong feature throughout.
6. The New Rail Strategy for Surrey acknowledges that good rail services are vital for maintaining and growing Surrey's economy and whilst the council has no statutory role in planning or delivering rail services it is important to continue to engage with the rail industry and Government to ensure that our priorities are reflected in rail service delivery and in planning for the future.
7. The emerging Surrey Transport Plan sets out a bold ambition on how to achieve a future-ready transport system that allows Surrey to lead the UK with a low-carbon, economically prosperous, healthy, and inclusive county. The Surrey Transport Plan proposes a hierarchy of modes and the ambition to shift journeys from the private car to other more sustainable modes, including active travel and public transport.
8. Transport for the South East (TfSE), the sub national transport body for the South East of England, has published a Transport Strategy. This focusses on economic, environmental, and social priorities and identifies the need for sustainable and attractive alternatives to the car, placing the passenger at the heart of the local public transport network, including more frequent rail services.
9. Improving rail services and supporting infrastructure to enhance access to and from the rail network will help make the train a real and attractive choice for residents, is something that features in our emerging Surrey Transport Plan, the New Rail Strategy for Surrey and the Transport Strategy for the South East. Improving public transport is critical to our commitment to sustainability and delivering on the aims and ambitions of the council's Greener Futures programme of work and the delivery of the council's 2030 Community Vision. Proposals that seek to diminish the public transport offer need, therefore, to be closely scrutinised.
10. In formulating their response to the proposals, CEH Select Committee may, in particular, wish to consider the following key points:
 - The robustness and relevance of the data SWR has used to inform the draft December 2022 timetable service specification

- The impact on the communities affected by the proposed rail service reductions, particularly those where off-peak service will only be hourly
- The ability and flexibility within the rail network and SWR to respond to increased capacity needs should this be necessary, noting the historically long planning and implementation timescales for timetable changes
- How these proposals align (or otherwise) with local and regional transport strategies and policies, the climate change and sustainable transport agendas, and housing growth.

SWR Proposals

11. SWR is seeking views on their proposals for the rail network from December 2022. This December 2022 timetable has been informed by the experiences gained running the railway during the pandemic, customer feedback and the arrival of new rolling stock (90 new high capacity Arterio trains).
12. Over the last 16 months while train frequencies have been reduced due to COVID rail performance has increased i.e running fewer trains has improved overall train service reliability. This is largely linked to less train paths travelling through the rail “bottleneck” outside Waterloo Station. However, it is worth noting that the number of platforms at Waterloo was increased during 2017 to assist with train reliability and to accommodate growing passenger demand, with the former Eurostar platforms re-commissioned.
13. Research data that SWR has obtained from customers suggest that commuting passenger traffic will not exceed 60% of pre-pandemic levels. The same is forecast for business travel. Leisure market travel is expected to return to the same levels as before the pandemic.
14. SWR state that the anticipated service levels contained within this December 2022 timetable specification have sufficient excess capacity to accommodate variations in demand. The introduction of 90 new higher capacity Arterio trains across some of the network will offer more capacity as well as better reliability and punctuality.
15. It should be noted that the proposals contained in the consultation for the December 2022 timetable represent an outline specification for the future, with detailed scheduling around specific journeys still to be carried out by SWR.
16. Across the SWR main suburban rail network proposed frequencies from December 2022 remain similar to those that were provided with the May 2019 timetable.

17. Service reductions are being proposed by SWR on the following lines/stations:
- 17.1 **London Waterloo to Dorking:** off peak frequency reduced from two trains per hour to hourly. To reduce congestion on the inner parts of the network, SWR propose to reduce frequency to Epsom and Dorking as these stations are also served by Southern services from London Bridge and London Victoria.
- 17.2 **London Waterloo to Guildford via Leatherhead:** off peak frequency reduced from two trains per hour to hourly. To reduce congestion on the inner parts of the network SWR propose not to reinstate previous services. Passengers at Effingham Junction, Horsley, Clandon and London Road can use the twice hourly services on the Cobham line. Bookham will be the only station to receive one train per hour. SWR state that Bookham station has relatively low usage off peak, with an average of 5 people using each service in May 2019. It is worth noting that pre-pandemic there were over 320,000 passenger trips made at Bookham in 2018/19.
- 17.3 **London Waterloo to Epsom:** AM peak and off-peak frequency reduced from four trains per hour to two trains per hour. Ewell West and Stoneleigh will have a reduced service. Epsom is also served by Southern services from London Bridge and London Victoria.
- 17.4 **Fast lines from Woking/Surbiton:** during the AM peak there will be a reduction from 25 trains per hour to 21 trains per hour. During the off-peak this will reduce from 14 trains per hour to 13 trains per hour.
- 17.5 **Windsor Line:** during the AM peak there will be a reduction from 17 trains per hour to 16 trains per hour. During the off-peak this will reduce from 12 trains per hour to 10 trains per hour.
- 17.6 **London Waterloo – Portsmouth:** during the AM peak there will be a reduction from 8 trains per hour to 5 trains per hour. During the off-peak this will reduce from 5 trains per hour to 4 trains per hour. The London Waterloo to Haslemere stopping service in the peak and off-peak has been withdrawn to improve resilience of the timetable between London and Woking. The London Waterloo to Portsmouth (slow) service will now call at all stations south of Guildford incorporating stops that were previously in the Haslemere stopping service. The removal of these services will still provide three trains per hour in the off-peak period at Guildford, Godalming and Haslemere. SWR advise that these stations are also served by alternative services with enough capacity to meet demand.

Conclusions:

18. SWR are seeking the views of stakeholders on their consultation for the December 2022 timetable. This timetable will form the future timetable specification across the SWR network. As noted above and to help compensate for the changes, 90 new Arterio trains will be introduced which are designed to improve reliability and to ensure sufficient passenger capacity.
19. At a high level much of the SWR network across Surrey will maintain May 2019 service levels and frequencies. There are, however, some significant reductions in train frequency affecting stations in Mole Valley and Epsom & Ewell. Bookham will be the only station across the SWR network to be served by just an hourly off-peak service. SWR have predicated the timetable revisions for Dorking, Leatherhead, Ashted and Epsom on alternative services being provided by Southern. Of course, there may be a similar consultation on Southern services in the future. Woking will see a reduction of 4 trains per hour in the AM peak. To provide context, it is worth noting that the 07.42 ex Woking to Waterloo was previously one of the most over-crowded trains in the country as identified by the Department for Transport.
20. The ambition of improved train reliability and punctuality, and the introduction of new rolling stock is welcome. However, the proposed reduction in service frequencies is not consistent with the county council's climate change ambitions or the emerging Surrey Transport Plan and will provide significant detriment to the communities affected, noting that the December 2022 timetable is the blueprint for future services. The research undertaken by SWR to arrive at this position is not comprehensive or fully informed. The driver for service reductions, and consequently the impact on Mole Valley and Epsom & Ewell appears to be around overall service reliability improvements across the whole network and not about our local communities.

Recommendations:

21. The views and comments of the Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee are sought on the changes proposed by SWR through this consultation so that these may be included in a formal response to SWR, as part of the county council's formal response to the consultation.

Next steps:

CEH Select Committee to provide a detailed commentary for inclusion in a formal letter from the Cabinet Member for Transport & Infrastructure to SWR by the deadline of 19 September 2021.

Report contact

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Sources/background papers

South Western Railway 2022 Timetable Consultation – Annexe 1

South Western Railway network map – Annexe 2

A New Rail Strategy for Surrey 2021

Surrey Local Transport Plan 4 (Draft)

Transport for the South East's Transport Strategy