



BT4C Report: Passenger Survey at Chepstow Station. Monday 5th July 2010.

Prelude.

This was the fourth survey carried out at Chepstow by BT4C. Following the example of STAG who recently carried out a survey at Severn Tunnel Junction we decided to use our survey this year to gather the views of the public by means of a questionnaire instead of concentrating on a footfall analysis.

To publicise our campaign we set up a stall in the High Street on Saturday 3rd July at which we displayed posters and gave out leaflets. Our presence attracted a steady flow of people throughout the 6 hours (from 10am to 4pm) and as usual people told us how much they agreed with our aims and a few said we were wasting our time and would get nowhere! Most people wanted to show their support and volunteered to sign a form indicating their support for BT4C's aims, 30 duly signed,

An advantage of being in town is that we meet people we wouldn't catch at the station. These are people that once used the trains but wouldn't do so again! Several told us how fed up they were that they couldn't use the train to get to Bristol and one was very annoyed that he was forced to go by car because the train was so bad. Time and again we were told that they would use the train to go to Cardiff if the service was better.

Introduction. Distribution and Return of Questionnaires.

The response to our questionnaire was truly remarkable: 220 forms were given out and 99 were completed and returned. Two contained too little useful information and were removed but the detail contained in the remaining 97 completed questionnaires has provided a lot of useful information to analyse. This is the basis of this report.

We underestimated the number of people that travel long distances into Chepstow and we are sorry that the design of our form, which assumed residence in or near Chepstow, made it a little difficult for some to know how best to answer the questions. Since we captured postcodes we were able to identify those travelling into Chepstow and treat their data accordingly. It is evident that the poor train services are an even greater impediment to those coming to Chepstow.

Some Observations during the Survey.

In addition to the data collected in the survey one can never spend long at the station to witness problems and difficulties encountered by passengers. Monday 5th July was no exception.

1. In the afternoon a young lady, who either missed her train or arrived anticipating a more regular service, waited patiently for 2 hours in the waiting shelter for her train back to Cardiff (whilst 2 AXC trains went by nearly empty).
2. The second "incident" involved another lady who was brought to the station by a friend and left to catch a return train back to London. It was late in the afternoon and the ticket office was closed. There was no information on the station to suggest how she could complete her journey. Fortunately we knew the railway geography (no maps on the station to help) and the alternative routes by train: via Bristol Parkway, Gloucester or Newport. We ended up telling her the best way was to wait nearly an hour and to change at Newport. What would she have done if we hadn't been there to advise her?
3. On a normal day our surveys confirm that only 2 or 3 people a day now travel by train between Chepstow and Bristol because of the absence of connections at Severn Tunnel Junction. But, on Monday 5th July, a party of about 40 US archaeologists took a return train trip from Bath to Chepstow to visit Tintern. A remarkable sight and demonstrated the value of reinstating regular service connections at STJ.



Comments on the Survey Results.

1. Changes at Chepstow since last year.

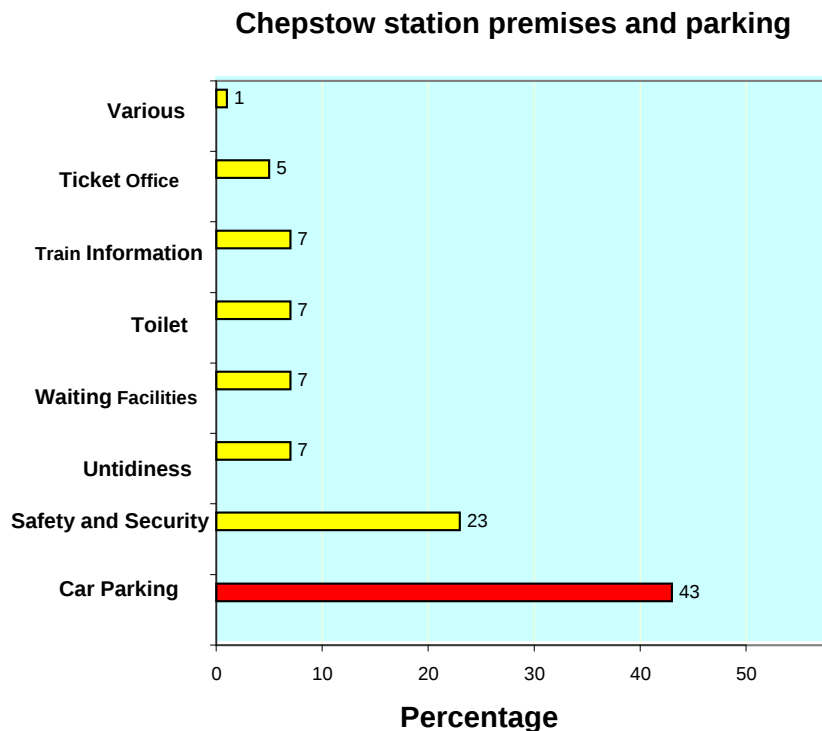
Since last year the waiting shelter on the Newport direction platform has been renewed, the Booking Office continues in operation and the café continues to flourish in the old station building. The evening train service was worsened in December 2009. No service improvements have been noticed.

2. Analysis of the Passenger Concerns. Part 1 - Station premises and parking. (See Figure 1)

Asked to tell us their biggest concern or need regarding Chepstow station premises and parking we received the following responses:-

1. **43%** of the comments concerned car parking. Several said they were pleased that car parking was free and wished it would remain so. All complained that there was insufficient space and the park was full at 08.45. There was nowhere else to park and one suggestion was to restrict the car park to rail users.
2. **23%** expressed concerns about safety and security at the station. This mainly concerned vandalism, loitering and activities on the station at night which left people feeling unsafe. Better lighting and CCTV security was suggested.
3. **7%** complained about untidiness and lack of cleanliness at the station much of it appearing to be related to the night time activities mentioned above.
4. **7%** were dissatisfied with uncomfortable waiting facilities which lack sufficient seats and cover in the cold and wet.
5. Another **7%** complained at the lack of toilet facilities.
6. **7%** also wanted to see electronic train information displays. (A facility that is currently in hand).
7. **5%** mentioned the Ticket Office praising the service but complaining that it was not always open.
8. Other concerns were:- (a) Motor cycle parking, (b) lack of a bus service to Chepstow bus station, and (c) the absence of wheel chair access to platform 1.

Figure 1. Passenger Concerns



3. Analysis of Passenger Concerns. Part 2 - Regarding trains you regularly use. (Figure 2)

Asked to tell us your main concern regarding the trains most regularly used brought the following responses:-.

1. **46%** Called for regular more frequent trains at times to suit their needs and for the gaps in the service to be filled.
2. **24%** Complained of overcrowding; (2 car where 3 required), dirty, old and poor quality stock. The lack of legroom, the absence of ventilation and the inability to open windows were also highlighted. **The 17.12 train from Cardiff was the one that caused most dissatisfaction.**
3. **9%** Called for the AXC trains to stop to avoid having to change at Gloucester/Cheltenham and to give them a more convenient service.
4. **16%** were concerned with punctuality and evening cancellations.
5. **3%** mentioned the inadequacy of bus services pointing out long waits for services to the Wye Valley and Lydney.
6. **2%** had a variety of individual concerns: (a) praised the “nice café”, (b) called for staff to deal with rowdy behaviour, (c) wanted a direct train to Bristol and London,(d) suggested ticket machines to speed up ticket issuing and (e) wanted train drivers to open the doors more quickly.

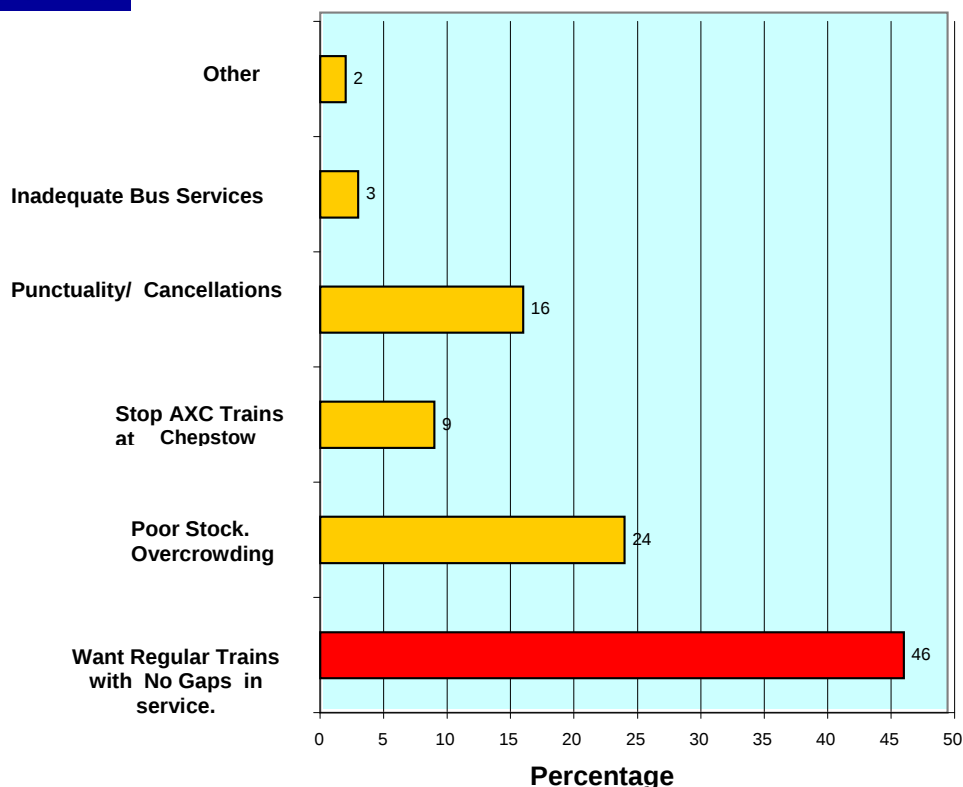


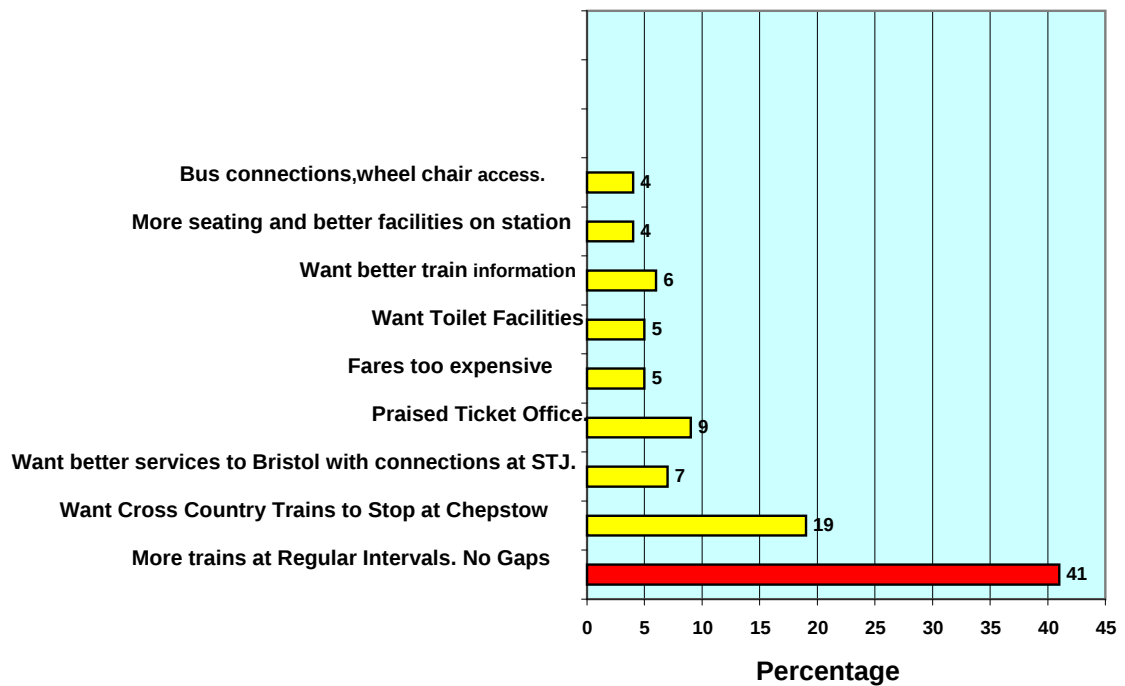
Figure 2. Passenger Concerns.
Regarding trains you regularly use.

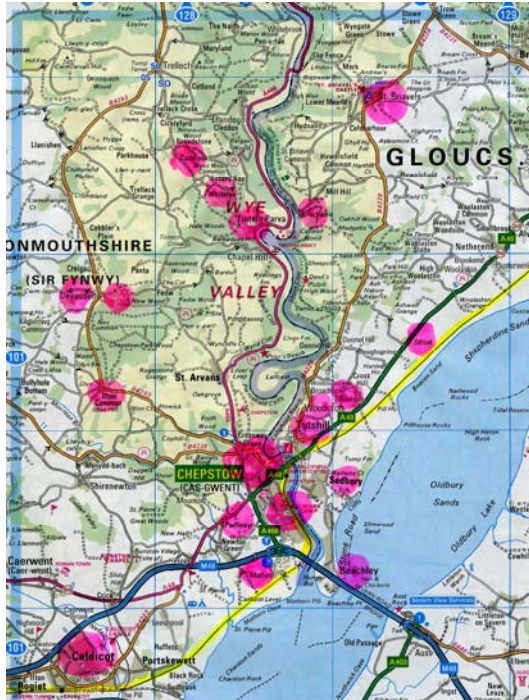
4. Analysis of Passenger Concerns. Part 3 - Other Comments about Chepstow station and train services. (Figure 3).

Asked for any other comments about Chepstow station or the services operating from it brought the following responses:-

1. **41%** wanted more trains at regular intervals throughout the day and complained about the inconvenient gaps in the service.
2. **19%** thought it wasteful that Cross Country trains didn't stop at Chepstow and wanted the better through services cutting out the need to change trains so often.
3. **7%** expressed a desire for better services to Bristol and train connections at Severn Tunnel Junction.
4. **9%** praised the Ticket Office and the friendly service from the Ticket Man.
5. **5%** complained that fares were too expensive.
6. **5%** complained that there were no toilet facilities at the station. One complained that part of the station smelled of "wee".
7. **6%** expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of train information. (It has recently been announced that new indicators are due to be installed).
8. **4%** wanted more seating and better waiting facilities.
9. **4%** with a variety of individual concerns wanted:- (a) integration with bus services. (b) wheel chair access to Platform 1, (c) the coffee shop to open earlier.

Figure 3. Other comments about Chepstow station and train services.





Where do the passengers come from?

The distribution of addresses for local residents travelling from Chepstow station.

Figure 4. Map.

Figure 5. Pie Chart.

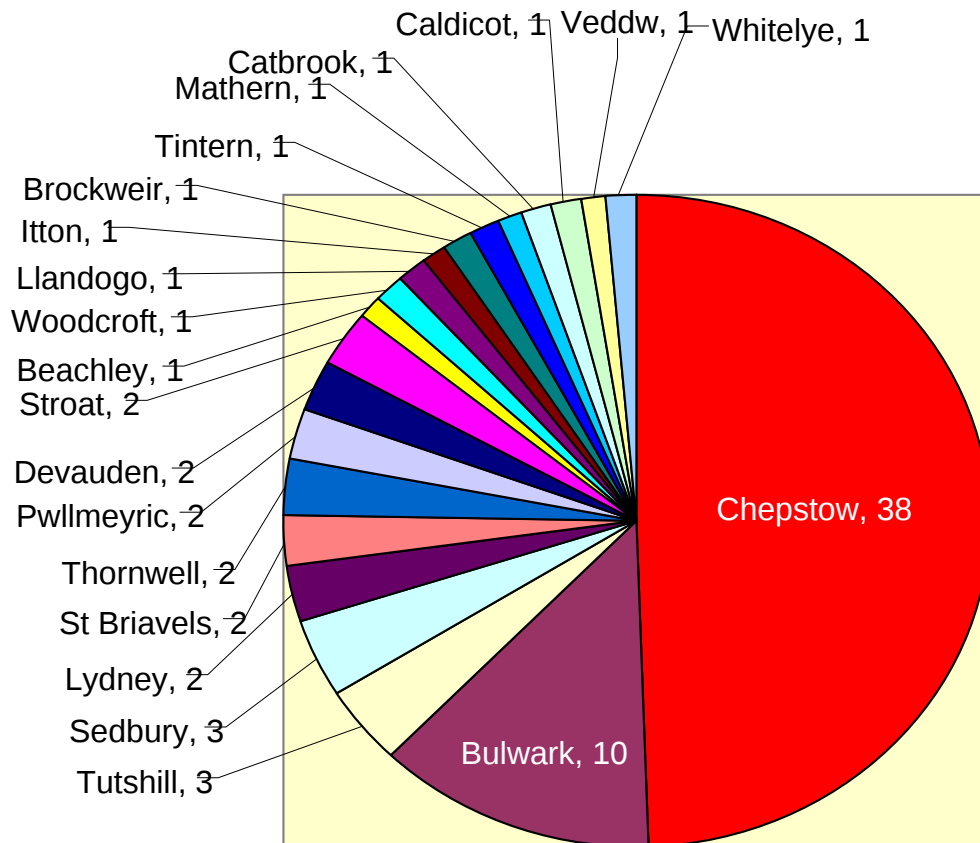


Figure 6. How do you normally travel to Chepstow station?

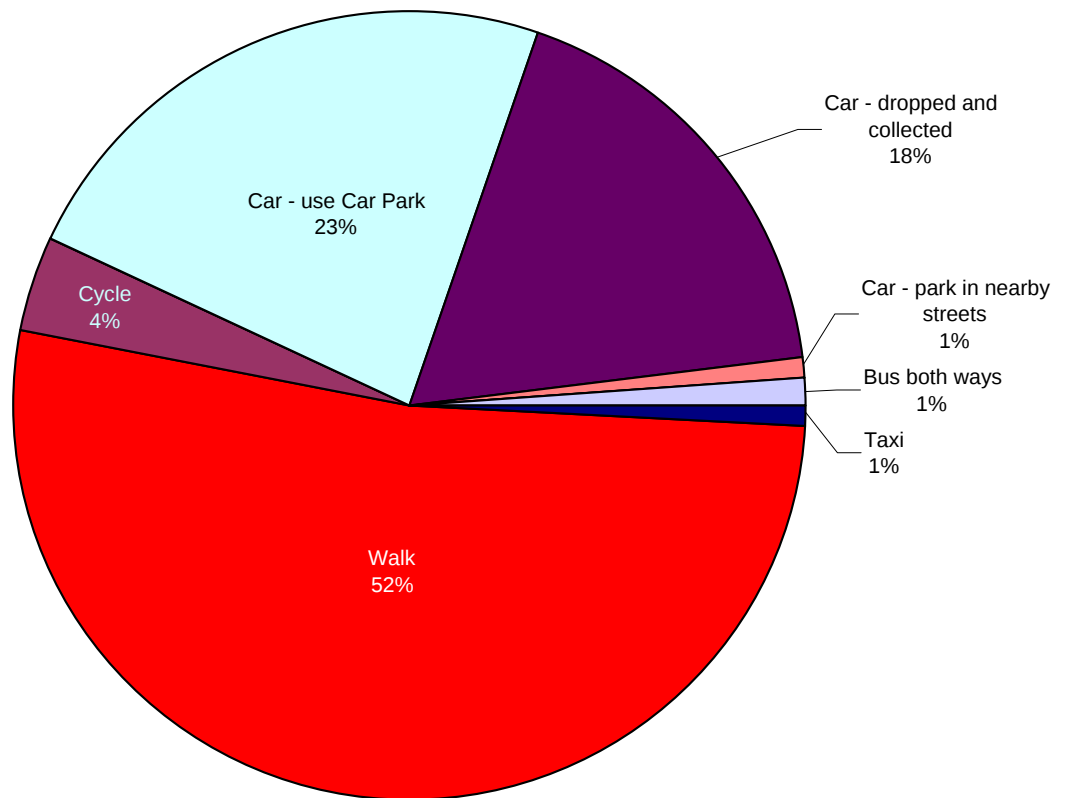


Figure 7. How often do you travel from Chepstow?

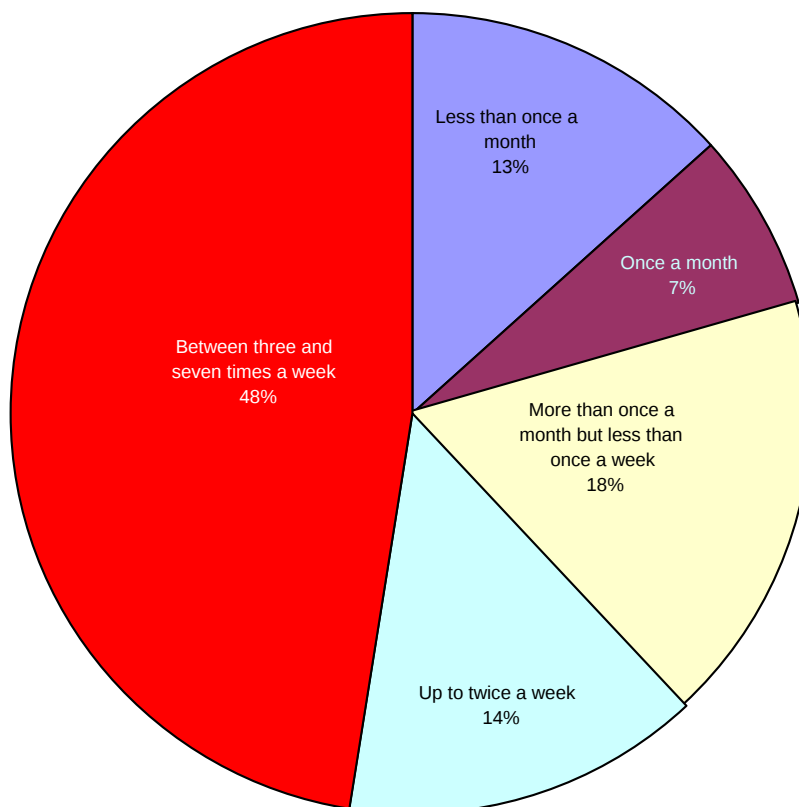
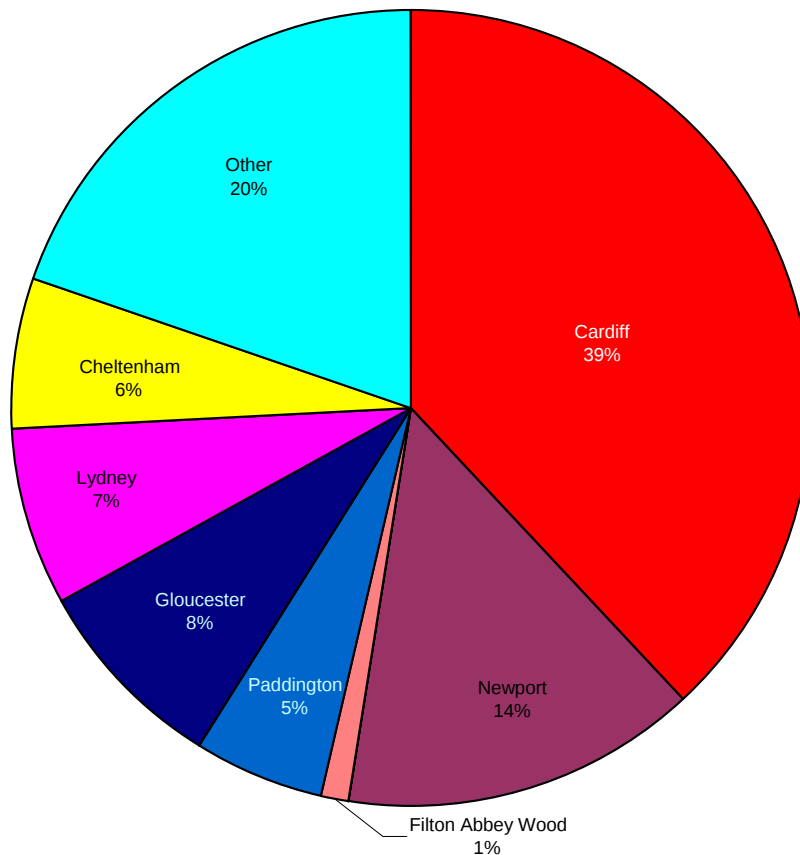


Figure 8. The Stations Most Frequently Travelled to From Chepstow.
The "Other 20%" included: Northampton, Stoke, Llandudno, Southampton, Birmingham, Oxford, Manchester, Stroud, Swindon and University.



Comments on the Results of the Survey.

1. More trains at regular intervals without gaps.

The survey confirms that the biggest concern is to have a regular service without gaps. This was the overwhelming response to our two questions about their regular trains and to services in general. Figures 2 & 3.

2. Car Parking.

The biggest concern at the station is the lack of sufficient car parking space and the absence of anywhere else to park. Figure 1.

3. Lack of a feeling of Safety & Security.

It surprised me that as many as 23% of the concerns at the station was for their safety and security. This is obviously a worry particularly at night time. Figures. 2 & 3.

4. Poor Stock and Overcrowding.

Conditions on the 17.12 from Cardiff would seem to be pretty bad between Cardiff and Newport judging by the number of complaints received. Figure 2.

5. Stopping Cross Country Trains.

This was not the top priority but it was second at 19% of “other comments” and third at 9% of main concerns for trains regularly used. I should point out that these two percentages each represent separate groups of individuals. No double counting. Figures 2 & 3.

6. Want Better Services to Bristol with connections at STJ.

This did not appear at all on the complaints for regular services and only 7% of “Other comments”. Figures 2 & 3. The reason is that the service is so bad that few now attempt to make the journey by train.

7. Praise for the Ticket Man.

It is good to report that several people expressed satisfaction that the station had a ticket office and were very pleased with the help he gave them. Figure 3.

8. Better Train Information.

There were a number of complaints about the inadequacy of the existing passenger information system. Passengers will be pleased to know that new modern indicators are to be installed soon. Figure 3.

9. Where do passengers travel from?

It is not surprising that most local residents using Chepstow station are from Bulwark and Chepstow. But it is interesting to see how they are distributed along the Wye Valley and into the FOD. Figures 4 & 5.

10. How do people travel to the station?

Nearly half come by car and half of them use the car park. More than a half chose to walk to the station. Taxi, bus and cycles are rarely used. Figure 6.

11. How often do people travel?

Nearly half between 3 and 7 times a week. Figure 7

12. Where does everyone go?

Most travel to Cardiff, then Newport and Gloucester. No one goes to Bristol yet a surprising 25% travel beyond to Paddington, Birmingham, Southampton etc. Figure 8.

Acknowledgments:-

We thank Michael Vaughan of Arriva TW for allowing us to conduct the survey and for the assistance of Tony in the Booking Office who helped and collected some of the questionnaires. We thank all those who helped or offered to help in our preparations leading up to the survey and those who gave up their time on the 5th July.

Without all this generous help and assistance we could not have contemplated undertaking such a big task and brought it to such a successful conclusion.

Most of all we pay tribute to the long suffering passengers who endure the services and provided all the information on which this report is based. We hope that we can put the facts to good use in pursuit of a better train service; one that meets your needs and brings credit to those who provide the services for us.

Edited by Jim Jenkins, Chair, Better Trains for Chepstow Team.

ADDENDUM

Passenger Numbers.

As explained at the beginning we didn't set out to count passengers but we took the opportunity to check 13 trains to see how numbers compared with last year.. We found no significant difference in numbers boarding trains down 3%, but the number alighting trains was up 18%. Just a small sample but it is consistent with previous surveys that have shown a steady increase year after year.

Our previous surveys revealed a steady increase in passenger using Chepstow:- **+8%** in 2007/2008, **+11%** in 2008/2009.

Each year the Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) publish station usage figures based upon ticket sales and these show a growth of **13.37%** for 2007/2008 and **18.19%** for 2008/2009.

Taking the line between Gloucester and Severn Tunnel Junction the official ORR actual growth rates have risen from **5.37%** 2005/2006, **10.04%** 2006/2007. **11.54%** 2007/2008. to **34.57%** 2008/2009..

One can only speculate at the growth in passenger numbers if our trains were regular, connected with other train operators, with local bus services and there was space to park!

Despite these facts Network Rail in its review of rail services for the All Wales RUS Report assumed an annual growth rate of **1.4%** and using these figures concluded that there was only a weak case to justify an hourly service on this line. The calculations by Network Rail are evidently utterly wrong.

Why is the train service so bad at Chepstow?

The specification for the train service that a Train Operating Company is expected to provide is set down by the Department for Transport in the franchise contract and contained in the "service level commitment" (SLC) section. Since these contracts remain in operation for up to 16 years and the DfT are unwilling to amend them this is the key problem and the area that requires attention.

The contracts are often badly written: failing to specify where connections should be made with other services and omitting to specify essential station stops. The DfT attempt to defend their lack of clarity by saying that TOC's are free to make additional stops. However, our experience at Chepstow is that some TOC's go to any length to cut services to a bare minimum regardless of the effect upon the community.

The three contracts that affect Chepstow are:-

1. Arriva Trains Wales contract let in 2003 which left Chepstow without an hourly service to Cardiff and deprived Chepstow of morning and evening peak services.
2. Contract awarded to First Great Western in 2006 for the Cardiff – Portsmouth service omitted to specify stops at Severn Tunnel Junction. This effectively cut off train travel between Chepstow and Bristol.
3. In 2007 the DfT repeated the mistake and failed to specify that Arriva Cross Country should stop and serve Chepstow with its hourly service.

What Next?

The Welsh Assembly Government are now responsible for the ATW contract and should, we expect, have influence upon the management of the other two DfT contracts affecting services into Wales. We hope these organisations can be persuaded to look again at these contracts and amend them.