

A Lost Opportunity. Newport Area Resignalling. Track Alterations at Severn Tunnel Junction. December 2009.

The Newport Area Resignalling Scheme (NARS) will bring improvements at Severn Tunnel Junction, most importantly the reinstatement of platform 4. However it is hard to understand why the redundant Bishton Flyover nearly halfway between Newport and Severn Tunnel Junction was not removed by Network Rail as this could have brought much greater long term benefits.

The Bishton flyover was built in the 1960's to carry large numbers of wagons across the mainline from the steelworks at Llanwern on the southside to a large marshalling yard on the northside. The wagons and the marshalling yard disappeared many years ago but the superfluous flyover remains.

The removal of the flyover, as the attached sketches show, would allow the main and relief lines to remain continuous and parallel throughout the 10 miles between Newport and Severn Tunnel and increase the speed and capacity of the four running lines. This parallel running, cutting out the criss-crossing of routes and the sharing of paths at Severn Tunnel Junction, would have enabled line speeds to be increased, improved timetabling and reliability of services through this important point of entry to Wales.

The complete renewal of signals, cables and their control equipment take place at intervals of 30 or 40 years and are therefore subject to much planning and careful scrutiny so it is difficult to understand why the removal of this redundant structure was overlooked in the planning of this work.

Network Rail's recently published Wales Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS) for Wales also appears to have overlooked the possible advantages arising from the removal of Bishton Flyover structure. I was unable to find any reference to it in the report.

See Appendix below.

Appendix. Additional notes listing some advantages for removing the flyover and re-designating the running lines as proposed.

Some of the Benefits from Removing Bishton Flyover.

1. Main and Relief lines between Newport and Severn Tunnel can be aligned to run in parallel.
2. Removal of flyover will enable line speeds to be increased.
3. Criss-crossing of trains and sharing of tracks at STJ could be avoided.
4. Reduction in delays at STJ.
5. Chepstow line and Main line services would be separated and run in parallel to Newport and line capacity would be increased in both directions.
6. AXC would be able to cut time out of their Cardiff to Nottingham service and no longer be constrained by FGW services at STJ.
7. This separation would have advantages in providing alternative pathways in times of failures and for track possessions for alterations and repairs.
8. Separating the lines throughout would make it possible to provide additional stations at Magor and Llanwern (on the Relief Line, without affecting the mainline) if desired.
9. In the event that electrification reaches Wales the impediment would have to be removed.

