

To; Mark YOUNGMAN, Transport Policy Officer, Monmouth County Council

Dear Mark,

Better Trains for Chepstow Campaign.

SEWTA Regional Transport Plan. Consultative Draft. July 2008.

We have studied your draft report and make the following comments:-

1. Chepstow Line Stopping Services

The policies outlined in your paper are most encouraging and we note that the proposals, if implemented, would increase the ArrivaTW Cardiff to Cheltenham services at Chepstow (Lydney, Caldicot and STJ) to a regular hourly stopping service in 2010, increasing to half hourly service in 2014.

A regular hourly stopping service at Chepstow is a top priority and we support your ambition of achieving this in 2010, hopefully in time for the extra business anticipated with the Ryder Cup event. We cannot emphasise enough, the fact that the present haphazard and irregular "service" with six two hour intervals is not just an inconvenience but a positive disincentive for passengers. The present timetable at Chepstow (Lydney and Caldicot) does not conform to the established "clock-face" pattern and is less frequent than all the neighbouring services. The service gaps make journeying by train from Chepstow a lottery and it is not unusual to have to wait up to two hours for a train to return home from Cheltenham, Gloucester or Newport.

2. Chepstow to Bristol Services.

Your report (5.15.5) makes a general comment about improving service across borders and to Bristol but there is no specific reference to restoring the services lost to Chepstow (Caldicot, Lydney and Severn Tunnel Junction) when FGW took over the franchise for the Cardiff – Portsmouth line in December 2006.

FGW by removing STJ station stops have increased journey times from Chepstow to Bristol from 51 minutes to 1 hr 25 minutes because waiting time at STJ is increased from 17 minutes to an intolerable 47 minutes. STJ station has no toilets or facilities.

Removing these stops during the day has also made it necessary for Chepstow passengers bound for Portsmouth to change trains at Newport (10 miles further). Adding one hour each way on journeys to and from Portsmouth.

Eliminating these stops has brought no benefit to the Cardiff – Portsmouth passengers as the journey times are the same as when the trains stopped at STJ.

We know the DfT were responsible for letting this contract to FGW but it is perverse that whilst SEWTA and WAG are seeking to fund investments and struggling to obtain funds that the DfT have worsened our services for no obvious advantage.

BT4C recently conducted a passenger survey at Chepstow which revealed that only 2% of local journeys from Chepstow were to Bristol (our nearest city). This loss of service is a serious concern for the people and businesses in Chepstow. It was the primary concern when we presented our survey findings to Chepstow Chamber of Commerce and Tourism.

If SEWTA and WAG are unable to persuade FGW and the DfT to reinstate these connections at STJ, which would cost nothing, we propose that SEWTA should develop alternative proposals to improve train services to and from Bristol. We feel sure that the Bristol authorities would want to support any proposals for improved services between the towns.

3. Chepstow. Cardiff – Birmingham/Nottingham Services.

I could not find any reference in your transport plan to improve through services from Chepstow to Birmingham and Nottingham.

SEWTA in their letter to Arriva CrossCountry Ltd dated 22nd November 2007 supported stops at Chepstow and we would like to see this initiative progressed.

BT4C are still pressing Tom HARRIS for a response to our request that he look again at getting Arriva XC to serve Chepstow.

There is no reason why these trains cannot stop and serve Chepstow. There is plenty of spare time in the schedules, it could be done immediately, and cost nothing to implement.

We know the DfT were responsible for letting this contract to Arriva XC Ltd but it must make sense to implement improvements that cost nothing and make better use of the existing services.

4. DfT Franchise Contracts.

The last two franchise contracts awarded by the DfT have both failed to specify that trains must stop at the Welsh border stations of Chepstow and Severn Tunnel Junction. In both cases it has been left to local campaign groups (BT4C and STAG) to negotiate direct with the train operating companies to try to persuade them to stop and serve the community.

There is evidently a need for closer cooperation and scrutiny of DfT contracts to make sure that contracts are drafted to enhance and improve our services where possible, not make them worse. The DfT appears to have objectives that don't include local services this side of the border!

Our consultations and exchanges with the train operating companies show that once they are in possession of a contract they are very reluctant to vary it. Meeting PPM (Passenger Performance Measure) targets is a greater concern to them than carrying passengers.

I have tried to be brief but please don't hesitate to let me know if you would more information on any of the issues mentioned.

Yours sincerely,

Jim JENKINS

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