LTW 372

Annex B

Development of Train Services for Chiltern Routes

Draft for consultation

February 2011



London TravelWatch is the official body set up by Parliament to provide a voice for London's travelling public.

Our role is to:

- Speak up for transport users in discussions with policy-makers and the media,
- Consult with the transport industry, its regulators and funders on matters affecting users,
- Investigate complaints users have been unable to resolve with service providers, and
- Monitor trends in service quality.

Our aim is to press in all that we do for a better travel experience for all those living, working or visiting London and its surrounding region.

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Executive summary

This consultation draft paper sets out our how London TravelWatch thinks train services on the Chiltern route into Marylebone should be developed, both in the short term and looking ahead to the 2020s.

Chiltern's route is an unusual one, at least for the London & South East area. Its High Wycombe line serves both short and medium distance suburban passengers, and also fast long-distance trains to Birmingham and (from 2013) Oxford. However it has only one track for each direction (a two-track railway), so fast trains cannot overtake slower ones. This creates severe constraints on how the timetable is compiled, with a trade-off between the competing needs of the two groups of passengers. At present Chiltern Railways decide this trade-off heavily in favour of the fast longer-distance trains

The Aylesbury line is shared with London Underground's Metropolitan line to Amersham, which also imposes constraints on how the timetable is compiled.

This paper sets out our view of how Chiltern's timetable should be developed between now and 2016, when Chiltern's Project Evergreen 3 scheme for faster running and for operation to Oxford and London Underground's Metropolitan line upgrade, will have increased the capacity of both the High Wycombe and Aylesbury lines will be completed.

It states the case for, and offers a way forward on, the long-standing issues of providing a proper "metro" turn-up-and-go service for the stations between Wembley and West Ruislip, and the addition of a Chiltern station to the existing interchange facilities at West Hampstead.

Improvements to the track layout at Banbury are proposed (to enable better connections from High Wycombe line stations to Birmingham), and a way of accelerating the present very slow service from Aylesbury to London is explored.

For the 2020s, we recommend electrification of the route to increase its capacity and environmental sustainability and to reduce its costs. We also identify a possible way of running trains direct from the High Wycombe line to Heathrow by using the proposed High Speed 2 airport branch, and suggest that the land needed to make this connection should be included in the forthcoming HS2 safeguarding process.

We invite comments on this draft paper from passengers – both groups and individuals – local authorities and the transport industry.

Please send them by e-mail to info@londontravelwatch.org.uk or by post to:

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Closing date 3rd May 2011

1 Introduction

London TravelWatch has written this draft consultation paper as the independent statutory watchdog representing transport users of all modes in London and rail users in its surrounding area. The map below shows London TravelWatch's areas of National Rail responsibility.

Diagram 1 – London TravelWatch Remit

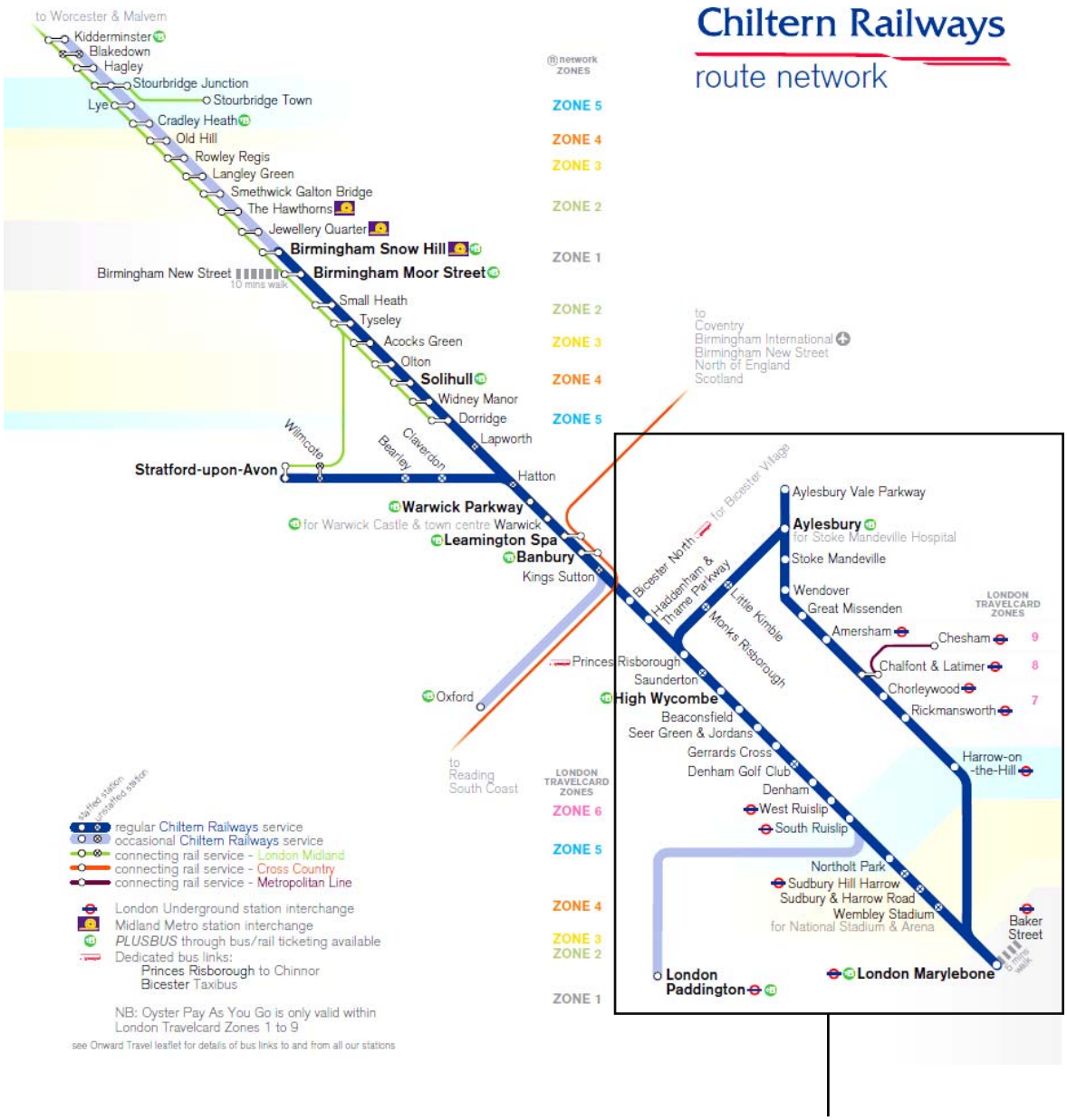
This consultation draft paper sets out our how we think train services on the Chiltern route into Marylebone should be developed, both in the short term and looking ahead to the 2020s.

It is being attached, as a draft, to our response to Network Rail's draft West Midlands and Chilterns Route Utilisation Strategy, in order to amplify our comments on that document.

However, as the train service lies at the very heart of what a train operator delivers to its passengers, we wish to hear wider views before we finalise this paper.

We therefore invite comments from passenger's local authorities and the transport industry.

Diagram 2 – The Chiltern Route



London TravelWatch's remit for the Chiltern route extends from London Marylebone to Aylesbury and Bicester North, including consideration of links beyond to the north and west.

2 Our Plan – The First Stage

The starting point for our plan is the London TravelWatch Requirements for Train Services, our aspirations for train service frequencies and start/finish times throughout the London TravelWatch area.

This sections how these broad aspirations should be applied to the Chiltern routes between London and Bicester and London and Aylesbury. These are summarised below under each line heading.

For the stations within Greater London (Wembley Stadium – West Ruislip), where present train services fall way below our aspirations, we explain the background to this situation and discuss some of the underlying issues.

2.1 The High Wycombe line (Marylebone – Bicester & branches)

- Wembley Stadium – West Ruislip (the TfL stations)

Our London-wide long-term policy for stations within the TfL zones is for 'turn up and go' 6 trains per hour all day metro service, as near as possible at even ten minute intervals, seven days per week. Neither this, nor compromise 4 trains per hour, is achievable on the present 2-track infrastructure and for the present there is no realistic prospect of investment in widening this section of the line.

We have therefore long pressed for a 2 trains per hour frequency, which we regard as the absolute minimum for an urban area service to be of any real use to passengers. When Chiltern Railways first briefed us on their Evergreen 3 project they stated this would be provided, by means of a 2 trains per hour all-stations service from Marylebone to Gerrards Cross using new high acceleration class 172 trains.

However as Chiltern has refined the details of Evergreen 3, this commitment has been whittled away to a point where the latest published draft timetable (issued with their track access application in autumn 2009) shows no improvement. This would mean that Sudbury & Harrow Road will continue with just 1 train per hour in the peak direction in the peaks, Sudbury Hill with just 1 train per hour on weekdays and none in the evenings nor at weekends, South Ruislip – bizarrely – will have 2 trains per hour northbound but only 1 train per hour southbound and West Ruislip will have the opposite. On Sundays none of the Transport for London (TfL) zone stations will have more than 1 train per hour.

It is true that since Chiltern Railways took over the franchise some of the TfL zone stations have gained better services. However that was starting from a woeful base and is now some 15 years ago. Not only has Chiltern fallen behind other operators in improving services at badly-served stations), but unless the present plans are changed then the almost useless service looks set to continue for many years.

From study of the draft Evergreen 3 timetable and its associated track access application, it is clear that the problem of service frequency at these stations arises from a combination of capacity, operational and financial issues. London TravelWatch wishes to work with the industry and with Chiltern in particular, to find a way forward.

- Denham – High Wycombe

For the first ring around London beyond the zones London TravelWatch's general aspiration is for 4 trains per hour all day every day, but recognising that there may be some stations where this cannot be justified by demand and value for money.

Applying this principle to the Chiltern route we consider that the following frequencies should be provided –

	Basic service – trains per hour	Comments
Denham	2	
Denham Golf Club	1	
Gerrards Cross	4	2 per hour to be fast
Seer Green	2	Could consider 1 per hour off-peak if this would enable a better service at a station with greater need, and subject to review of present usage
Beaconsfield	4	Could consider 2 per hour if both fast - maximum 2 stops
High Wycombe	4 trains per hour	2 per hour to be non-stop

All stations should have direct trains or good connections to West or South Ruislip (for Central line) and to Wembley.

Peak services should be increased as necessary to meet demand as per the national rail crowding rules.

- Saunderton – Bicester & Monks Risborough – Aylesbury

For a second ring around London out to the London TravelWatch boundary our general aspiration is for 2 trains per hour all day every day, but again recognising that there may be some stations where this cannot be justified by demand and value for money.

Applying this principle to the Chiltern route we consider that the following frequencies should be provided:

	Basic service – trains per hour	Comments
Saunderton	1	2 per hour at commuting times to and from High Wycombe
Princes Risborough	2	Maximum 3 stops
Haddenham	2	Maximum 4 stops
Bicester	4	2 per hour fast at one station or the other
Monks Risborough	1	Consider 2 per hour at commuting times to and from High Wycombe and Aylesbury
Little Kimble	1	Could consider less if this would enable a better service at a station with greater need, and subject to review of present usage
Aylesbury	1	Consider 2 per hour at commuting times to and from High Wycombe and Aylesbury

All stations should have direct trains or good connections to West or South Ruislip (for Central line) and to Wembley.

Peak services should be increased as necessary to meet demand as per the national rail crowding rules.

- North and west of Bicester

South or West Ruislip (for Central line), Gerrards Cross, Beaconsfield, High Wycombe, Princes Risborough (for Aylesbury), and Haddenham to have direct

trains or good connections with no more than one change to Oxford and Banbury – 1train per hour, except High Wycombe to be 2 trains per hour.

If service to Banbury is not by a through train to Birmingham, there should be good connections with onward Chiltern or Cross-Country services.

There should be through trains between London and Stratford-upon-Avon at key day-trip and tourist travel times, and a minimum of 2-hourly London connections at other times.

- General

Pulling our aspirations together into a general statement of what London TravelWatch believes Chiltern should be aiming to provide in the immediate future, we propose:

- Off-peak services should run to a consistent repeating hourly pattern, eliminating the present hour-to-hour variations in timings – an irritating feature which is now largely unique to Chiltern.
- Timetables should be standardised across the weekday off-peak and evenings, Saturdays and (subject to reasonable Network Rail track maintenance requirements) Sundays. The Virgin West Coast model of running weekday services from around 1300 hrs on Sundays should be the minimum aim.
- Peak services should also run to a repeating pattern. Without this, non-central London links become haphazard and therefore unattractive to passengers.
- Given the nature of the two track railway, which prevents operation of cascade-type services providing good direct or single interchange links between all pairs of stations, decisions on which links can and cannot be accommodated should be based on reliable demand data (e.g. origin and destination surveys) and thorough local consultation regarding priorities.
- Careful consideration should be given to providing both peak and off-peak direct links between the ‘Heartlands’ stations (Bicester – Denham) and the Central line, and also with Wembley.
- There should be a minimum 2 trains per hour for all stations between Bicester and London in the commuting peaks (including for commuting to and from High Wycombe), and also in the off-peak wherever practicable.

- If present service frequencies at any station are proposed for reduction, stakeholders must be consulted and provided with full evidence to justify such a change.
- The TfL stations (and Gerrards Cross) 2 trains per hour stopping service, as advised by Chiltern when they ordered the new class 172 trains, should be implemented. To be fully effective it should:
    i. Operate all day every day
    ii. Provide 2 trains per hour at all stations[1]. If an all-stations service cannot be timetabled to achieve this, consider switching 2 trains per hour West Ruislip calls into 'Heartlands' services (see item e) above).
    iii. Provide good connections between 'Heartlands' stations and Wembley Stadium if direct links are not practicable.
    iv. As far as possible, reduce lengthy stand time at South or West Ruislip while a fast train overtakes.
    v. Maintain existing frequencies (as a minimum) between High Wycombe and the Banbury / Birmingham corridor.

2.2 The Aylesbury line (Marylebone – Aylesbury via Amersham)

The basic Aylesbury service should be 4 trains per hour peak and 2 trains per hour off-peak, with at least 2 trains per hour at all times to Aylesbury Vale Parkway once the new housing development it is designed to serve takes off in earnest.

Aylesbury is a designated Buckinghamshire growth town, with the Department for Transport's Thames Valley Regional Assessment calling for this to be supported by enhanced transport services. The town's recent and continuing population increase clearly points to a need for faster services to London, both peak and off-peak. The present standard journey time of 60 minutes for 38 miles from Aylesbury to Marylebone compares very badly with other towns of similar size and importance around the periphery of London.

This timetable on this route will not be affected by Evergreen 3, apart from any minor changes to accommodate revised High Wycombe line trains on the common section between Neasden Junction and Marylebone.

2.2.1 The Evergreen 3 Timetable

Evergreen 3

Following previous upgrade projects Evergreen 1 and 2 from 1998 to 2006, in 2011 Chiltern is currently progressing Evergreen 3, a third major track investment project which will increase the capacity of the line, allow trains to run faster and – in 2013 – extend its route from Bicester to Oxford. Key to the project is a new Parkway station in north Oxford designed to attract traffic from a large swathe of the Cotswolds to London.

The increased capacity should provide a golden opportunity to correct some of the complaints about the present service. Indeed when Chiltern first briefed passenger groups about the project they stated that one of the outputs would be a hugely improved service within Greater London. New trains with a high acceleration rate optimised for frequent stops would be built specifically for this service.

Regrettably, as the detailed timetable plans for Evergreen 3 have evolved, this promise has been gradually whittled away. As matters now stand, not only will the Greater London service (for the stations Wembley Central to West Ruislip inclusive) be no better, but some stations both here and elsewhere on the route will actually have a worse service.

London TravelWatch believes that we are now at a watershed. If we cannot develop a coherent plan of what is wanted, and one which takes account of the institutional, operational and financial realities surrounding Chiltern Railways, then improvements for passengers and potential passengers will remain unfulfilled: certainly for the next ten years and quite possibly for twenty years or more.

Actions

High Wycombe line - The short-term action is to seek to persuade Chiltern to get the Evergreen 3 timetable to meet as many of our aspirations as possible. This will not be an easy task, because the realities of a two-track railway and Chiltern's financial imperative to earn a return on its investment mean that the room for manoeuvre is limited.

It is likely that some improvements can be made, but it is also likely that Chiltern will offer trade-offs – improvements for some stations but with a price to be paid by others. Some of these choices will be difficult.

We will also press Chiltern (and Network Rail where appropriate) on issues which are not constrained by the capacity of the two-track railway (although recognising that financial aspects will have a role to play). These issues are:

- Bring evening services up to the same frequencies as daytime off-peak services.
- Review first and last train times, particularly where overnight engineering hours seem excessive in relation to the amount and frequency of work actually carried out.

The parameters for first and last trains should be:

- First arrivals at Marylebone no later than 0600 (0730 Sundays). (Present first arrivals are 0620 0840 Sundays)
- Last departures from Marylebone no earlier than 2400 (0030 for the TfL stations) (Present last departures are 0010 [2345 Sundays])

Aylesbury line - The opportunity for improvement comes with London Underground's upgrade of the Metropolitan Line. This major investment introduces new trains (S stock - now being delivered) to the Metropolitan line, followed by 2016 by a new signalling system enabling faster and more frequent services. Chiltern's trains should benefit from this upgrade where they run over the Metropolitan tracks between Harrow on the Hill and Amersham.

We believe that London Underground, Chiltern and Network Rail should jointly plan the new timetable for the upgraded line. They should consider the Marylebone to Aylesbury and Baker Street. – Amersham and Chesham services from scratch. This should include consideration of stopping patterns and pay attention to the need for greatly accelerated services between Aylesbury and London.

Careful account will have to be taken that for Amersham, Chalfont & Latimer, Chorleywood and Rickmansworth (which at present are served by both operators), the relative attractiveness of the trains will change and this will affect loadings. This is because the new S stock will be faster, smoother riding and better heated and ventilated (air conditioning) than the 50-year-old trains they are replacing. Thus some passengers who presently choose Chiltern's more modern trains will switch to the Metropolitan Line.

On the other hand the new S-stock trades seats for more standing space, which may mean some passengers, if given a choice, switch to Chiltern.

To deal with this issue, we believe the new timetable should be compiled to the national rail crowding rules (which broadly mean sufficient seating capacity for all journeys of more than twenty minutes), even though these do not formally apply to London Underground.

It would also be sensible for this exercise to consider possible new services from the Aylesbury line to Watford Junction (via the Croxley link), and should examine options for through services over the proposed re-opened line from Aylesbury to Milton Keynes. Even though these new lines are not yet funded and are unlikely to be completed by 2016, we are confident they will happen in the relatively near future. It would therefore be foolish if a new Aylesbury line timetable, which will be difficult to change once implemented, unwittingly closed off opportunities to make the best use of these new facilities.

We would expect London TravelWatch to be regularly consulted throughout the development process of the new Aylesbury line timetable.

3 Our Plan – Beyond 2016

3.1 Overall Aims

With Evergreen 3 completed by 2013 and the Metropolitan Line upgrade by 2016, current investment plans for the Chiltern route will be complete. Beyond that, it is unlikely that Chiltern alone will be able to fund any large new schemes, because they will be too close to the end of their franchise (2021) to be able to earn a return on their investment.

However, Evergreen 3 is not going to solve all the issues for the High Wycombe line. It is also quite possible that the Metropolitan Line upgrade will not do everything that will be needed for the Aylesbury line; in particular it may not be capable of giving Aylesbury itself the speed and frequency it will need.

Therefore, a start needs to be made now to identify realistic investment packages for the years ahead.

Our overall aims are that the railway should:

- increase its attraction to car users as a more sustainable and congestion-free mode of transport for as wide a range of journeys as possible
- maximise the role it plays in meeting local authority objectives for enhancing access to jobs, modal switch and air quality and meet the requirements of passengers

This means providing more frequent services (to ‘turn-up-and-go’ standards in urban areas) and good connectivity to and between towns, not just to central London.

Quality of trains, stations and interchanges, good advance and real-time information, affordable fares and good customer service are very important to passengers. . However, the most important factor in achieving these aims is the timetable. If the train service does not meet people’s needs then they will not travel by train however nice the stations and however cheap the fares. That is why this paper focuses on the timetable.

We therefore set out some medium and longer term objectives, briefly state the case for each, and suggest how they should be taken forward to assess their practicability and viability and onwards to funding and implementation.

3.2 The TfL Stations – The Chiltern Metro

Our immediate aspiration is for all stations between Wembley Stadium and West Ruislip to have a minimum frequency of 2 trains per hour, all day every day. This is because we regard this as the absolute minimum for an urban area service to be of any real use to passengers. With just a very a few isolated exceptions, there are now no stations in Greater London that fall below this level.

However this aspiration is only a short term one which takes account of the practical limitations of a two-track railway that also has to accommodate faster trains to more distant destinations.

London TravelWatch's full aspiration is for a proper 'turn-up-and-go' metro service of 6 trains per hour. We have been advocating this for more than ten years, since we published "There's More to Chiltern than the Chilterns – the Case for a Chiltern Metro". Since this report was written, the case has been strengthened by population and demand growth and by the requirements of the London Plan and the Mayor's Transport Strategy.

The London Plan envisages the areas adjacent to the stations between Wembley Stadium and West Ruislip for the development of housing with an additional 17,000 homes in the next ten years. This will need transport infrastructure to support it, and because other modes and routes in this sector of London are already at capacity, the Chiltern route is likely to be the only viable option for expansion.

Also relevant is the aim of the Mayor's Transport Strategy to support employment opportunities by maximising the number of jobs that are accessible within 45 minutes journey time of people's homes. At present London Underground's Central and Piccadilly lines that serve this area, as well as being crowded, follow circuitous routes into central London resulting in slow journey times to the West End, let alone to the City or Docklands.

Given the competing requirements for use of the tracks, a 6 trains per hour service is presently impossible. Indeed as already seen, Chiltern are currently struggling to find a way of scheduling just 2 trains per hour. Anything more than 2 trains per hour will require additional tracks, and the higher the frequency the more new track it will need.

It is very fortunate that when the line was built, land was taken for four tracks along much of the route. Some of this remains available. However the available sections are separated, first by a long bridge over the 6-track West Coast Main Line at Wembley and then by a tunnel north of Sudbury Hill. Widening these would massively increase the cost, yet without it a 6 trains per hour service would probably remain impracticable.

An assessment needs to be made of the extent of 4-tracking that would be needed for different levels of service increase, and for these costs to be assessed against the benefits. These benefits would of course include the substantial indirect and non-financial benefits which have contributed to the justification of recent rail investment in London, as witnessed by TfL's successful expansion of the Docklands Light Railway and its conversion of old suburban railways into the London Overground metro network.

We therefore recommend that a joint TfL, Chiltern and Network Rail team be created to examine the options for increasing the capacity of the Chiltern route to West Ruislip to run metro train at 3 trains per hour, 4 trains per hour and 6 trains per hour frequencies. This would provide information on the costs and benefits of such a scheme, to be fed into the planning of London's rail development to follow on from the completion of Crossrail and the Thameslink Programme after 2018.

However, it would be realistic to recognise the possibility that no 4-tracking scheme – however limited – might prove worthwhile. In this case it would be prudent to examine the implications of a closure proposal for some or all of these stations if this could be shown to yield greater benefits for other travellers.

Our acknowledgment of this possibility in no way pre-empts our immediate Evergreen 3 objective of a proper all-day and all-week 2-tph service at all the TfL stations. Indeed we would expect the results of providing such a service for a reasonable period to be an essential input into consideration of any closure option, along with a thorough assessment of Piccadilly line capacity and faster journey times after it is upgraded, and the effects of Crossrail and other service changes on future Central line traffic.

A steering group including London TravelWatch and the local boroughs should oversee the work, and an initial report should be produced within twelve months.

3.3 West Hampstead

In parallel with the Chiltern metro study and carried out possibly by the same team and certainly under the same steering group, there should be a study into the provision of Chiltern platforms at West Hampstead.

This is not a new idea. Creation of an integrated interchange at West Hampstead between Thameslink, London Overground, the Jubilee line, possibly the Metropolitan line, and Chiltern goes back at least 30 years. At the moment there are five railway lines within spitting distance of each other, only three of which have stations. Interchange between them is via narrow pavements and busy street crossings.

Historically there was little need for interchange, because both daily commuting and other travel were focussed almost entirely on central London. However this has now changed. Various factors have cumulatively played a part in this. These include the diversion of the North London Line away from the City to run to Stratford (plus its recent conversion into the Overground), the creation of Thameslink as a through service across London, the extension of the Jubilee line to Docklands, introduction of Travelcard (and now Oyster pay-as-you-go) making it easier to change between lines, and the much wider range of commuting and leisure travel patterns which have emerged in recent years.

Collectively these factors, together with the London Borough of Camden's desire to improve the local area~~;~~ have generated ideas to build an integrated interchange station, including platforms on the Chiltern route. Indeed the most recent such scheme was worked up by Chiltern Railways themselves.

However the problem with these "grand" schemes was always that they depended on funding through commercial development, but the scale of the development needed to generate the necessary funds was too big to be acceptable to the local community.

To break the deadlock and at least to make some improvement for passengers and for local residents, TfL, Network Rail and Camden have now embarked on a programme of separate but co-ordinated improvements to the Thameslink and London Overground stations and to the streetscape. This does not provide a fully integrated interchange but it will be a substantial improvement on the present situation.

We see no reason in principle why, as a stand-alone initiative, a scheme should not now be developed for a Chiltern station. Indeed it is very likely that much of the design work done by Chiltern on an integrated scheme could be re-used.

The case for such a scheme rests on the poor connectivity that the Chiltern route currently has with the rest of the London rail network. This is largely confined to the interchange with the Bakerloo line at Marylebone, which Network Rail's draft West Midlands and Chilterns Route Utilisation Strategy suggests may begin to become overcrowded by 2019.

Chiltern platforms at West Hampstead would dramatically change this situation by providing interchange with the Jubilee line (to the West End, Waterloo, London Bridge, Canary Wharf and North Greenwich), Thameslink (to St.Pancras International, Farringdon [for Crossrail to Docklands], London Bridge, Gatwick and Luton Airports) and the London Overground (to Stratford, Richmond and Clapham Junction). It would also provide a greater level of resilience for the network in terms of alternative routes for passengers in the event of disruption, and also greater flexibility for dealing with events at Wembley.

Such an interchange would be useful for passengers from all parts of the Chiltern route, and although it would not be necessary for all trains to call there we would expect that (as has occurred with Stratford on the Great Eastern line) the level of demand would be substantial.

Certainly we would expect all trains serving Chiltern's TfL stations to call at West Hampstead, and the links thus created would greatly improve the number of jobs accessible within 45 minutes. Benefits would be even greater if Metropolitan line platforms were added to the London Underground station. Ideally this would be combined with a Chiltern scheme; at the least there should be passive provision.

We recommend that the team studying this West Hampstead proposal should operate under the aegis of the same steering group as the Chiltern Metro project, so that the analysis of each can inform the other. Again, therefore, a report should be produced within twelve months.

3.4 Banbury

One of the issues with Chiltern's draft Evergreen 3 timetable is inadequate connections between the High Wycombe area and Banbury and beyond. To remedy this will most likely require the operation of additional trains to Banbury, some or all which may need to terminate there and then return south.

This is a manoeuvre for which the track and platform layout at Banbury was not designed. It requires conflicting movements across the main line tracks and, (according to exactly how it is scheduled) may require southbound passengers making the interchange to cross the footbridge from one platform to another. It is also a time-consuming arrangement that may impose a constraint on how the timetable is compiled and may create extra costs. All these features are undesirable, and may prevent our aspiration from being realised.

However the draft West Midlands and Chilterns Route Utilisation Strategy speaks of a Network Rail scheme (as yet unfunded) to change the track layout at Banbury and install new signalling.

We suggest that the design for this new installation should divert the present northbound main line to run through the present platform 1, construct a new terminating line and platform between platform 1 and platform 2, and either convert the present northbound main line to become the southbound line, or widen platform 2 across the site of the northbound line in order to serve the existing southbound line.

This arrangement would eliminate all conflicting movements for terminating Chiltern trains and provide level cross-platform interchange for passengers in both northbound and southbound directions.

We recommend that Network Rail and Chiltern Railways consider this proposal.

3.5 Aylesbury via Princes Risborough

One of our aspirations for the Metropolitan Line upgrade Aylesbury line timetable is for substantially faster trains between Aylesbury and London as the current off peak journey taking 60 minutes.

Whilst some reduction will undoubtedly be possible, investigation might show that a better solution would be to run additional trains from Aylesbury via Princes Risborough. This would fit in with Buckinghamshire County Council's aspirations under the East-West Rail scheme to introduce a service between Milton Keynes and Aylesbury, as well as the need to support the planned growth of the town with enhanced public transport.

As part of the East-West scheme it is intended that Milton Keynes trains should continue to High Wycombe. For this purpose the project planning is looking at increasing the capacity of the single-track line between Aylesbury and Princes Risborough by adding a passing loop.

It would of course make no sense to terminate these trains at High Wycombe. By running through to Marylebone with limited stops – say Aylesbury, High Wycombe and two more thence to Marylebone (selected to mesh with our other service aspirations) – we estimate that a timing of 50 minutes should be achievable. This is still not ideal – but it could be further improved if 100 mph Clubman trains could be used and if the permitted speed on the Aylesbury – Princes Risborough section were increased.

We therefore recommend that Chiltern and Network Rail should investigate this proposal. Also, as the East –West Rail scheme is not yet funded, they should examine whether the increased fares revenue from a faster Aylesbury service would be sufficient to enable the latter to be funded on a stand-alone basis.

3.6 Timescale for action

The four schemes described in this section should be developed with a view to obtaining funding during Network Rail's Control Period 5 (2014 –2019),once the British economy has progressed out of recession and the public finances can support new railway investment initiatives.

Any that passes the necessary business case tests but are not included in the industry's programme for 2014 - 2019 should be specified – at least as options – in the bidding for the next Chiltern franchise starting in 2021.

4 Our Plan - Longer Term Schemes

4.1 Electrification

By the time the present Chiltern franchise ends in 2021 a substantial proportion of their existing diesel trains will be reaching life expiry, and the newer ones are likely to need substantial life extension work.

By this time the Chiltern lines will be the only London area route operating significant numbers of diesel trains, as the Great Western main line will have been electrified, and most likely the Midland main line as well.

Although it is not specified as a core route for electrification in Network Rail's electrification strategy, the Marylebone to Banbury section (plus Princes Risborough to Aylesbury and Leamington to Stratford upon Avon) is listed for early evaluation, along with the associated cross-country route from Oxford to Birmingham. Taken together these would eliminate all diesel trains on the High Wycombe route.

Passengers would benefit from the higher performance and higher line capacity that electrification can provide, and it would contribute to the national objective to source fuel from more sustainable sources than oil or gas. Total energy consumption should fall, because electric trains can regenerate power when they brake rather than have their kinetic energy dissipated as heat.

There would also be an air quality benefit in the area through which the line passes. This is a matter raised in the Mayor's Transport Strategy, which shows that the two main diesel routes in London (i.e. Chiltern and [at the moment] Great Western) have higher levels of noxious substances in the air than elsewhere – a problem which will get worse with the longer and additional trains which will be running on the route as traffic grows.

Allied with electrification to Aylesbury via Princes Risborough and running fast trains to London by this route, it would make sense to look at electrifying the Amersham to Aylesbury section on the London Underground conductor rail system and transfer it to the Metropolitan Line; otherwise it would require dual voltage trains. Taking advantage of the extra line capacity of the Metropolitan Line upgrade, the Aylesbury via Amersham line could have more frequent services than now, all running to Baker Street and a proportion through to the City. For passengers returning home this would remove the hassle of having to check the time to see which London terminal to head for as everything would run on a turn-up-and-go frequency from Baker Street. A service of 4 trains per hour from Amersham to Aylesbury could well be justified.

Passengers would benefit more widely because the complications of Chiltern and London Underground having to both work over the Harrow to Amersham section would be removed. This would make it easier to write timetables to meet passengers' needs. It would also improve the reliability of the service, as one operator's delays would no longer be imported onto the other's network.

High Wycombe line passengers would also benefit. Removal of Amersham line trains from Marylebone would remove junction conflicts at Neasden, allow more timetable flexibility and again remove the performance risk of having a network linked to London Underground.

We recommend that electrification of the Chiltern network, and transfer of the Amersham to Aylesbury section to London Underground, should be jointly investigated by Network Rail, Chiltern, London Underground and the Department for Transport. The study should include funding arrangements, in particular to consider the extent to which a scheme could be funded by inclusion as a commitment in the next Chiltern franchise due to start in 2021.

4.2 Heathrow Airport

Network Rail's draft West Midlands and Chilterns Route Utilisation Strategy draws attention to the lack of a link between the Chiltern route and Heathrow Airport. This is certainly odd given that the route passes within just a few miles of the airport, and it fits badly with government and BAA policy to increase the use of public transport by all users of the airport, both passengers and staff.

The short-term solution being considered is a coach link with High Wycombe. This is not actually a new idea, as British Rail ran such a link in the 1960s and 1970s, as did Chiltern in the very early days of their franchise from Gerrards Cross.

However experience tells us that the need to interchange from one mode to another is a major disincentive to the use of such links.

For the longer term a direct rail service into the airport would be preferable, but the reality is that a new line built solely for the Chiltern route could never be justified.

However, a prospect does open up – albeit not until the mid-2020s and probably even later than that – if High Speed 2 (HS2) from Euston to Birmingham is built.

The planned route out of London for HS2 is by tunnel from Euston to Old Oak Common, then taking over and reconstructing the existing little used line from Paddington to Northolt Junction (on the Chiltern route near South Ruislip). It will run in tunnel and cutting alongside the Chiltern line from south of Northolt Junction to north of West Ruislip before turning away towards Amersham.

HS2 Ltd, the company developing the scheme, was instructed by Government to identify the route for a possible future branch to Heathrow. Its report has identified three junction options between Northolt and Denham, and one or more of these are likely to be safeguarded in the planning process.

It is obvious that if an HS2 Heathrow link were built it would be used by only a relatively small proportion of the high speed trains, so it would have spare capacity and there may be a case for constructing a link to enable (say) 2 trains per hour to run from the Chiltern line direct to the airport.

We therefore consider that HS2 Ltd., Network Rail and Chiltern should investigate such a link, with a view adding this to the HS2 safeguarding process.

4.3 Uxbridge to Crossrail via Northolt

The London Borough of Hillingdon has suggested that the present little used single track line Paddington to Northolt Junction (South Ruislip) might be reconstructed to provide a new a parallel fast service to the Central line from Ruislip, but starting back at Uxbridge. It would only stop at major stations e.g. Northolt, Greenford, Hangar Lane and then run into Crossrail.

As HS2 is planned to take over this line, this proposal would only be possible if HS2 is not built, or if it's planned route out of London is changed. In the event of either of these outcomes, we would recommend that serious consideration be given to the Hillingdon proposal.

5 Our Plan – Summary of Actions

5.1 We Recommend

Chiltern Railways to develop their Evergreen 3 timetable to incorporate as many of London TravelWatch's aspirations as possible.

To achieve the best results from the Metropolitan line upgrade, due for completion in 2016, London Underground, Chiltern and Network Rail should jointly plan a new timetable for Aylesbury line. They should consider the Marylebone to Aylesbury and Baker Street to Amersham and Chesham services from scratch. This should include consideration of stopping patterns and pay attention to the need for greatly accelerated services between Aylesbury and London. They should also consider possible new services from the Aylesbury line to Watford Junction (via the proposed Croxley link), and should examine options for through services over the proposed re-opened line from Aylesbury to Milton Keynes.

That a joint "Chiltern Metro" TfL, Chiltern and Network Rail team should be created to examine the options for increasing the capacity of the Chiltern route to West Ruislip to run metro train at 3 trains per hour, 4 trains per hour and 6 trains per hour frequencies. This should provide soundly based information on the costs and benefits of such a scheme, to be fed into the planning of London's rail development to follow on from the completion of Crossrail and the Thameslink Programme after 2018. A steering group including London TravelWatch and the local boroughs should oversee the work, and a report should be produced within twelve months. This team should also consider the alternative option of closing the intermediate stations of Northolt Park, Sudbury Hill Harrow and Sudbury & Harrow Road in the event that an infrastructure enhancement scheme is not feasible.

A similar team, under the aegis of the same steering group, should examine the case for a Chiltern station at West Hampstead. This should include provision for Metropolitan line platforms at the existing London Underground station. A report should be produced within twelve months.

As part of its plans to resignal and modernise the track layout, Network Rail and Chiltern should consider a simplified and more passenger-friendly means of terminating and reversing Chiltern trains at Banbury.

Chiltern and Network Rail should investigate a scheme to provide Aylesbury with a faster London service by running via High Wycombe.

Electrification of the Chiltern network, and transfer of the Amersham to Aylesbury section to London Underground, should be jointly investigated by Network Rail, Chiltern, London Underground and the Department for Transport. The study should include funding arrangements to consider the extent to which a scheme could be funded by inclusion as a commitment in the next Chiltern franchise due to start in 2021.

HS2 Ltd, Network Rail and Chiltern should investigate a link between the Chiltern route and the proposed HS2 Heathrow Airport branch so that Chiltern trains could run direct to the airport, with a view adding such a connection to the HS2 safeguarding process.

If HS2 is not built, or if its planned route out of London is changed, consideration should be given to London Borough of Hillingdon's proposal of a fast link from Uxbridge to Crossrail via the present Northolt Junction – Paddington line.

6 Comments

We invite comments on this draft paper from passengers, other stakeholders and the transport industry.

Please send them by e-mail to info@londontravelwatch.org.uk

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