

<p>London Transport Users Committee</p> <p>Proposed Closure of the Sheepcote Lane Curve</p>	<p>Document</p>
<p>Secretariat's Memorandum</p> <p>Author: Vincent Stops</p>	<p>C</p>

Proposed closure of Sheepcote Lane Curve

1 Purpose of report

This report informs members of some of the issues they may wish to consider, representations received from objectors and others and the Strategic Rail Authority's comments on these representations.

2 Strategic Rail Authority's 'Statement of Reasons'

2.1 Economic

The SRA have concluded that the subsidy required was greater than the wider benefits of continuing the service. They say that this assessment was confirmed during the franchising process when bidders were asked to provide their own estimate of the subsidy required to continue the service.

2.2 Passenger use

The Strategic Rail Authority have conducted passenger counts that show low usage, particularly between London Waterloo and Reading. Where passenger counts are higher, west of Reading, they maintain that the additional First Great Western 06:11 service from Reading meets the demand. Passenger counts on the 20:16 Pembroke Dock between Cardiff and London Waterloo were also low and do not justify a replacement service.

2.3 Combining franchises: London termini

The Strategic Rail Authority have a policy of reducing the number of different franchisees using each London termini.

2.4 Alternative services

2.4.1 Reading / London

The suggested alternative service is tabulated on page 2 of the 'Statement of Reasons'. It is suggested passengers use either an earlier or later train out of either Reading or London Paddington (as an alternative to London Waterloo) and interchange via bus or taxi. Instead of the 05:05 from London Waterloo passengers can use either the 03:35 or the 06:00 with similar journey times. Instead of the 03:00 from Reading passengers can use the 02:34 or the 04:34, again with similar journey times.

2.4.2 London to Reading to Cardiff and westward

The suggested alternative service is tabulated in Annex 1(c and d) of the 'Statement of Reasons'. It is suggested that instead of the 05:05 from London Waterloo passengers use the 03:35 from London Paddington to Reading (04:30) and then change to the new 06:11 service to Cardiff and then change to the retained portion of the London / Maesteg service from Cardiff at 08:21.

2.4.3 Pembroke Dock to Cardiff, Reading and London

The suggested alternative service is tabulated in Annex 1(a and b) of the 'Statement of Reasons'. The existing service between Pembroke Dock and Cardiff has been retained. Suggested alternatives for travellers beyond Cardiff are to depart Pembroke Dock two hours earlier at 18:16 and arrive at London Paddington 4½ hours earlier at 23:38 (instead of 04:13 at London Waterloo) and interchange via bus or taxi. Passengers travelling east from Swansea could use the 03:30 (instead of the 22:30) and arrive at London Paddington at 06:43 (instead of 04:13 at London Waterloo) and interchange via bus or taxi. Passengers from Pembroke Dock could wait until the next morning 07:05 and arrive at London Paddington at 13:02 and interchange via bus or taxi.

2.5 Fares

2.5.1 The Strategic Rail Authority accepts that withdrawal of the service will result in the loss of significantly cheaper fare options. For example an advance purchase single fare via Slough is twice that of the equivalent Arriva Trains Wales fares and return fares via Slough / any route are between 35% 50% higher.

2.5.2 However, the Strategic Rail Authority tell us that only 5 Apex and 3 SuperAdvance tickets were issued in a three week period in February and March 2004 for the services using the Sheepcote Lane Curve and there will therefore only be a disbenefit to a very small number of passengers.

3 Representations Received

7 representations were made. 4 were categorised as objections, 3 as comments. Those objections which arrived before the advertised closing date (1 June 2004) were summarised and the SRA asked for a response. The summarised objections, the SRA's comments, and the Secretariat's comments follow. One objection received after the close of objections was sent to the Strategic Rail Authority with a request for a verbal report to the sub-committee meeting.

3.1 Fares

The closure will result in the loss of a low-fare service. The 'Statement of Reasons' compares various fares, but some will be more readily available on the ATW service than FGW services;

Strategic Rail Authority's comment

As detailed in the Statement of Reasons, the withdrawal of the ATW services via the Sheepcote Lane Curve will lead to the withdrawal of some advance purchase, low fares between Wales and London. However, take up of these fares was very low and their withdrawal will not in itself lead to passenger disbenefit: Over a three week period in February and March 2004, 5 sales of these fares were made in the Cardiff to London direction and none in the London to Cardiff direction.

Secretariat's comment

The Strategic Rail Authority accepts that there will be a loss of significantly lower cost fares, but has evidence that take up of these advance fares was very low.

An additional point for members to consider is that the Strategic Rail Authority, in its 'Statement of Reasons', compares Arriva Trains Wales advance fares with First Great Western advance fares. This assumes that advance fares are actually available on First Great Western. The Secretariat have asked the Strategic Rail Authority to be ready to explain the quota situation on advance purchase tickets on these services to members at the meeting.

3.2 Demand

There is passenger demand and the service should continue, perhaps run by SWT.

Strategic Rail Authority's comment

As detailed in the Statement of Reasons, the passenger counts indicate that passenger demand for these services via the Sheepcote Lane Curve was low: An average of 6 passengers used the service between Reading and London Waterloo and 2 between London Waterloo and Reading. This level of demand does not indicate that the services via the Sheepcote Lane Curve should continue.

Secretariat's comment

The demand is low between London Waterloo and Reading. Demand increases west of Reading. Passengers can use existing services from London Paddington or the new 06:11 service from Reading to the west.

3.3 Availability of line for future use

The curve must remain available for diversionary use and possible future passenger services.

Strategic Rail Authority's comment

The Sheepcote Lane Curve will continue to be used by Eurostar empty stock movements between North Pole Depot and Waterloo International, and will also be available for freight use and as an emergency diversionary route. Network Rail has confirmed that it has no plans that will affect its availability for future passenger use.

Secretariat's comment

This will be an important issue for members. Transport for London have commented that they are not objecting on the basis of the commitment that the section of line will remain signalled for passenger operation. But unless a condition is attached to any closure consent, there would be no guarantee that this remains the situation.

3.4 Alternatives

The alternatives suggested / available are not at equivalent times.

Strategic Rail Authority's comment

The very low level of demand for the services between Reading and London Waterloo and vice versa was not sufficient to warrant the provision of alternative services at the precise times of those being withdrawn via the Sheepcote Lane Curve. Other alternative services which involve travel at different times are available.

Secretariat's comment

The service was originally conceived to connect with an early morning Eurostar service from London Waterloo. There is no equivalently timed service that satisfies this (admittedly low) demand.

The service out of London Waterloo to the west provides a very early morning service (05:05 departure) to the West Country and South Wales. There is not an equivalently timed service that satisfies this (admittedly low) demand. Passengers would have to depart from London Paddington at 03:35 and wait at Reading for 1hr 40 mins. for the 06:11 service. Alternatively the 07:00 London Paddington service

arrives at destinations west of Cardiff about 40 minutes later than the 05:05 service from London Waterloo.

Passengers travelling west of Reading to Cardiff and intermediate stations have an equivalently timed service from London Paddington.

3.5 Suggested alternatives

It is suggested that the 22:00 Penzance to London Paddington (table 135) again calls at Bristol Temple Meads allowing early morning connections from Bristol to Heathrow and Gatwick via London Paddington.

Strategic Rail Authority's comment

The Strategic Rail Authority has asked First Great Western for its comments on the feasibility of this.

Secretariat's comment

This would be a welcome service and provide an early morning arrival into London from the West Country.

It is suggested that the 06:11 Reading to Cardiff service (table 125) could start from London Paddington and so serve as a more equivalent and useful early morning service to the West Country and Wales.

Strategic Rail Authority's comment

The Strategic Rail Authority has asked First Great Western to examine this as an option for the Winter 2004/05 timetable.

Secretariat's comment

This would be a welcome service and provide an early morning departure from London to the West Country and Cardiff.

3.6 Consultation

What consultation did the SRA undertake with passenger committees etc. prior to ceasing the suite of services from south and west Wales and the Marches to London Waterloo?

Strategic Rail Authority's comment

As these services were not part of the Passenger Service Requirement for the original Wales & West franchise, let in September 1996, which became the Wales & Borders franchise in October 2001, there was no requirement to consult with the RPCs on the SRA's intentions for these services in the new Wales & Borders franchise which commenced operation in December 2003. However, the SRA did discuss its intentions for these services with LTUC in February 2002 and the RPC Wales in March 2002, prior to the publication of the Core Franchise Proposition for the new Wales & Borders franchise in April 2002. I attach copies of an email exchange with LTUC and the minutes of a meeting held with the RPC Wales detailing these discussions.

Secretariat's comment

It is fair to say that the future of this service was known to be uncertain by LTUC and the Rail Passengers Committee for Wales, but there was no consultation with respect to ceasing its operation at the end of Winter 2003/04 timetable. The decision to

cease operating the service before the closure process was complete was not satisfactory. However, members should be aware that the cost of maintaining a rail service along this section of line would have been very costly to the Strategic Rail Authority.

3.7 Legality

An objector has pointed out that this service was originally an experimental one and therefore there is no requirement for a closure process.

Secretariat's comment

The Secretariat believes that this is not the case as the service has run for more than five years. In any case we welcome the opportunity of the process to allow passengers views to be considered.

An objector has stated (after the close of the objection period) that he believed a Train Operating Company must be the promoter of a closure. Also that running a taxi service that i) does not traverse the section being proposed for closure; ii) does not call at the stations where the service previously called; iii) only operates once a week breaches the legal requirements of closure processes.

Secretariat's comment

We have asked the Strategic Rail Authority to comment on this at the sub-committee meeting.

3.8 Publicity

The publicity regarding this closure has been over and above that required by the Act. However, the technical nature of the notices that simply describe the section of line to be closed without reference to the service affected will mean passengers may not have fully appreciated the process and how the closure would effect them.

3.9 Other points for consideration

Members should note that statutorily they are required to consider hardship caused by closure of the service. As the Pembroke Dock / London Waterloo / Maesteg service has now ceased, it could be said that members are simply required to comment upon the Kensington Olympia to London Waterloo weekly service. However, the spirit in which the Strategic Rail Authority and the Secretariat has approached this is that consideration is being given to the closure of the Pembroke Dock / London Waterloo / Maesteg service.