

## **Heart of Wessex Rail Partnership (Executive Decision)**

*Communities Lead:* Helen Rutter  
*Service Manager:* Natalie Fortt, Area Development Team Lead (South)  
*Lead Officer:* Helen Rutter, Communities Lead  
*Contact Details:* [helen.rutter@southsomerset.gov.uk](mailto:helen.rutter@southsomerset.gov.uk) or (01963) 435012

### **Purpose of the Report**

To receive a summary of the work undertaken by the Heart of Wessex Rail Partnership during 2016/17. To consider making a partnership contribution for 2017/18.

### **Public Interest**

Yeovil Pen Mill is on the Bristol/Weymouth line. The Partnership actively supports community involvement in improving the stations and encouraging local communities and visitors to utilise the line for a wide range of trips and journeys. The Partnership is resourced by contributions from local authorities, match funded by the rail operator Great Western Railway and a large group of volunteers who offer their time and expertise.

### **Recommendations**

That members:

- 1) Note the work undertaken by the Partnership in 2016/17 and that a similar report has been taken to Area East Committee.
- 2) Approve a funding contribution of £1,000 from the Transport Scheme Grants budget for 2017/18.

### **Background**

Accountability and financial support for the Heart of Wessex Rail Partnership is shared between Area East Committee (2 stations along the line) and Area South Committee (one station).

The line has been supported by a partnership of local authorities along the route since 1998 but was revised and expanded in 2003, with an action plan to:

- 1) Widen the Partnership to include local communities and to improve the understanding of and response to local needs along the line
- 2) Improve quality and availability of information promoting the line and its destinations and raise the profile of the service as an alternative to the private car
- 3) Improve station environments & facilities and access to them by other modes of travel

In the last 14 years the Partnership has developed its community arm achieving significant station investment, improvements to access, promotion and better information from local community groups along the line, including a large number of regular volunteers. Community Working Parties with the TOC and Network Rail are organised by the partnership to discuss and prioritise community aspirations.

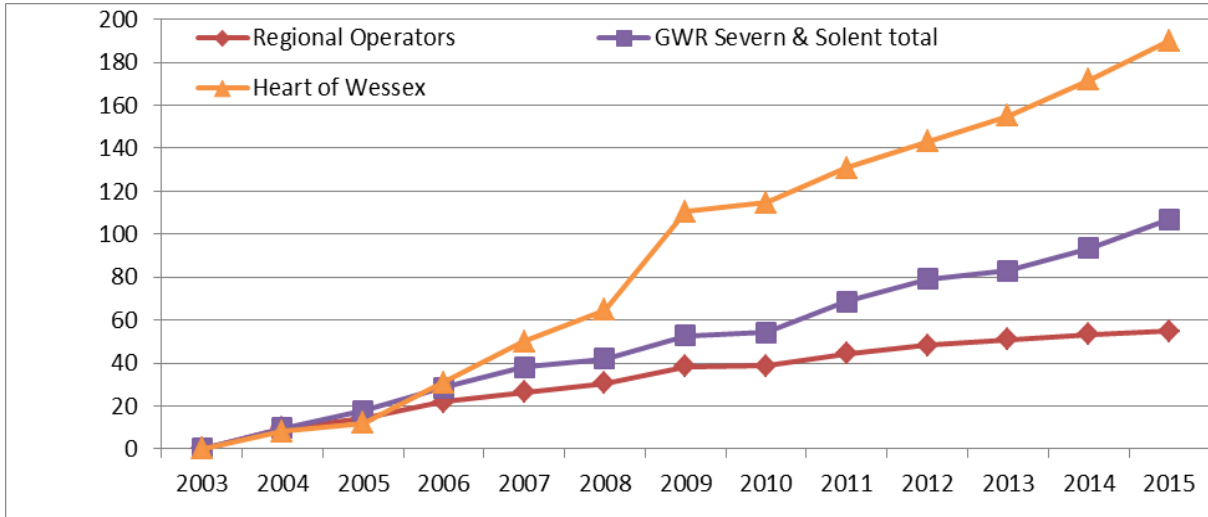
In October 2011 the line was designated a Community Rail Service, in recognition of its strong support from partner authorities and communities themselves. This gives greater freedom to the operator and community in running the service and stations. The national objectives for community rail development are to increase revenue, manage down costs and encourage greater community involvement in the local railway.

## DELIVERY AGAINST ACTION PLAN

**Overall objective: raise awareness and increase use of the Bristol to Weymouth line**

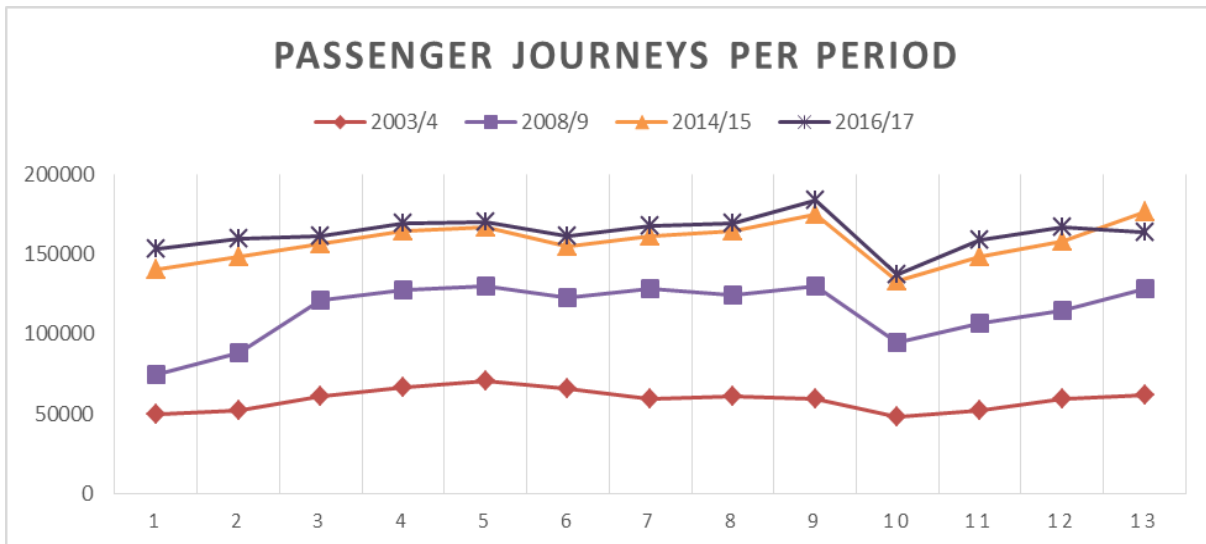
### 2003 to 2015

Passenger journeys on the Heart of Wessex Line grew from 705,500 to 2,047,749. The chart shows cumulative percentage annual growth for the Heart of Wessex, the total of eight lines making up the Severn & Solent region<sup>1</sup> and for national Regional Rail Operators<sup>2</sup>. Appendix (page 12) shows the Severn & Solent region map.



With no change to the level of services growth was 3 times the national average and double that for the Severn & Solent area. The “share” of all journeys in the Severn & Solent region made on the Heart of Wessex Line rose from 9.8% to 14.9 % over the period. For every 100 journeys made in 2003/4, 290 journeys were being made on the same trains by 2014/15.

### 2014/2015 to 2016/2017



Annual journey figures: **2014/15: 2,047,749** **2015/16: 2,032,619** **2016/17: 2,119,070**

<sup>1</sup> Data supplied by FGW. SEVERN & SOLENT TOTAL includes total of passenger journeys on: Cardiff-Portsmouth, Bristol-Exeter, Bristol-Weymouth, Bristol – Great Malvern, Bristol –Severn Beach, Bristol – Cardiff, Bath – Filton and Swindon-Westbury. (See map on Page 7).

<sup>2</sup> Office of Rail Regulation. Regional Rail Operators excludes London and South East.

Growth has slowed dramatically and for the first time has not exceeded the regional and national average. In 2015/16, service disruption, due to electrification work, reduced passenger numbers, but generally lower levels of annual growth may be partly due to increasing capacity limitations, with, at peak times, overcrowding leading to an inability to board and/or to collect revenue on certain trains. In addition, there has been a decline in reliability on the service. This is a matter of great concern and is being taken up as a priority with GWR by the Chairman of the Partnership.

- The Line guide produced 3 times a year along with the excellent website is the mainstay of line promotion, along with eye-catching posters Seize the Sunday, which encourages the public to take advantage of year round Sunday services
- There are 5 Sunday trains running throughout the year. The main gap is an early train up from Weymouth on a Sunday. GWR are still conducting feasibility work to achieve a train departing Weymouth at 8.20 am
- GWR have also promised to reintroduce the northbound Sunday services from April 2018 to allow a full day out in Bath or Bristol
- The year-round Sunday morning services began in mid-December 2016 and use is building steadily. This has allowed Yeovil residents to make trips to Weymouth on Sundays out of the peak summer period and has taken some of the pressure off the Saturday trains, which could be prone to overcrowding between mid-September and mid-May. Yeovil features as one of the destinations along the line worth visiting on a Sunday for both the Country Park and Sunday shopping opportunities. Extended ticket office opening hours are also of more general benefit as this appears to be developing into a popular day to eg: collect tickets that have been bought online or to seek advice on journey options from the staff
- A project with Cambian Lufton College brings students and their tutors to the station frontage area once a fortnight during term time to carry out litter picking and cleaning, and to undertake some planting and sowing. The tutors appreciate the opportunity this gives for students to improve their coordination skills, to work together and to socialise with new people. A planter in the form of a small train has been dedicated to them and is replanted at intervals with the students choosing and bedding the plants and learning about their different characteristics
- Following some services linking through from the Waterloo line run by South West Trains launched in 2016/17 some further improvements to the timetable are envisaged for December 2018. South West Trains are consulting on some additional services to London from Yeovil including some routed via Bruton, Castle Cary and Frome. The consultation closes on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2017 and SSDC will make a formal response once officers have been able to assess in detail
- GWR have made available a £50k contribution through their Customer and Communities Infrastructure Fund (CCIF) towards the Lyde Road Pedestrian and Cycleway scheme, to give improved accessibility to Yeovil Pen Mill station. This scheme has been identified in the SSDC Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) as being necessary to facilitate growth and, as such, will receive funding through developer contributions. SSDC has also allocated a Capital fund (£250k) to facilitate a completed through route. However, given that there has been a significant amount of highway work undertaken in the Lyde Road area in recent months, it is currently uncertain when SCC will be able to include in their highway work programme

## **Funding Support**

The annual running cost of the Partnership in 2016/17 was £ 69,000. This covers: the salary of the Rail Partnership Officer; the printing and promotion of the line guide; upgrades to the Partnership website and a local grants scheme of £10,000 pa to enable the Partnership to match fund local community-led station initiatives. There is a formal Partnership Agreement through which the Unitary/County Authorities with responsibility for Local Transport Plans put in the greatest contribution and participating Districts a lesser amount. The biggest annual funding contributor is Great Western Railway at £39,290 although they are not signatories to the partnership agreement. The total funding

expected in 2017/18 is £63,264 including some funding for small projects made available by GWR to enable some additional implementation of minor station improvements.

### **Financial Implications**

There is £7,950 unallocated in the Transport Scheme Grants budget for 2017/18. Under the terms of the Partnership Agreement it is requested that a sum of £1,000 is awarded as a partnership contribution by the Committee for this financial year. If approved a sum of £6,950 will remain unallocated.

### **Corporate Priority Implications**

4. Ensure safe, sustainable & cohesive communities

### **Carbon Emissions & Climate Change Implications**

Maximising train travel reduces car journeys and congestion and therefore has a beneficial effect on carbon emissions

### **Equality and Diversity Implications**

A local train service provides these towns with an alternative to car travel for people without their own independent transport. The Partnership has produced its line guide in large format type for easy reading and this is replicated on its website. The train stations themselves have limited access for those with mobility problems on certain platforms.

### **Background papers**

SSDC Partnership Review April 2011, Report to ASC July 2012; Report to ASC October 2013; Report to ASC October 2014; Report to ASC October 2016;