

Heart of Wessex Rail Partnership (Executive Decision)

Lead Officer:

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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

Area East has two stations on the line at Bruton and Castle Cary. 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 Train operating Company (TOC) Great Western Railway and a large group of volunteers who offer their time and expertise.

Recommendations

That members:

- 1) Note and comment on the work undertaken by the Partnership in 2016/17 and that a similar report will be taken to Area South Committee
- 2) Approve a funding contribution of £2000 from the Members' discretionary 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.

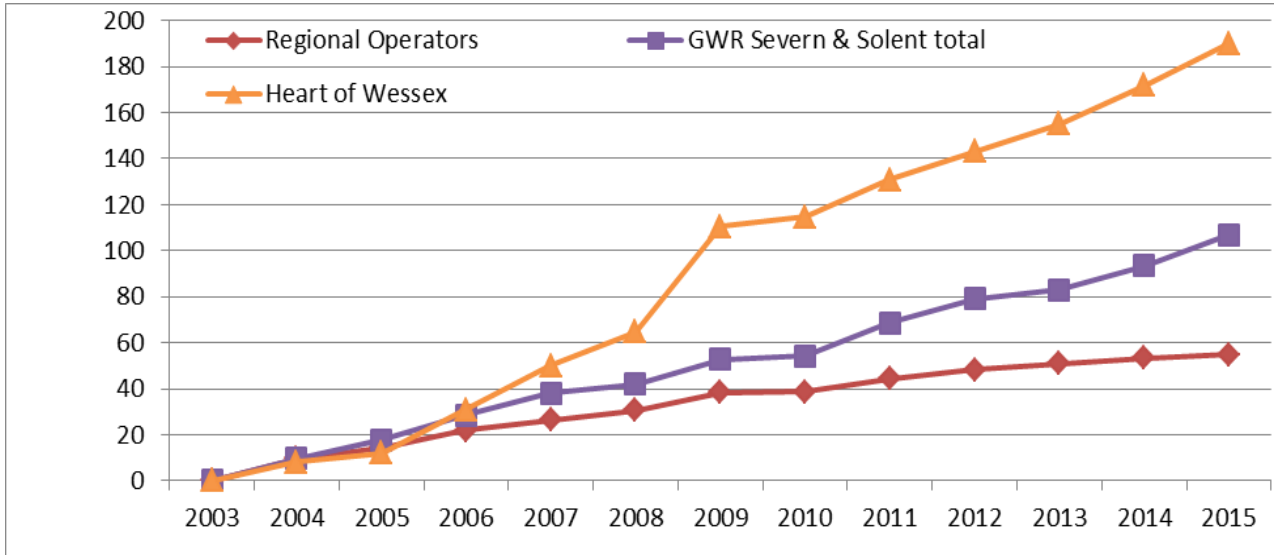
In October 2011 the line was designated a Community Rail Service, in recognition of its strong support from partner authorities and communities. This gives greater freedom to the operator and community in running the service and stations. The national objectives for community rail development are to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

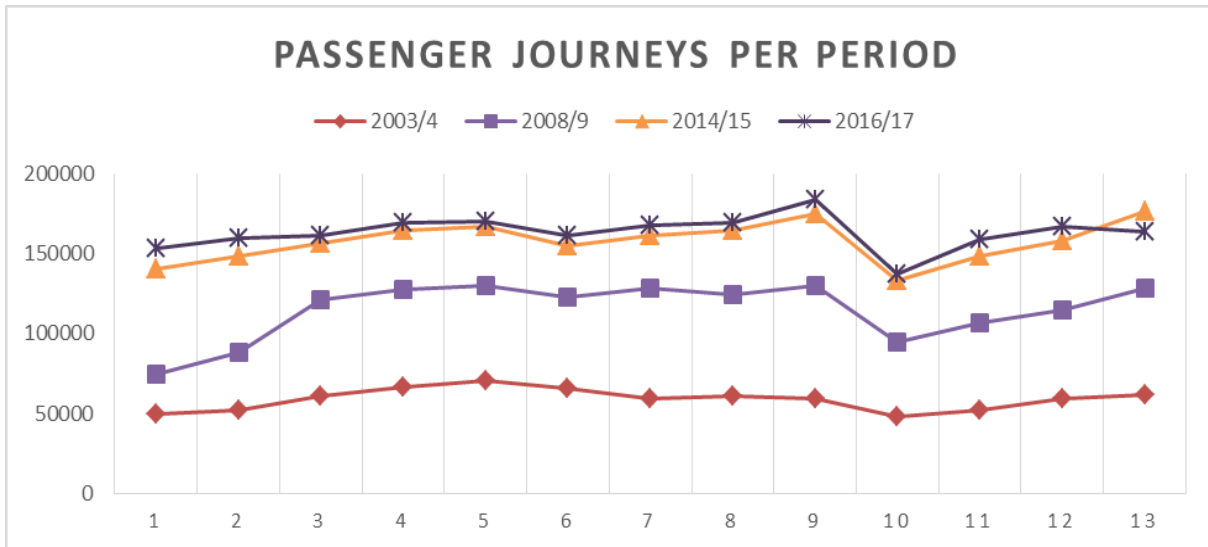
2003 to 2015

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 region¹ and for national Regional Rail Operators². 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



¹ 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).

² Office of Rail Regulation. Regional Rail Operators excludes London and South East.

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

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.
- Bruton Projects (a) in 2016 additional seating for Bristol bound platform (b) feasibility work undertaken for access to south side platform, findings and options are awaited
- Castle Cary plans are well advanced to provide an extra 20 car parking spaces. The aim is to complete these early 2018. Feasibility work is also underway to provide further car parking of up to 100 more spaces. There should be opportunities to carry out other small-scale enhancements in conjunction with the parking improvements

Funding Support

The annual running cost of the Partnership in 2016/17 was £ 68,276. 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. The expected expenditure for 2017/18 is £71,874.

Financial Implications

There is £10,200 unallocated in the Members' discretionary budget for 2017/18. Under the terms of the Partnership Agreement it is requested that a sum of £2,000 is awarded as a partnership contribution by the Committee for this financial year. If approved a sum of £8,200 will remain unallocated.

Corporate Priority Implications

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 AEC July 2011; Report to AEC December 2011; Report to AEC May 2013; Report to AEC August 2014; Report to AEC August 2015; Report to AEC August 2016.
