

Briefing Note for Cabinet 13th December 2017

South Western Railway Timetable Consultation for December 2018: Exeter – London Waterloo Services (Clapham Junction calls)

Background

South Western Railway (SWR) launched a consultation on their December 2018 timetable on 29th September, closing on 22nd December. Passengers in Devon are primarily affected by changes to the Exeter – Waterloo service although many will also have an interest in connecting services to other destinations on the SWR network. Whilst a number of smaller changes are proposed, many of which are positive for Devon, the primary issue of concern has been the option to drop calls on Exeter services at Clapham Junction.

SWR has specifically asked a question in the consultation about the balance of stops at Woking and Clapham Junction on Exeter services based on pre-consultation meetings. The question states:

QUESTION: Woking stop in Exeter service

We propose, following the pre-consultation meetings, to stop the Waterloo to Exeter services at Woking. However, instead a Clapham Junction stop could be provided, or even that the service could call alternately every two hours at Woking and every two hours at Clapham Junction.

From the three options, which do you think provides the best interchange opportunities for passengers travelling from the suburban area to Yeovil and Exeter?

SWR has made it clear that it will listen to the feedback from the public and stakeholders and respond to stated wishes as closely as possible. The consultation documents state that the issues it is trying to balance are:

- Speeding up journeys based on pre-consultation feedback
- Maximising the number of services (and therefore number of available seats) able to pass through Clapham Junction in peak periods. Each service calling at Clapham Junction in the peak period reduces the number of arrivals or departures at Waterloo by one due to the time taken to stop compared to a service running through non-stop.

Discussion

The County Council and other stakeholders in the South West have long supported the aim of reducing the journey time on Exeter – Waterloo services. It is recognised however that this has to be balanced with connectivity needs.

The majority of Exeter services currently call at both Woking and Clapham Junction. Woking provides an interchange with the coach link to Heathrow as well as connections into some intermediate stations to Clapham Junction and the Portsmouth line. Clapham Junction provides a wide range of connections across South / South West London and beyond including Kensington Olympia / Shepherds Bush and North London, Richmond / Twickenham, Kingston / Epsom, Victoria, East Croydon / Gatwick Airport / Brighton, Sutton and East London via the London Overground.

Woking can be a useful stop for East Devon residents wanting to access Heathrow although many people in Devon travel via Reading and the coach link there which is faster and more frequent. Not

stopping at Woking would however provide benefits in reducing the journey time by several minutes but just as importantly increasing the number of seats available which are taken by Waterloo / Clapham to Woking and vice versa journeys. Keeping the Woking stop in after December 18 could see more people using the service between Clapham Junction and Woking in particular in the context of fewer other Woking services calling at Clapham. This could increase crowding and reduce the number of seats for Devon passengers. Those still wishing to access Woking to / from Exeter services would have the option of changing at Basingstoke into frequent connections although it is recognised that this would increase journey times and be less convenient for those with luggage or needing assistance.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that a very high proportion, often over half, of passengers on Exeter services alight or join at Clapham Junction. This can be particularly convenient for leisure travellers to / from the destinations noted above but also business users too. The Gatwick Airport connection is particularly useful and needs to be balanced against connectivity to Heathrow. The need to maximise the number of services and seat capacity in peak periods through Clapham Junction is acknowledged but unlike many other destinations on the network the Devon area does not have a choice of services and high frequency to Waterloo that might give alternative options. Leisure travel is important on this route and these passengers particularly value the direct connections available. Waterloo is arguably more useful for commuters although still important for leisure.

Not all services on the line travel as far as Exeter and there are a significant number of other stations along the line in Dorset, Somerset and Hampshire. Other services start or finish at Salisbury or Yeovil Junction which gives options for these services to call at Woking instead of Clapham (which is generally the current pattern). This option is not available at all times when the Exeter service is the only one available.

The suggested option of calling alternately at Woking and Clapham Junction would appear to be too complicated and not genuinely satisfy anyone's needs, particularly when connecting to / from other services. It is also susceptible to problems at times of disruption which could lead to passengers having some very long waiting times.

Action Taken

The County Council has already responded to the consultation stating its clear preference that the Clapham Junction stop is retained on all services but that on balance the Woking stop could be dropped. Officers will continue to liaise with SWR to ensure the reasons are clearly understood.

The Peninsula Rail Task Force will also be responding and is likely to support the County Council's stance. The Heart of South West LEP is expected to do the same.

It is not yet known how other authorities and stakeholders along the line will respond but there seems to be a general acceptance on the importance of the Clapham Junction stop. Woking may be more important as a Heathrow interchange for those areas that do not have an alternative route via Reading.

References

<https://www.southwesternrailway.com/contact-and-help/timetable-consultation> (detailed timetables for Monday to Friday are also available via this page)

https://www.southwesternrailway.com/~/_media/pdfs/timetable-consultation/clapham-stops.pdf?la=en