

Great Western Rail Utilisation Strategy

Consultation

A Response from Radstock Action Group November 2009

IN SUPPORT OF THE REINSTATEMENT OF THE LINE BETWEEN RADSTOCK AND FROME

1. Radstock Action Group welcomes the opportunity to participate in the debate over the future of rail services in the Great Western Region. We have read the Draft RUS and are encouraged to see that there are proposals to improve services right across the region. We believe that there is an acknowledgement of the opportunities to enhance business by building usage by members of small communities which currently suffer from lack of services and lack of connectivity.
2. This response requests that Network Rail and its partners, in determining the strategic development of rail services in the Great Western region, address the possibility of reinstating the rail link between Radstock and Frome. As we only became aware of this consultation process late on 25 November, our comments inevitably lack detail and we will continue to look more closely at the consultation papers and address new issues as they arise.
3. When Radstock was the centre of the now defunct North Somerset Coalfield, rail played a crucial role in linking the town to the outside world, through the transportation of coal. Once the coalfield closed, the railway fell into disuse but the trackbed is still in existence in certain areas, including Radstock to Frome. Whilst Radstock continues to plan for regeneration, there is no doubt that the introduction of a rail link, as part of an integrated transport system would encourage more businesses and individuals by providing fast and appropriate services to major centres from London through to Plymouth, without having to connect via Bath Spa.
4. We note in 2.2.2:
The Great Western RUS will therefore:
 - propose options to achieve the most efficient and effective use of the existing rail network and identify cost effective opportunities to improve it where appropriate
 - enable Network Rail to develop an informed renewals, maintenance and enhancements programme in line with the Department for

Transport's aspirations and the reasonable requirements of train operators and other key stakeholders

- enable local and Regional Transport Plans and freight plans to reflect a realistic view of the future rail network.

5. We hope that our specific comments will be seen as a contribution to the debate and be born in mind within these parameters.
6. Radstock is situated on the furthestmost edge of Bath and North East Somerset. This obviously ensures that links with Bath itself feature in strategic thinking, but we wish to suggest that Radstock equally sees itself as having worthwhile and important links to the areas south of the authority, linking it directly to the region covered by rail connections through Frome and Westbury.
7. Together with such towns as Midsomer Norton and Paulton, plus the outlying villages, it comprises a population which is effectively isolated from major transport links. In the past decade or more, the road system has become more and more congested and it now takes up to 90 minutes to reach such key routes as the M4 and M5 by road. Roads are the only option for those wishing to travel outside the area, whether by car or train. Even a journey into Bath by car takes up to 45 minutes and is then followed by the expense and time needed to secure a parking space prior to catching a train.
8. We suggest that if there were better connectivity, including the reinstatement of a rail link to Radstock from Frome, that there would be take up by those wishing to reach as far afield as London, not to mention Bristol and destinations in the South West.
9. A reinstated Radstock to Frome line would facilitate inter-urban links and bring more connectivity without using Bath Spa which appears to be under stress according to the consultation document.
10. Westbury features repeatedly in the consultation document as a place ready for development and with an increased role in connectivity between Bristol/South Coast and London/Thames corridor. The enhanced use predicted for Westbury Station is good news and could be further enhanced if only a fraction of the commuting residents, of the Radstock and Midsomer Norton, Somer Valley and surrounding districts had access to a rail link. Plus, of course, those requiring rail services for other uses.
11. Similarly there is considerable discussion of South Wales/Bristol/South Coast links needing improvement. A reinstated Radstock line would act as a feeder service and consolidate usage.

12. Branches in the region are already being re-opened for general usage, for example, Wareham – Swanage and Taunton – Minehead.
13. The Parkman Report, which was produced some years ago, emphasized the benefits and practicalities of through trains from Radstock to Swindon. The pressure is now greater as the Trowbridge, Bradford-on-Avon corridor has expanded considerably since then with more building planned, so further road usage would be expected. Already, Wiltshire Unitary District Council has promoted a service between Westbury and Swindon with an extension to Frome.
14. Currently, there no real integrated transport facilities at Radstock, merely bus and cycle, in spite of the town technically being part of the Greater Bristol Bus Network. If rail were included, there would be real choice for commuters, both in and out-bound and reduced road vehicles. An early commuter train (currently starting at Frome) could be changed to start at Radstock, then call at a new Frome Market station before continuing on its current route to London. Trains could run throughout the day bringing Radstock and surrounding areas into immediate contact with the rest of the rail network.
15. Even now, if the line were built, trains could be run to Trowbridge, Swindon, Bath, Bristol via Westbury and as far afield as London without requiring further rolling stock. It is hoped that freight could also be included: protection of links will permit fewer heavy lorries on the road in the future.
16. We realise that it will be necessary to survey extensively to gain proof of potential numbers and are in the process of organising some investigations, still at an early stage. We already have a petition which contains thousands of signatures in support of the railway link; we intend trying now to establish more accurately how many people would actually use any such rail link.
17. Radstock Action Group would welcome becoming part of the Wider Stakeholder Group (WSG) (section 2.3.2). This would then tie Radstock's needs in with the objectives of the Regional Spatial Strategy mentioned in section 5.2.2.7 and the Regional Economic Strategy section 5.2.3 (page 91).

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