

## 8. CONCLUSION



Northbound service at Chetnole

## **8 CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

### **8.1 Introduction**

8.1.1 This section concludes the research undertaken and is set out in four sections mirroring the research questions set out in Chapter 1. The conclusions are reflected upon to give some policy implications.

### **8.2 Research conclusions**

#### **For what journeys are rural railways used?**

8.2.1 Nationally, rural railways are few and far between and only a small proportion of rural dwellers live in close proximity to them. In addition, the case study area illustrates that the catchment of rural railway stations is small in terms of population and geographical area, with the majority of rail passengers beginning their journeys in station settlements. The train service is accessed on foot in almost half of instances.

8.2.2 The case study has shown that rural railways are, in the main, not used by village dwellers, but by those inhabiting the nearby market towns and travelling between their home town and other nearby urban areas. In the study area, social or leisure trips constitute almost half of all journeys on the line and many of these are undertaken regularly. Work, school and education trips constitute 37% of travel on the line, the majority of such passengers travelling on a regular basis. A substantial minority of journeys are by first-time users of the line.

8.2.3 Whilst only a small proportion of households in the village study area use the railway on a regular basis, a far greater proportion do so on an infrequent basis. That said, use is similar to that found in other rural rail surveys; and the proportion of regular users in urban areas is not much higher. The low rural population base naturally equates to low overall passenger numbers.

8.2.4 Some aspects of social inclusion can be detected from the research. More than half of rail passengers would not have undertaken or been able to make their journey if the train was not available. This, of course, blurs inability with dissuasion to travel by alternate means. Within the study villages, there was a widespread perception that the railway was of importance; usually to other people, rather than themselves.

### **Perception of rural railways**

8.2.5 If rural railways are perceived by many to be inferior to private transport, then buses are perceived to be more inferior still. With a couple of exceptions, case study households use the bus less frequently than the railway service. Local rail fares are perceived to be expensive and knowledge of the line is generally poor, with just one quarter of local households knowing the level of service provided.

8.2.6 Rural dwellers state that wide-reaching changes to make train travel more financially and time advantageous as compared with car travel would be most effective in encouraging greater rail use. Mention was however made by householders and rail passengers alike that value for money fares, poor traffic conditions and difficulty in parking already made train travel attractive. Basic changes to prices, timings and frequency, for example, would also appear to encourage rural dwellers to make more journeys by rail.

### **Rural rail as an alternative or substitute for car and bus journeys**

8.2.7 Whilst rural railways are touted by some as having attractive modal shift possibilities, this tends not to be borne out in the results. Only a small proportion of passengers could have travelled by car, either as passenger or driver, if they did not use the train. Even fewer would have used a bus service. It appears that many journeys would not have been undertaken at all if a rail service was not available.

### **Are rural railways 'fulfilling their potential'?**

8.2.8 Whilst diverse work, education and shopping destinations act as barriers to use, there is potential to capitalise on the existence of rural railways. Only a small percentage of trips to and from settlements served by rail use the service. Some of their potential is lost through poor integration with the surrounding rail network and other modes. The high levels of arrival and departure on foot could indicate that completing the journey by other methods is currently too difficult to contemplate. Long-term trends, such as traffic growth and the attendant problems of congestion and parking are forecast to continue and will affect rural areas. Rural rail's role in offering a solution to these problems looks set to increase.

## **8.3 Implications for policy**

### **Rural park and ride**

8.3.1 Some of the most rural stations have poor general accessibility and no parking facilities. A walker's-style car park using chippings would allow easier access for rural dwellers to their local stations. It could also permit step-free access for bicycles and disabled users. This facility is suitable and practical for Thornford and Chetnole. For a relatively modest investment (when compared with the cost of most other transportation related improvements) this could offer a worthwhile experiment for an LTP partnership project.

### **Timetabling and connections**

8.3.2 The infrequent and irregular service pattern is a chief complaint of passengers and householders. This could be resolved through :

- Timetable modification to make the times easier to remember, such as with a 'clockface timetable' (on the hour, every other hour, for instance)
- By an hourly timetable (already a priority in LTPs)

- 8.3.3 Better train connections were highlighted as important change which would encourage further rail travel by householders. Connecting services to the Westcountry are more popular than those to London. Improving interchange at Castle Cary, rather than Westbury, is perhaps of greater importance and should be reflected in the emerging Greater Western franchise.
- 8.3.4 The rail link to Yeovil Junction was the joint sixth most frequent comment by householders and half of all householders considered it an important way of encouraging them to make greater use of the railway. Work should continue to promote a link to the Waterloo line in this way.

### **Information**

- 8.3.5 Marketing of the relatively low ticket prices on the B-W line should be prioritised, since this may help clear up misconceptions about 'expensive' tickets and raise the profile of the line more generally. Ticket prices could form part of the information to be found within timetable leaflets. In addition, the interior of the rolling stock could be used to highlight the Heart of Wessex website and to provide tourism information.
- 8.3.6 One of the barriers affecting prospective passengers is the lack of knowledge and information about onward connections from their destination station. The existence of nationwide journey planning tools such as Traveline should be highlighted. Literature, similar to the '*where to catch your bus*' and '*continuing your journey from*' (illustrated in Appendix 11) leaflet series [Transport for London 2002] should be printed and distributed on trains and at stations, or form part of the timetables.

8.3.7 Information at the station is also considered poor. Installation of:

- Real-time information
- Maps illustrating the what surrounds the station

should be considered for stations between and including Yeovil Pen Mill and Dorchester West, in a similar fashion to those at Moreton.

### **Land use policy**

8.3.8 The use of the rural station settlements for development (on the basis of sustainable transport suitability) should generally be avoided. The case study shows that few journeys (both absolutely and relatively) for work, education and shopping will take place by rail, or on public transport more generally. The wide diversity of trip destinations and low potential passenger numbers make public transport difficult to provide economically.

## 9 REFERENCES



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## **10 GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS**

BBC	Bournemouth Borough Council
BR	British Railways Board
B-W line	Bristol to Weymouth Railway Line
CA	Countryside Agency
CRP	Community Rail Partnerships
DCC	Dorset County Council
DETR	Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions
DTLR	Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions
GWR	Great Western Railway
LTT	Local Transport Today
PSR	Passenger Service Requirement
RDC	Rural Development Commission
SCC	Somerset County Council
SRA	Strategic Rail Authority
SWT	South West Trains
TR&IN	Transport Research & Information Network