

THE ROLE OF RURAL RAILWAYS

A case study of the Yeovil to Weymouth section of the
Bristol-Weymouth railway line

James Purkiss

This dissertation is submitted in part fulfilment of the MSc
in Urban Planning

**School of Planning
Oxford Brookes University**

2003



[Thirlwall 1992]

ABSTRACT

Rural railways have been in existence for 150 years and in contraction for the last 80 years. A national programme was instigated in 1963 to close those railways which were not financially viable. Counter-closure arguments tended to highlight the possible hardship this would cause certain sectors of the community.

Existing research on the subject reveals that rural railways have multiple roles. Not only do they provide local accessibility but have implications for national rail travel, for tourism, social exclusion and economic development amongst others.

The original research in this paper is based on the analysis of data from 216 householder questionnaires and 323 rail passenger interviews. These were conducted in the spring of 2003 in West Dorset. This paper outlines the findings from this research and concludes that rural railways in extreme rural areas have mostly local catchments and have more leisure use than use for work and education. Rural dwellers' knowledge about rural railways is poor but rail use tends to exceed that of bus use. Possible policy outcomes include higher profile marketing and information and improved access through the creation of rail park and ride sites.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	i
CONTENTS	ii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	v
PREFACE.....	vi
1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Introduction to study	1
1.2 Relevance to current government policy	1
1.3 Research question and objectives	2
1.4 Explanation of chapters.....	3
2 LITERATURE REVIEW: BACKGROUND	5
2.1 Introduction	5
2.2 Rural transport	5
2.3 History of rural railways	10
2.4 National Policy	14
2.5 Rural railways: a current overview.....	16
3 LITERATURE REVIEW: ROLE OF RURAL RAIL.....	21
3.1 Introduction	21
3.2 Rural railways and local accessibility	22
3.3 Other roles.....	27
3.4 Barriers to increasing usage	33
3.5 Rural railways: conclusions.....	34
4 CASE STUDIES.....	37
4.1 Introduction	37
4.2 Case study line: background.....	37
4.3 Case study line: relevant polices	40
4.4 Case study line: current situation	44
4.5 Case study area: householder postal questionnaire	45
4.6 Conclusion	49
5 METHODOLOGY.....	51
5.1 Previous research techniques	51
5.2 Chosen research techniques	52
5.3 Householder postal questionnaires.....	53
5.4 Rail passenger interviews	59
5.5 Station Audits.....	62
6 ANALYSIS OF RESULTS	66
6.1 Introduction	66
6.2 Rail travellers: travel patterns.....	66
6.3 Rail passengers: comments	79
6.4 Rail passengers: opinion and knowledge.....	80
6.5 Households: travel patterns.....	83
6.6 Householders: rail travel patterns.....	87
6.7 Householder comments on public transport.....	89
6.8 Householder's opinion and knowledge	90
6.9 Station Audits.....	96

7	DISCUSSION	102
7.1	Introduction	102
7.2	How passengers use the rural railway	102
7.3	How rural dwellers use rural railways	105
7.4	Opinions and knowledge	109
8	CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS	113
8.1	Introduction	113
8.2	Research conclusions.....	113
8.3	Implications for policy.....	115
9	REFERENCES	118
10	GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS	124
11	APPENDICES.....	125

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Title	Page
2.1	England's rural and urban wards	7
2.2	Cloke's index of rurality	8
2.3	Reporting of Transport Users' Consultative Committee decision on closure of Okehampton line in Devon	11
2.4	The passenger rail network: 1963 and 1984	13
2.5	The current geographical distribution of rural railway lines	17
3.1	Social Exclusion Unit's accessibility definition	31
4.1	The Bristol- Weymouth line	38
4.2	Bristol-Weymouth line's designation in the Regional Transport Strategy	41
4.3	Case study parishes	47
4.4	Bus services in the case study area	48
5.1	Unexpected questionnaire responses	59
5.2	Chetnole Station	64
5.3	Maiden Newton station	64
5.4	Thornford station	64
5.5	Yetminster station	64
6.1	Passenger use of the line through the day : Bristol-Weymouth	67
6.2	Passenger use of the line through the day : Weymouth- Bristol	67
6.3	Purpose of rail journeys	68
6.4	Journey purpose and frequency of use	69
6.5	Rail passengers' origin location	71
6.6	Rail passengers' origin station	72
6.7	Rail passengers' destination station	76
6.8	Rail passengers' destination locations	77
6.9	Rail passengers' alternatives to using the train	78
6.10	Use of suggested alternative means of travel	79
6.11	Categorisation of rail passenger comments	79
6.12	Rail passenger perception of ticket prices	80
6.13	Likely journeys on winter Sunday mornings	82
6.14	Level of household car ownership in the study area	83
6.15	Questionnaire comment responses	89
6.16	Householder opinion of ticket prices	91
6.17	Number of trains running in one direction on a weekday: householder estimates	93
6.18	Factors encouraging greater use of rail by householders	94
7.1	Thornford Station: poor access	108

LIST OF TABLES

Figure	Title	Page
2.1	The OECD definition of rural	6
2.2	Other typologies of rural areas	9
3.1	Use of trains	22
3.2	Degree of interchange by rural rail travellers	24
4.1	Regional transport studies	40
4.2	Local Transport Plan consultation responses	42
4.3	Frequency of train use in 1992 :Weymouth- Yeovil section	44
4.4	Case study parishes	46
5.1	Householder questionnaire locations	53
5.2	Information gathered from householder questionnaires	55
5.3	Level of questionnaire responses	56
5.4	Survey population breakdown	57
5.5	Profile of form fillers	57
5.6	Rail passenger interview dates	60
5.7	Trains surveyed	60
5.8	Categories of information recorded for station audits	63
6.1	Passengers on the train: age breakdown	68
6.2	Rail passengers' frequency of use of line	70
6.3	Origin locations of rail passengers	70
6.4	Method of arrival at origin station	74
6.5	Method of journey continuation from destination station	74
6.6	Destination locations of rail passengers	75
6.7	Top 5 rail passenger comments	80
6.8	Mode of travel to work/ education: Maiden Newton	84
6.9	Mode of travel to work/ education: Wriggle Valley villages	85
6.10	Proportion of households using trains	87
6.11	Proportion of households using buses	87
6.12	Use of rail to visit Weymouth	88
6.13	Top 10 comments by householders	90
6.14	Effects of increased knowledge of the timetable	90
7.1	Frequency of train use- Weymouth- Yeovil section	104
7.2	Rail travellers and local population: age breakdown	104

PREFACE

For a long time (until this week, really) this dissertation seemed unending. In my opinion, it wouldn't have been completed at all if it were not for the support and help of a whole group of people.

I would like to thank my tutor, Peter Headicar, for piling on the guilt and ensuring I knuckled down to work when I had 'better' things to do with my life- the painstaking examination of my questionnaire drafts and comments on the script were enormously helpful. Grateful thanks must also go to the Economic & Social Research Council and Rees Jeffreys Road Fund for their financial support over the last two years, which has allowed me to pursue my chosen career through this course.

I would like to thank the staff of the Environmental Services Directorate of Dorset County Council; to Beryl Ellis, Stephen Hardy, Barry Thirlwall, Adrian Welsh, Peter White and Paul Willis, whose support has been enduring over the last 5 years. Particular thanks to Kate Tunks for helping with the interviews and keeping me company on the train! Also I must thank Joanna Dixon of Wessex Trains and Bernard Lane of the Heart of Wessex Rail Partnership, without whom the quality of rail data collection would not have been possible.

Thanks also to my friends in Dorchester, in particular to Jacki, to Ross and to Sarah. Thanks to everyone for pre-testing the questionnaire and not mentioning the project too much.

Of course, principally affected have been my three planner housemates- Dave, Matt and Sarah- and I would like to apologise for the high levels of stress I have shown over the preceding months. Cheers for all the discussions over how to move the project forward and the hundreds of offers of cups of tea- It's you and Fox FM that got me through this!

Whilst my maternal grandparents did not live to see me attend university, their financial support ensured I did so. May this dissertation be a reminder of their generosity.

I dedicate this work to my parents.

29 May 2003

1 INTRODUCTION



A passenger awaits a southbound train at Thornford station

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to study

1.1.1 As a topic for discussion over the last few years, UK railways can hardly be accused of having a low-key media presence. Privatisation, a succession of major rail accidents, the demise of Railtrack and the continuing wrangles and changes of direction over re-franchising have, amongst other issues, never been far from the front pages or headlines.

1.1.2 The publication of the transport white paper in 1998 was the first statement of general government transport policy for over two decades. In terms of rural railways, it asserted that '*rural rail services provide an alternative to the car and for some journeys one that is not easily substituted by bus*'. In addition it considered that '*many of them are not delivering their full potential*' [Cm 3950:148]

1.2 Relevance to current government policy

1.2.1 Understanding the role which rural railways play is important for at least three reasons.

- Firstly, the government is exhorting people to make a modal shift onto rail and other non-car modes. It is not clear whether rural railways are appropriate for this task.
- Secondly, the current government has launched the 'New Deal for Communities' which seeks to overcome social exclusion, partly through better transport links. Little research exists examining the degree to which rural rail services reduce social exclusion.
- Thirdly, the possibility of closure makes greater knowledge all the more important to assist in informing the debate surrounding their future.

To conclude, many strands of government policy appear to make assumptions about use of rural railways and people's assumptions towards using them. Little research exists to confirm these assumptions.

1.3 Research question and objectives

Research question

1.3.1 This research will investigate the detail behind government statements and assumptions. The research question therefore asks:

What are the roles of railways in rural areas?

Objectives

1.3.2 This dissertation will aim to answer the following questions:

- For what journeys are rural railways used?
- How are rural railways perceived?

In answer to the government's statement, (quoted in para. 1.1.2) this research will also investigate whether:

- Rural railways provide an alternative or substitute for car and bus journeys
- Rural railways are '*fulfilling their potential*'

1.3.3 The relationship of rural railways to social exclusion and economic development issues is briefly commented upon in the literature review but is not covered in depth in the original research.

1.4 Explanation of chapters

1.4.1 Chapter 2 examines previous literature on the subject of rural railways.

Chapter 3 concentrates on examining the various roles which have been attributed to rural railways. Chapter 4 illustrates the location of rural railways across the UK and informs the reader of the background to the Dorset case study area. Chapter 5 sets out the methodology used in the research exercise and the results of the research are analysed in Chapter 6. The results are discussed in Chapter 7 and conclusions offered in relation to the research objectives are set out in Chapter 8.