

Analysis of proposal for turnback signal at Clifton Down on Severn Beach Line

Background

- Originally proposed in Network Rail (NR) 2007 Business Plan, listed as pending “Third party funding”
- Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways received a letter from Mark Bradshaw confirming that Bristol City Council intends to provide some funding for the turnback facility
- Would enable trains to terminate at Clifton Down and return back to Temple Meads
- Currently trains can only terminate at Avonmouth or Severn Beach without requiring shunting or assistance from a pilotman

Reasons for implementation & response

- “In times of disruption terminate late running Avonmouth / Severn Beach services”
 - Line Development Plan (LDP)
 - The LDP was written at a time when the branch operated an hourly shuttle service with just 8 minutes turnaround. Now, trains rotate with over double this turnaround time
 - Train travel is the most reliable form of local transport and in recent times there have been no occasions when turning trains would have been appropriate in order for their return trips to run to time.
 - Terminating trains at Clifton Down would lead to a lack in confidence for existing and potential passengers and could potentially lead to a decline in use for the entire line
- “Enable a more frequent service pattern on the Temple Meads to Clifton section, which is the most heavily used and has the potential for maximum growth in patronage” - LDP
 - Comparing Office of Rail Regulation ticket sales figures (ORR figures) over one and two years worth of figures, there is less than a 3% difference in the increase of passengers boarding or alighting at stations between Lawrence Hill & Redland and between Sea Mills & Avonmouth
 - Clifton Down is the busiest station on the branch with over 180,000 passengers boarding or alighting here according to ORR figures - 25% of passengers using this station are travelling in or coming from the northbound direction
 - Stations past Clifton are poorly connected by alternative public transport - there are minimal direct buses to the Temple Meads area and bus routes from the City Centre to Avonmouth take up to 53 minutes versus 25 minutes by train from Temple Meads. The Park & Ride route which stops outside Shirehampton station only runs during the day on Monday to Saturday
 - Capacity on the main line, and the present service on the branch would prevent ambitious service enhancements - NR documents say the main line is already at 70%-90% capacity
- “Permit a trial Sunday service, for example linking Clifton with Weston-super-Mare, without consuming an extra train unit resource” - LDP
 - The current timetable has a Sunday service operating all the way to Avonmouth - this could be further enhanced with extended opening of St Andrews Road signalbox

Future service reductions past Clifton Down

- An outline business case report for the Great Western Franchise drawn up for the Department for Transport by Jacobs Consultancy recommended truncating the Severn Beach Line at Clifton Down
 - The report claims that the principal barrier to implementation of the recommendation is the present “nature of the signalling.” If this principal barrier is removed then there is nothing to say that this proposal will not be implemented in the future