

## **Route Prospectus Bristol to Weymouth Line**

### 1. Geography and History

The Bristol to Weymouth (Heart of Wessex) Line is served by up to eight daily services each way on a series of routes shared with other services, including, for some sections of the route, main line services. Only the section of the route between Castle Cary and Dorchester Junction is used exclusively by Bristol to Weymouth trains, other sections being shared with other local, regional and long-distance services. This application is therefore for Designation as Community Rail Services of the local passenger services between Bristol Temple Meads and Weymouth which are operated by through trains on this route, including those which start/terminate at Frome. The following stations are also included: Keynsham, Oldfield Park, Bath Spa, Freshford, Avoncliff, Bradford-on-Avon, Trowbridge, Westbury, Frome, Bruton, Castle Cary, Yeovil Pen Mill, Thornford, Yetminster, Chetnole, Maiden Newton, Dorchester West, Upwey and Weymouth. Note that the stations at Keynsham, Oldfield Park, Bath Spa and Freshford are also the responsibility of the Severnside Community Rail Partnership. The designation does not extend to services to the north of Bristol Temple Meads on which these trains may also operate.

The line has been supported by a partnership of Local Authorities along the route since 1998 (as the Bristol to Weymouth Rail Partnership), with a revised and expanded strategy from 2003. At this time both the line and the partnership were rebranded as **Heart of Wessex**, and a new Action Plan implemented to:

- 1) Widen the partnership to include local communities, and to improve understanding of and response to local needs along the line
- 2) Improve quality and availability of information promoting the line and its destinations and raise the profile of the service as an alternative to the private car
- 3) Improve station environments and facilities and access to them by other modes of travel.

### 2. Community Rail Partnership

Since 2003 the Heart of Wessex Rail Partnership has developed into a community rail partnership having built up significant input to station adoption, improvements to access, promotion and improved information from local community groups along the line, including a large number of regular volunteers. The community representatives now have their own working group, meeting quarterly with the train operator and Network Rail (the Community Rail Working Party). Seven members of this group have been recognised in the ACoRP annual awards, including three Outstanding Volunteer Contributions (two in 1<sup>st</sup> place, one in 2<sup>nd</sup>).

The members of the Heart of Wessex Rail Partnership, and the Client Group who have agreed to this prospectus, are:

Bristol City Council, Bath & North East Somerset Council, Wiltshire Council, Somerset County Council, South Somerset District Council, West Dorset District Council, Dorset County Council, First Great Western and the Community Rail Working Party.

### 3. Objectives for Designation as a Community Rail Service.

The purpose of Designation is to give more freedom to the operator and community in running the service and stations, and the national objectives for Community Rail Development are to increase revenue, manage down costs and encourage greater community involvement in the local railway. For the Heart of Wessex Line Designation will:

- Endorse the existing level of active community participation in the service and stations, and give impetus to further expansion of community support from local organisations and businesses.
- By raising the profile of the rail partnership, assist with building further awareness of the line and revenue from it, and with further development of initiatives to promote more sustainable visits to local economies and tourist destinations in partnership with local organisations.

- Give impetus to development of proposals for an improved service in partnership with a wider stakeholder base, to better meet the current and future needs of the local economies, businesses and communities along the route.
- Support a continued focus on improving accessibility to public transport for the communities served by the route in partnership with Local Authorities and communities, and explore the potential for collaboration with Local Strategic Partnerships / Local Economic Partnerships in integrating the Heart of Wessex Line into broader strategies to tackle carbon reduction and congestion issues.
- Give access to the Designated Line Fund, which offers an opportunity for match funding for projects that contribute to building business and local involvement on community rail lines.
- Enable the Heart of Wessex CRP to be a participant in the national Designated Line meetings and seminars organised by ACORP and DfT.

#### 4) Key measures of success

a) Increasing patronage and revenue. The principal measurement for this, and for the partnership's work in general, has always been passenger journey data. Since 2003 passenger journeys on Heart of Wessex Line services have increased from 707k to 1632k or 131%, compared with 68.5% growth for Severn and Solent lines in total (based on FGW stats), and 44% growth on Regional Routes nationally (ORR stats) over the same period. 2010/11 was the first year in which the Heart of Wessex Line did not grow above the regional average, growing 7.5% against 8.3% for the Severn and Solent lines in total. There has been no change to the number of services on the Heart of Wessex line, and it may be that further growth at the substantial level achieved so far may be constricted by capacity, but at minimum continued growth above the national average for Regional Routes would be a reasonable expectation from the higher profile, and potential expansion of community participation, following Designation.

b) Community participation. Almost all the stations along the line have now been adopted, and a number of community groups have in addition generated projects to improve access to stations, and promote the line through their own local publications, websites and events. The potential for further incremental annual increases in the number of volunteers, projects and communities contributing to improving patronage on the route would be increased with the high profile endorsement that would be supplied by Designation, and could be included in annual measures of success.

c) Local Transport Plans for the five transport authorities all focus on increased community participation in public transport, with CRPs including the Heart of Wessex featured as examples of good practice in this area. Projects led by the partnership have provided examples of Best Practice, particularly in Rural Accessibility, for both Local Authorities and the Commission for Rural Communities. Another proposed measure of success, therefore, would be to supply one Best Practice case study each year from amongst the partnership's projects that would help to demonstrate delivery of community driven projects specified in broader Local Authority objectives.