**South Hampshire Rail Users Group’s Report [Hog Rider]**

**No 151 (Mid-April to August 2016)**

Contains evidence-based reports, research, analysis and discussion from the South Hampshire Rail Users’ Group (SHRUG), and complements our widely-researched History of South West Trains under Stagecoach [see www.shrug.info].

**New Prime Minister raises hopes of asset- stripping, tax-evading, ethically-limited Stagecoach’s exit from South West Trains**

**Regular SWT passengers have little hope of ever getting a fair deal under Stagecoach. The company’s Chairman believes that “ethics are not irrelevant but some are incompatible with what we have to do because capitalism is based on greed”. Along with his sister, he owns a quarter of the company’s shares, and low customer service standards have helped boost their wealth to over a billion pounds.**

* **Theresa May has commendably condemned companies which strip assets and try to reduce their tax liabilities.**
* **The two Stagecoach founders have acquired a billion-pound fortune, including two castles and two mansions.**
* **Twenty years ago Stagecoach took over SWT and collapsed the service by disposing of drivers. Director Brian Cox called passengers “Fully paid up members of the Hindsight Club”.**
* **Two decades of stripping assets followed. Staff went in relays. Busy travel centres went. 120 good-quality ‘Wessex Electric’ coaches went, fuelling today’s overcrowding. Ticket office opening hours reduced. Day return off-peak tickets outside the London suburban area now offer only a nominal reduction (often 10p) compared with peak tickets. A leaflet announced that innocent mistakes in buying tickets could result in penalty fares and/or prosecution. Dodgy PR and statistics are rife, promoted in a new twice-yearly Customer Report.**
* **Examples of other Stagecoach achievements: Southampton bus station was sold for development. The southern sector of Hampshire Bus was hived off. Manston Airport was sold for development against David Cameron’s express wishes. East London Buses was sold and re-purchased at a fraction of the sale price. Poor safety standards on buses have incurred fines and operating restrictions.**
* **More recently, Stagecoach had to pay £11 million in tax after deliberate manipulation to reduce its liability.**

**The Public Accounts Committee and resigning rail minister Claire Perry highlight exactly the kind of franchise failings illustrated in our History of South West Trains under Stagecoach.**

**The Appendix to this item illustrates how Mrs Perry’s Department has remained in robust denial of what she actually believes**

The influential Public Accounts Committee considers that DfT still lacks a coherent strategic vision for rail, creating “a risk that it will make decisions now that prove costly in the future”. Chairman Meg Hillier stated: “It is vital more work is done to ensure the franchise system delivers promised service improvements to passengers and value for money to taxpayers. We are particularly concerned about the effects of declining competition within the programme. By its own measure, the department requires at least three bids per competition to increase the likelihood of receiving quality bids. Yet last week, it was announced that only two companies will compete to run the South Western franchise from June next year”. [Guardian 12.2.2016]

Resigning rail minister Claire Perry recently told MPs there are “fundamental failures” in the rail system: “There has been a disdain for people, for passengers, at the heart of the railways for decades”; “we have a highly complicated structure in the industry”; “we also have an investment structure that is broken, where the government steps in over and over again, to buy rolling stock”; “the other problem is the contractual levers are really poor.” [Private Eye, Issue 1424]

The Invitation to Tender for the new South Western franchise, and summary of the views expressed in response to the Department’s Stakeholder Consultation, were both delayed from April to July 2016. The current SWT franchise, already extended from February to June 2017, may be further extended to August 2017.

If that’s not bad enough, RAIL, Issue 806, reports that the quality premium for the new franchise is understood to have been ditched. The DfT’s Stakeholder Consultation stated, “The new South Western franchise will be expected to deliver a transformation in the way the railway serves its markets and communities. We are seeking a franchisee who will deliver benefits to passengers through increased capacity, a high quality passenger experience, and improved collaboration with a range of stakeholders”.

That would effectively rule out the possibility of Stagecoach getting a further franchise term. However, we understand from industry sources that the required basic premium is being revised upwards to allow for inflation, so the competition is likely to be wide open with another ‘plain vanilla’ franchise in the offing.

Very conveniently, Stagecoach has been introducing a range of over-hyped token changes such as occasional trains between Yeovil Junction and Yeovil Pen Mill, and a direct early morning summer Saturday service from Portsmouth to Southampton via Southampton Airport which accounts for an exciting 7 extra trains annually! What about the three years of leaking roofs, broken toilets and scaffolding at Brockenhurst station?

**Appendix**

**Letters from regular Guildford rail user Jeremy Varns to Anne Milton MP**

**21.5.2016**

“Thank you for seeking a reply to my concerns from the Rail Minister, Claire Perry. It is perhaps worth noting that I have not, in fact, 'simultaneously' written to the Department for Transport on the same issues. I can only assume that this is a reference to my own submission for the South West Trains franchise consultation.

As the Minister recommends, I have been in dialogue with Transport Focus. Unfortunately, while generally agreeing with my concerns they have referred me to yourself and the Department for Transport as most of the issues raised fall outside of their remit.

The Minister cites an EU Regulation from 2007 regarding a fair bidding process prior to awarding a rail franchise. The DfT's current guidelines which were published in 2011 require 3–5 full bids to be submitted. The Minister fails to make reference to the fact that the current EU Directive requires governments to stimulate demand thereby increasing competition and encouraging new entrants into the market. Passengers have a right to know why the DfT has spectacularly failed to meet these objectives and why the requirements for a competitive franchising process, based on their own criteria, are not being met.

The Minister states that SSWT is compliant under the terms of the current franchise agreement. Rail users would be right to question such an assertion. The company has missed its punctuality targets for both mainline and suburban services over the past 12 months. This is despite running a timetable that is in many cases slower than in the 1960s and utilising every available lever to manipulate performance figures regardless of the inconvenience caused to passengers.

Weekend services are in many cases falling well below the levels of frequency the company is obliged to provide under its current contract. Repeated train faults and staff shortages are commonplace on the network and the company has recently cut maintenance spending by over 30%. Carriages are entering service without working toilets, with door faults, and with litter from the previous day or longer. Deep cleaning has been slashed from monthly to yearly. This is the reality for those using SWT in 2016. Is this something the Rail Minister is aware of or indeed concerned by?

The £50 million of 'additional investment' is significantly less than what the company is receiving in revenue support payments. Many people may also rightly ask why the train company is allowed to run down the network for over 8 years and then get a helping hand from the DfT for the final 18 months of its contract. It could be concluded that the Department is favouring the incumbent operator prior to awarding a new 10-year term. Several SWT employees have recently taken to social media claiming that it’s widely acknowledged within the company that Stagecoach will win the franchise, implying that the whole bidding process including the 'consultation' has in fact been a farce with the intention of deceiving passengers and the wider public.

Stagecoach SWT is increasingly omitting information from the Journey Check facility on a daily basis. Such omissions include short formations, broken ticket vending machines and closed ticket offices. Does the Department rely on the same self-reporting system that is letting passengers down? If so, why are independent checks not taking place? Guards, revenue and gate-line staff are not aware of breaches to the queuing standards, ticket office closures or faulty ticket machines. On one occasion earlier this month, almost unbelievably 3 of the 4 services I used in a single day were short-formed yet not one was reported on Journey Check.

Addlestone ticket office was closed last week due to a member of staff being on holiday; this repeated closure was not reported by SWT and no attempts were made to find cover as you would expect in any other type of business. This example is by no means unique. The following station ticket offices I have visited in the past month have been closed during advertised opening hours without any information passed onto passengers via Journey Check: Esher, Farncombe, Guildford, Woking (multiple occasions), Milford, Basingstoke (multiple occasions), Southampton Central, Poole and Weybridge. I should add that I have only visited 3 other stations during this time so perhaps this will contextualise the extent of problems I have observed.

The company is increasingly using a third party to operate ticket barriers, and in many cases I have witnessed staff being unaware of basic ticket rules and conditions or carriage such as the ability to make a break of journey on a non-advance ticket. Guards are incentivised to charge higher prices on trains for tickets where the passenger may have not been able to buy at the station. No independent checks have been published on waiting times outside of London since 2012 when 40% of passengers at Guildford were found to be waiting longer than the approved standard of 3 minutes off-peak and 5 minutes at peak times. Stagecoach continues to exploit the lack of reporting and accountability to further understaff stations and illegally block those from entering a station via barriers even when there is clear intention from the passenger that they wish to buy a ticket.

We hear repeated excuses from SWT and ATOC that the railways 'are full'. The railways are not full. They are not even close to being full. With some imagination, targeted investment and a different policy on pricing, rail use could increase significantly within the constraints of the current network. If companies such as SWT were required to utilise rolling stock rather than having it parked up in sidings for most of the day, capacity would increase and prices could significantly fall to encourage changes in demand. There cannot be a continued incentive for train operating companies such as SSWT to cut train lengths to save on leasing charges and boost profits.

I would like to end by copying a recent comment made on social media by a SWT passenger which sums up the feelings of a significant number of other rail users:

“It is difficult to envisage a privatised service which is run so flagrantly in the interests of the operator, with appalling rolling stock, perpetual over-crowding and utter unreliability naturally resulting in significant bonuses every year for senior management. Since it is a monopoly, there is no ability to choose a competitor whilst the watchdogs simply have no interest in the commuter and no concern for the public interest. *PompeyDrifter”*

I hope that the Minister will take seriously the significant amount of passenger feedback available online which includes repeated anecdotal evidence of closed ticket offices and over-crowding due to short formations which I experience on an almost daily basis. I am concerned that if the Minister and Department are in denial about the extent of problems on SWT, the franchise process will continue to be further undermined.”

**15.7.2016**

Thank you for seeking a reply from the Rail Minister, Claire Perry.

Unfortunately, my concerns have not been addressed and the Minister has not answered my specific question about who is responsible for measuring performance indicators (short formations, ticket office closures and ticket

machine failures).

Regarding the franchising process, I have included a quote from the BBC website, 12th February 2016 entitled, ''Lack of interest in running rail franchises, MPs warn”:

“‘MPs noted that the DfT - which is responsible for awarding rail franchises in England and Wales to private sector companies - requires at least three bids per franchise to ‘create competitive tension’.

And from the National Audit Office 24th November 2015 entitled; “Reform of the rail franchising programme”:

3.21 'The number of bids the Department has received under the current franchising programme is lower than the historic trend. For each of the first three competitions (taking the InterCity East Coast competition to be the first) **the Department has received three bids, which is the minimum the Department considers is necessary to ensure good quality bids**.'

There is no reference made to the EU Regulation cited by the Minister in the National Audit Office document yet it would appear that the Minister thinks that this is more relevant than the Department for Transport's own guidelines. It is also unclear as to how having fewer bids will lead to a more competitive bidding process or how the Department can be credited for stimulating demand while attracting the **lowest ever level of bids compared with previous competitions**.

The Minister has not answered my question as to the body responsible for measuring SWT's compliance and whether it is reliant on the company's own self-reporting procedures.

I am happy to provide video evidence of closed ticket offices when no issues have been reported on the company's reporting app, Journey Check. Some recent examples include:

Esher 1st July 14:19

Weybridge 1st July 14:50

Godalming 2nd July 13:12

Woking 29th June 21:25, 30th June 21:05, 2nd July 20:40

Fleet 3rd July 15:10

Basingstoke 6th July 21:05, 7th July 20:58, July 13th 21:03

Despite operating SWT for 20 years, queues continue to regularly exceed 10 minutes at stations (most recent queue I timed was at Basingstoke 10th July 13:25 – 11 min wait) and yet no measures are ever put in place to reduce waiting times and passengers are denied entry into the station where queues are in breach of the agreed standards. Ticket machines continue to overcharge passengers including no standard class option for certain journeys, and peak tickets during weekends where super off-peak applies all day. What legitimate reason is there for this please?

The Minister says that SWT is compliant, based on the franchise agreement. This clearly demonstrates how low the bar has been set in terms of franchise specification and oversight. And of course, with the current ongoing debacle at Southern, also deemed 'compliant' according to the Minister, the DfT and politicians appear increasingly out of touch with passengers. Even with timetable padding **SWT's performance is currently below its charter standards** which isn't surprising given the fact it fails to meet any of its other 'promises' attached to its meaningless 'Passenger Charter'.

I would also like clarification as to how South West Trains and the DfT can claim an additional 57,000 seats per week across the network when around **47,500 PER DAY have been cut** during the current franchise (190 shortened trains multiplied by average number of seats per single train formation of 250).

The usual spin prior to awarding a franchise is clearly favouring the incumbent, and along with the absence of a proper competition, passengers and tax payers are set to lose out. I hope when Stagecoach are awarded the next contract there will be a legal challenge from First as the whole

franchising process up to this point has been a farce.

**Govia reportedly got a poor deal on the amalgamated GTR franchise; yet its passengers’ consequent sufferings are being cynically used to misrepresent Stagecoach’s SWT as one of the better London and South East franchises**

Govia’s Southern franchise (now part of GTR) has long been regarded as offering better value for money than Stagecoach’s SWT. For example, an off-peak day return by Southern from Southampton Central to Brighton (62 miles) costs £15.40. An off-peak day return by SWT from Southampton Central to Weymouth (63 miles) costs £27.00.

The recent disruption on the amalgamated GTR franchise therefore came as a surprise and disappointment. The reasons are now clearer. Soon after the unexpected resignation of the popular rail minister Claire Perry, quoting the failure of GTR, The Times of 18.7.2016 reported that the contract which DfT offered Govia had seriously underestimated the disruptive effects of infrastructure work at London Bridge and had offered fifty more drivers than were actually available. In addition, it appears that the DfT and unions are now waging war over the heads of both Govia and their passengers.

In our previous newsletter, we reported how SWT had apparently jumped the gun by producing a ‘Customer Report’ along the lines which DfT had set out in its Stakeholder Consultation as a possible requirement of the new franchise.

The "Overall satisfaction of London and South East" in the Customer Report was as misleading as a Brexit Bus slogan. It included some wholly favorable comparisons with Transport Focus' Autumn 2015 ratings for Govia’s Southern and Thameslink operations (which had already been amalgamated) and for South Eastern (likewise badly affected by the London Bridge infrastructure work).

It ignored Transport Focus’ ratings for the other 'London and South East' operators: Abellio Greater Anglia; C2C; Chiltern Railways; Gatwick Express; Great Northern; Great Western Railway; Heathrow Connect; Heathrow Express; London Midland; London Overground; and TfL Rail.

So SWT’s position among the train operating companies was cynically misrepresented:

Overall passenger satisfaction

SWT’s Customer Report: Best of 4.

Transport Focus’ original data: Joint 10th best out of 15.

Punctuality and reliability

SWT’s Customer Report: Best of 4.

Transport Focus’ original data: 9th best out of 15.

Frequency of trains

SWT’s Customer Report: Best of 4.

Transport Focus’ original data: Joint 9th best out of 15.

Satisfaction with ticket buying facilities

SWT’s Customer Report: Best of 4.

Transport Focus’ original data: 5th best out of 15.

DfT has since e’mailed us to clarify that this was not a Customer Report as envisaged in their Consultation on the SWT franchise, but a Customer Report as agreed during the abortive negotiations for an extension of the current SWT franchise period (for which Stagecoach apparently wanted a poor deal for the taxpayers it had also been trying to cheat of £11 million)! DfT did not, however, respond to points about Stagecoach’s inaccuracies and statistical manipulation in the Customer Report.

Forward to Transport Focus’ Spring 2016 Survey. A bright panel on SWT’s website declares, “South West Trains rated one of the best in London and the South East” with “significant (year-on-year) improvement in many of the 37 categories”. Really? Transport Focus itself records significant improvements in only five areas:

Ticket buying facilities up 5%;

Connections with other forms of transport up 5%, but that is largely something out of SWT’s control;

The frequency of trains up 5%, despite only minimal service increases;

Value for money of the price of the ticket up 5% to just 40%, but with 36% positively dissatisfied; and

Sufficient space to sit or stand up 4% to 64%, but with 22% positively dissatisfied.

**National Rail Passenger Survey for Spring 2016: South West Trains remains generally worse than five years ago**

Transport Focus’ latest independent survey confirms that SWT appears incapable of sustained progress following Stagecoach’s asset-stripping. Overall satisfaction is 82% compared with 85% in Spring 2011. Satisfaction with punctuality/reliability has crashed from 86% to 75% over the same period. Satisfaction with space to sit/stand on trains has reduced from 69% to 64%. Satisfaction with train toilet facilities is down from 36% to 32%. The score for how well the company deals with delays remains stuck at 33%. The score for the attitude and helpfulness of staff has increased from 68% to just 69% on trains and 70% on stations. Value for money has risen from 37% to just 40% - that’s equivalent to a 0.6% average annual improvement in delivering passengers’ prime aspiration.

**First Group’s Great Western rated more highly than Stagecoach’s SWT**

MTR is now to bid jointly with First Group for the new SWT franchise, on the

basis of a 30% share. It has ended its bid for the West Midlands franchise,

so presumably thinks First Group’s proposals have a good chance of success.

This, incidentally, leaves West Midlands as the second franchise with only two

bidders.

So how do Stagecoach’s ratings for SWT compare with First Group’s ratings on adjacent Great Western in Transport Focus’ Spring 2016 passenger satisfaction survey?

Of the 36 topics surveyed, Great Western’s scores are higher on 25, equal on 4, and lower on 7.

It might be argued that some Great Western services have inter-city rolling stock, and could be expected to be rated more highly. So did SWT’s Waterloo-Portsmouth and Waterloo-Weymouth services before Stagecoach downgraded them.

The biggest differentials in the scoring are:

* Value for money: First scores 50% and Stagecoach 40%.
* Attitudes and helpfulness of station staff: First scores 79% and Stagecoach 70%.
* Car parking facilities: First scores 56% and Stagecoach 48%. Perhaps this explains why car parks are suddenly being extended at a number of SWT stations.
* Availability of station staff: First scores 69% and Stagecoach 56%.
* Availability of station seating: First scores 55% and Stagecoach 41%.
* Toilet facilities on trains: First scores 45% and Stagecoach 32%.
* Sufficient room to sit/stand on trains: First scores 72% and Stagecoach 64%.
* Dealing with delays: First scores 42% and Stagecoach 33%.

Stagecoach does score 80% for connections with other forms of transport, and First only 71%, but that is not something over which the operators have much control.

First’s partner in its bid for SWT, MTR (which runs Hong Kong’s Mass Transit Railway) already has a 50% interest in the hugely improved London Overground operation, and has been chosen to operate the Elizabeth Line (Crossrail). With SWT’s inner-suburban services likely to transfer to London Overground, MTR’s involvement in SWT would be a logical step.

**Those new, lower, performance targets: to say passengers are 65% satisfied with SWT is as meaningful as saying voters are 48% satisfied with the EU**

DfT tells us that SWT spent six months benchmarking its performance, so it’s clear that the spurious and very low new targets were set to reflect what it thought it could achieve, rather than to improve its service to passengers. Quite how a 50% target for ease of completing a transaction with SWT, a 40% target for whether a passenger would recommend SWT to friends and family, and a 65% target for satisfaction with a journey on SWT is relevant to the DfT’s ambition of a world class national rail network is anyone’s guess.

DfT says that the percentage score “represents a percentage of the maximum achievable score. All customers responding with 5 (Very Good) would therefore equate to 100%, whereas all customers responding with 1 (Very dissatisfied) would equate to 0%. SSWT state that they used this approach, rather than convert the scale of 1-5 into two binary satisfied / dissatisfied categories, as it allows the company to monitor changes in satisfaction more sensitively.”

Note that this seems to contradict SWT’s claim that the research is independent. In fact, passengers find out about it through the following repeated announcement on Twitter: ‘Give us your feedback for a chance to win £100 travel vouchers! Survey takes just a couple of minutes to complete: <http://www.tellswt.co.uk>’. No chance that people might find something positive to say in order to stand a chance of winning the vouchers?

In addition, the average passenger satisfaction level produced is arguably LESS sensitive than Transport Focus’ data on the percentage of passengers in each of their rating bands. It’s interesting to speculate whether the new targets are a trial exercise before transferring responsibility for surveys from independent Transport Focus to the franchise operators themselves.

With or without targets, history shows that Stagecoach doesn’t deliver. Ten years ago, its big promise for the current SWT franchise was a ‘Right Time Railway’. Despite a slower timetable, missing booked stops or terminating trains short of their destination on an ad hoc basis, and shutting doors in the faces of boarding passengers, this is far from being realised. Stagecoach perhaps sees this as progress, given that the previous franchise had been reduced from twenty years to three because of SWT’s unacceptable performance under its stewardship, but its passengers have now suffered two decades of failure.

The Customer Report includes the Managing Director’s observation that this year SWT will be ‘introducing a range of new improvements for passengers which will make a real difference to your experience with us’. RAIL magazine, issue 801, has since reported that SWT has ‘put in place a package of measures to cut costs and increase efficiencies’.

Twitter reveals that the reduced availability of ticket office staff is linked with their being re-trained as ‘customer ambassadors’ (who will simply oversee passengers left to get their tickets from machines). So disadvantage is heaped on disadvantage for passengers paying ever more. It’s extraordinary how often the booking offices at busy stations such as Woking, Weymouth, Bournemouth and Brockenhurst are closed during opening hours.

**Stagecoach’s aggressive bidding destroying the franchise system?**

Remember how First Group’s bid for a new West Coast franchise was initially successful? The existing operator, Virgin Trains (49% owned by Stagecoach), then threatened to seek a judicial review on the basis that the evaluation process had been flawed. The popularity of the Virgin brand ensured big public support, and the chaos which followed is estimated to have cost taxpayers around £50 million.

Could the Stagecoach arm of Virgin Trains have conceived this challenge? Stagecoach won the current SWT franchise with a bid that was some £600 million more than any of the rival bids, and was never going to be deliverable. So the DfT’s ‘expectation’ of reduced season ticket rates for shoulder-peak travel was forgotten; off-peak day return fares for many journeys were raised virtually to peak rates; station car parking charges saw huge increases; overcrowding soared when 120 carriages were taken off-lease; busy travel centres were closed; ticket office hours were reduced; and a vicious penalty fares regime introduced.

Despite so many measures at the expense of passengers, profits were below forecast, and Stagecoach’s premium to government was heavily rebated. Isn’t it likely to be the case, therefore, that the Virgin-Stagecoach partnership questioned the evaluation of First’s bid for West Coast simply because Stagecoach knew that the evaluation of its own bid for SWT had been flawed, though to its own advantage?

Forward to the new East Coast franchise. East Coast became a successful and popular railway in the public sector, but that ended when Virgin East Coast (90% Stagecoach-owned) took over. The Guardian of 1.7.2015 reported that the subsequent reduction in Advanced fares meant that many passengers were facing 100 per cent stealth increases.

Unsurprisingly, a report commissioned by the Rail Regulator has found ‘irrefutable’ evidence that competition on East Coast’s London-Edinburgh services would bring significant economic benefits. (Source: The Times 9.5.2016).

First Group is accordingly to be allowed to run five return services daily between the two capital cities, also serving Stevenage, Newcastle and Morpeth. First’s Chief Executive stated: “We will offer genuinely low fares at half the average price of today. Our brand new trains will be cheaper than other rail services, greener than the plane, quicker than the coach and will get passengers from London to Edinburgh earlier than they can arrive today.” The new services would start in 2021, with tickets from around £25. (Evening Standard 12.5.2016).

Stagecoach cynically declared that this would not be in the “best interests of passengers, taxpayers or communities”. “It would assess the ruling from the ORR in detail”, and "consider its options" (BBC, 12.5.2016).

What is really at stake, of course, is the operator’s interest. Stagecoach bid aggressively for East Coast, just as it did for SWT. Profits are reportedly well below forecast on East Coast, Stagecoach shares are struggling, and The Times of 1.7.2016 reports that the franchise may fail.

No surprise therefore that the Stagecoach-Virgin partnership would like the rules changed to its advantage, with inter-city franchising abolished in favour of allowing operators to cherry pick train paths. Meanwhile, the Transport Select Committee considers that passengers should receive compensation for travelling long distances without a seat. The Stagecoach-Virgin response: compulsory reservations on busy trains (The Times 19.7.2016). So much for the benefits of ‘walk-on’ service frequencies!

**Invitation to Tender for SWT**

**DfT’s line**

The Department for Transport (DfT) has published documents setting out how

bidders for the new South Western franchise will be required to provide plans

for:

•at least 95 additional services on weekdays from December 2018;

•a doubling of services along the London Waterloo to Reading and Waterloo to Windsor and Eton Riverside routes from 2 to 4 trains an hour;

•earlier first trains and later last trains on many routes from December 2018;

•quicker journey times on at least 70% of all services from December 2020

(It appears that this will include removal of the slack in station dwell times which Stagecoach has introduced incrementally over two decades);

•an increase of at least 20% in peak-time capacity from December 2020;

•a new delay repay compensation system for passengers with a quicker and simpler claims process – Stagecoach has long resisted requests for such a change;

•new smart ticketing technology and new tickets for part-time workers;

The publication of the invitation to tender was presented as a significant step

forward in delivering better journeys for passengers, which details the

minimum level of improvements bidders hoping to secure the next franchise

will need to include in their detailed proposals. With the premium reportedly

now raised, minimum is likely to mean minimum.

**Comment**

While there is much that is positive in DfT’s proposals, there is also too much

reliance on the ITT incentivising bidders to introduce improvements. It’s

probably fair to say that ‘incentivise’ is the key weasel word, which allows

bidders to do as they wish. Remember how, a decade ago, DfT announced

that Stagecoach was ‘expected’ to introduce cheaper season ticket rates for

shoulder-peak commuters, and Stagecoach did precisely nothing?

DfT is apparently keen to “deliver an excellent experience for passengers

which leads to significantly improved passenger satisfaction”. Asset-stripping,

tax-evading Stagecoach hasn’t done that for the past 20 years, so won’t do it

now. In particular, there is no requirement for rolling stock to be suited to

journey length and little on timetable patterns. Yet respondents to DfT’s

consultation considered better value for money to be a prime aspiration.

We are told that “The majority of respondents believed that reliability needs to

be improved in the next franchise. Though some respondents commented that

performance was generally good, acknowledging that sometimes disruption is

not the fault of the train operator.”

It has to be suspected that SWT’s Passengers Panel is performing well in

dusting off Stagecoach’s ‘lines to take’ in return for their free season tickets.

In the September-October 2005 issue of SWT’s former ‘e-motion’ passenger

magazine, the Panel’s then Chairman, Sir Alan Greengross, was ‘interviewed’

by some un-named person from SWT, making comments on behalf of the

‘independent’ Panel such as: “Everyone knows that things go wrong on the

railway. We also acknowledge that much of it…is not the fault of South West

Trains”. On 7.6.2011, Panel members carried out a survey on an evening train

running in the opposite direction from the main commuter flow, reporting that:

“Even when things went wrong, there was wide recognition that it was very

often not the fault of the Company.”

Respondents also wanted the franchisee to work closely with other

organisations. Stagecoach has never done this whereas First Group has a

good record, leading to greatly improved services on West of England branch

lines.

The only case identified for new lifts across the whole SWT network is at

Pokesdown, home station of Stagecoach lobbyist Barry Doe, who can be

expected to report their installation ecstatically if Stagecoach wins.

It appears that the Isle of Wight and Lymington branch will retain something

similar to their current service. There is no proposal to improve what is

probably the South East’s worst inter-urban service, between Portsmouth and

Southampton. However, there is flexibility for the stopping service to extend to

Portsmouth Harbour and beyond Southampton Central. Perhaps other

improvements will come with the Great Western recast following main-line

electrification.

The Salisbury-Southampton-Eastleigh-Romsey service would be reconfigured

to provide two services hourly (two-hourly on Sundays) between Salisbury

and Southampton, with one running via Redbridge and one via Chandlers

Ford. This would give two trains per hour each way from the hamlets of

Mottisfont & Dunbridge and Dean. It would be good to have similarly concrete

proposals for Totton, the fourth largest intermediate town between

Southampton and Weymouth, where Stagecoach cuts wiped out some of the

strongest passenger growth on the SWT’s principal main line.

**Are SWT passengers being fined for ticketing**

**offences or for failure to attend court?**

Yet more reports of passengers receiving heavy fines for boarding SWT

trains without tickets appeared in the Southern Daily Echo during July.

All cases were ‘proven in absence’. This happens time and time again.

Why are there no reports of cases being proven where the passenger

attends court? Our History of South West Trains provides substantial

and detailed evidence of how Stagecoach has intimidated passengers

who were subsequently found not guilty. Is it the case that people don’t attend

court because Stagecoach continues to bully them into believing they have no

defence?

With stations such as Woking, Christchurch, Bournemouth and Hamworthy

routinely left with their ticket offices closed during opening hours, and with

ticket machines awkward to use and not providing a full range of tickets, is it

surprising that passengers board without tickets? SWT has admitted that

understaffed ticket offices are partly the result of training staff as ‘customer

ambassadors’ who can’t sell tickets. A backwards leap if ever there was one.

Historic background from our History of South West Trains

The South Hampshire Rail Users’ Group submitted details of many other revenue protection abuses on SWT and, to a lesser extent other franchises, in response to the DfT’s 2010 consultation on penalty fares. Nobody suggests that George Osborne was trying to defraud Virgin Trains when he was found in a first class seat with a standard class ticket. Nobody suggests that Cherie Blair was trying to defraud Thameslink when she was rushing to an important business engagement and boarded a train without queuing for a ticket. Society functions through people being in the right place at the right time; so why waste time and money treating ordinary members of the public like criminals over often very minor infringements of ticketing rules instead of employing staff to sell tickets on stations and trains?

A passenger who used a machine at Southampton Airport Parkway in extreme haste because his train was coming, inadvertently bought a child ticket to Winchester, instead of an adult ticket to Southampton using his Young Person’s Railcard. As his employer was to reimburse the cost, there was no incentive to cheat. He was nonetheless asked to pay £300 to avoid prosecution, because he had paid 5 pence too little. Outside the court, the prosecutor was rude and intimidating, and asked the defendant to pay £150 for SWT to withdraw the case. It became clear in court that the prosecutor hadn’t bothered to read preceding correspondence, and the magistrates repeatedly admonished him for asking irrelevant questions and bullying. They found “absolutely no evidence” that the passenger had tried to avoid paying his fare

While Stagecoach enthusiastically prosecutes its passengers, it appears less committed to ensuring that prosecutions are conducted properly. This may be because it realizes there is no evidence of fare avoidance, and relies on intimidation to extract large sums of money. Bournemouth Magistrates’ Court made SWT withdraw NINE prosecutions after it had failed to serve case details for the second hearing in a row. The magistrate commented that he despaired. Unsurprisingly, and unlike the other train companies serving South Hampshire, SWT is coy about the numbers of penalty fares it issues and prosecutions it undertakes, claiming the information is commercially confidential.

**Looking after the pounds while the passengers**

**look after themselves, day after day, year after**

**year: neglect and desertion on Stagecoach’s SWT**

As the Daily Telegraph commented over 11 years ago: “SWT has struck on one of the great philosophical truths of all time: the lower the standards that you set yourself, the easier they are to meet”. SWT’s new website has conveniently hidden details of closed ticket offices and broken ticket machines under an ‘All live travel updates’ link.

**Specimen SWT website update 21.6.2016**

Aldershot: Ticket Office Closure

Aldershot: Toilets out of order

Andover: Ticket Office Closure

Ascot: Ticket Office Closure

Bournemouth: Ticket Office Closure

Bracknell: Ticket Office Closure

Brentford: Ticket Office Closure

Brentford: Ticket Vending Machine problem

Byfleet & New Haw: Ticket Office Closure

Chertsey: Ticket Office Closure

Chiswick: Ticket Office Closure

Farnborough Main: Ticket Office Closure

Farnham: Ticket Office Closure

Grateley: Ticket Vending Machine problem

Hamworthy: Ticket Office Closure

Liphook: Ticket Vending Machine problem

Lymington Town: Ticket Office Closure

New Milton: Ticket Office Closure

Norbiton: Ticket Office Closure

Portchester: Ticket Vending Machine problem

Putney: Lifts out of order

Staines: Ticket Office Closure

Sunningdale: Ticket Office Closure

Twickenham: Ticket Office Closure

Upwey: Ticket Vending Machine problem

Virginia Water: Ticket Office Closure

Virginia Water: Lighting Problem

Walton-On-Thames: Ticket Office Closure

Wandsworth Town: Ticket Office Closure

Wareham: Ticket Office Closure

Weybridge: Ticket Office Closure

Weybridge: Hazard to Passengers

Weymouth: Ticket Vending Machine problem

Weymouth: Ticket Office Closure

Whitton: Ticket Office Closure

Windsor & Eton Riverside: Ticket Office Closure

Winnersh Triangle: Ticket Office Closure

Wool: Ticket Office Closure

**Specimen SWT website update 24.8.2016**

Ascot - Reduction in parking spaces

Due to several projects taking place on the network there is currently a reduction in the number of car parking spaces available at Ascot station.

Until April 2017 30 spaces are unavailable in the upper car park while contractors work to construct a new footbridge.

An additional 10 spaces are unavailable in this car park due to track upgrade works which are taking place.

Until 2018 up to 50 spaces will be unavailable in the lower car park in order for power upgrade works to take place on the railway.

We are sorry for the inconvenience these changes will cause you however these upgrades are vital to deliver a more accessible station together with a more reliable rail network which will include 10 coach trains on the route to Reading.

*Last Updated:12/08/2016 20:34*

<="">

Godalming - New footbridge opening

We will be opening the new footbridge on Thursday 16th June so that we can close off the subway and install more canopies.

The subway will be out of use from this date.

The lifts will be in operation by the end of August.

We thank you for your continued patience.

southwesttrains.co.uk/stations

The new cycle racks will come into use by the end of August.

*Last Updated:17/06/2016 07:45*

<="">

Alton: Ticket Office Closure

The ticket office will be closed from now until the end of the day at Alton station.

Additional Information  
Closed due to staff shortage

*Last Updated:24/08/2016 12:34*

<="">

Ascot: Ticket Office Closure

The ticket office will be closed from 17:30 on 22/08/2016 until the end of the day, from 17:30 on 23/08/2016 until the end of the day, from 17:30 on 24/08/2016 until the end of the day, from 17:30 on 25/08/2016 until the end of the day, from 17:30 on 26/08/2016 until the end of the day and from 18:30 on 27/08/2016 until the end of the day at Ascot station.

*Last Updated:19/08/2016 09:26*

<="">

Bagshot: Ticket Office Closure

The ticket office will be closed from now until the end of the day and from 06:15 on 22/08/2016 until 25/08/2016 at Bagshot station.

*Last Updated:19/08/2016 10:00*

<="">

Bournemouth: Ticket Office Closure

The ticket office will be closed from 19:00 on 22/08/2016 until the end of the day, from 19:00 on 23/08/2016 until the end of the day, from 19:00 on 24/08/2016 until the end of the day, from 19:00 on 25/08/2016 until the end of the day and from 19:00 on 26/08/2016 until the end of the day at Bournemouth station.

*Last Updated:22/08/2016 06:00*

<="">

Bracknell: Ticket Office Closure

The ticket office will be closed from 18:10 on 22/08/2016 until the end of the day, from 18:10 on 23/08/2016 until the end of the day, from 18:10 on 24/08/2016 until the end of the day, from 18:10 on 25/08/2016 until the end of the day and from 18:10 on 26/08/2016 until the end of the day at Bracknell station.

*Last Updated:19/08/2016 09:33*

<="">

Branksome: Ticket Office Closure

The ticket office will be closed from 06:05 on 24/08/2016 until the end of the day at Branksome station.

*Last Updated:19/08/2016 09:08*

<="">

Brentford: Lifts out of order

The lifts will be out of order from now until further notice at Brentford station.

*Last Updated:24/08/2016 16:06*

<="">

Brentford: Ticket Office Closure

The ticket office will be closed from 06:00 on 22/08/2016 until 27/08/2016 at Brentford station.

*Last Updated:19/08/2016 09:33*

<="">

Brockenhurst: Ticket Office Closure

The ticket office will be closed from 12:44 on 22/08/2016 until the end of the day, from 12:44 on 23/08/2016 until the end of the day, from 12:44 on 24/08/2016 until the end of the day and from 12:44 on 26/08/2016 until the end of the day at Brockenhurst station.

*Last Updated:22/08/2016 06:00*

<="">

Chertsey: Ticket Office Closure

At Chertsey station, the following issues have been reported:  
The ticket office will be closed from 06:00 on 22/08/2016 until 27/08/2016.  
Ticket Vending Machines are working correctly.

*Last Updated:23/08/2016 12:16*

<="">

Chiswick: Ticket Office Closure

The ticket office will be closed from 06:00 on 23/08/2016 until 27/08/2016 at Chiswick station.

*Last Updated:19/08/2016 09:36*

<="">

Datchet: Ticket Vending Machine problem

The ticket vending machines are out of order at Datchet station.

*Last Updated:24/08/2016 08:30*

<="">

Datchet: Ticket Office Closure

The ticket office will be closed from 06:00 on 22/08/2016 until 26/08/2016 at Datchet station.

*Last Updated:19/08/2016 09:37*

<="">

Earley: Ticket Office Closure

The ticket office will be closed from 08:00 on 21/08/2016 until the end of the day and from 06:00 on 24/08/2016 until 28/08/2016 at Earley station.

*Last Updated:19/08/2016 09:41*

<="">

Eastleigh: Ticket Office Closure

The ticket office will be open from 12:36 on 24/08/2016 until the end of the day at Eastleigh station.

*Last Updated:24/08/2016 10:00*

<="">

Hampton: Ticket Office Closure

The ticket office will be closed from now until further notice at Hampton station.

*Last Updated:20/08/2016 11:25*

<="">

Hamworthy Facilities: Various changes

At Hamworthy station, the following issues have been reported:  
The ticket office will be closed from 06:30 on 22/08/2016 until the end of the day, from now until the end of the day, from 06:30 on 25/08/2016 until the end of the day and from 06:30 on 26/08/2016 until the end of the day.  
The ticket vending machines are out of order.

*Last Updated:23/08/2016 07:56*

<="">

Haslemere: Lifts out of order

The lifts will be out of order between Platorm 1 and the overbridge from 18:04 on 23/08/2016 until further notice at Haslemere station.

*Last Updated:24/08/2016 16:07*

<="">

Hinton Admiral: Ticket Office Closure

The ticket office will be closed from 06:00 on 22/08/2016 until 28/08/2016 at Hinton Admiral station.

*Last Updated:19/08/2016 09:07*

<="">

Hook: The ticket vending machine on platform 2 is out of service.

The ticket vending machine on platform 2 is out of service.

*Last Updated:23/08/2016 10:11*

<="">

Hook: Ticket Vending Machine problem

The ticket vending machines are not working correctly (Platform 2 only) at Hook station.

*Last Updated:19/08/2016 14:46*

<="">

Kingston: Lifts out of order

The lifts will be out of order between platform 3 and the booking hall from now until further notice at Kingston station.

Additional Information  
A ramp is available between the booking hall and the platform level: step-free access is still possible to platform 3.

*Last Updated:24/08/2016 16:46*

<="">

Leatherhead Facilities: Various changes

At Leatherhead station, the following issues have been reported:  
The ticket office will be closed from 18:00 on 24/08/2016 until the end of the day.  
The ticket vending machines are out of order.

*Last Updated:24/08/2016 17:59*

<="">

Mortlake: Ticket Office Closure

The ticket office will be closed from 17:55 on 24/08/2016 until the end of the day at Mortlake station.

*Last Updated:20/08/2016 08:49*

<="">

Petersfield Facilities: Various changes

At Petersfield station, the following issues have been reported:  
The ticket vending machines are only accepting cash.  
Staff are in attendance.  
The customer information system is out of order.  
At the ticket office, the following changes apply:   
Season Ticket replacements cannot be issued   
Prepaid tickets cannot be collected   
Car Park season tickets cannot be issued

Additional Information  
This has an intermittent problem with its network connection, and as a result a number of our systems may not be working as normal. If you require assistance please speak to a member of staff, or press a help point.

*Last Updated:24/08/2016 08:28*

<="">

Petersfield: Ticket Vending Machine problem

The ticket vending machines are only accepting cash at Petersfield station.

Additional Information  
Due to intermittent issues with card reading machines, some card payments are unable to be processed from either the Ticket Machines or the Ticket Office at present.

*Last Updated:23/08/2016 16:52*

<="">

Pinhoe: Ticket Vending Machine problem

The ticket vending machines are out of order at Pinhoe station.

*Last Updated:23/08/2016 08:21*

<="">

Pinhoe: Ticket Vending Machine problem

The ticket vending machines are not working correctly at Pinhoe station.

*Last Updated:20/08/2016 08:25*

<="">

Pokesdown: Ticket Office Closure

The ticket office will be closed from 07:50 on 27/08/2016 until the end of the day at Pokesdown station.

*Last Updated:19/08/2016 09:09*

<="">

St Margarets: Ticket Office Closure

The ticket office will be closed from 09:10 on 21/08/2016 until the end of the day, from 17:40 on 22/08/2016 until the end of the day, from 17:30 on 23/08/2016 until the end of the day, from 18:15 on 24/08/2016 until the end of the day, from 18:15 on 25/08/2016 until the end of the day and from 18:15 on 26/08/2016 until the end of the day at St Margarets station.

*Last Updated:20/08/2016 09:32*

<="">

Staines: Ticket Office Closure

The ticket office will be closed from 18:40 on 22/08/2016 until the end of the day, from 18:40 on 23/08/2016 until the end of the day, from 18:40 on 24/08/2016 until the end of the day, from 18:40 on 25/08/2016 until the end of the day and from 18:40 on 26/08/2016 until the end of the day at Staines station.

*Last Updated:20/08/2016 09:35*

<="">

Sunningdale: Ticket Office Closure

The ticket office will be closed from 17:35 on 22/08/2016 until the end of the day, from 17:35 on 23/08/2016 until the end of the day, from 17:35 on 24/08/2016 until the end of the day, from 17:00 on 25/08/2016 until the end of the day, from 17:00 on 26/08/2016 until the end of the day and from 18:00 on 27/08/2016 until the end of the day at Sunningdale station.

*Last Updated:20/08/2016 09:54*

<="">

Swanwick: Ticket Office Closure

The ticket office will be closed from 15:50 on 24/08/2016 until the end of the day and from 15:50 on 25/08/2016 until the end of the day at Swanwick station.

*Last Updated:24/08/2016 10:01*

<="">

Swaythling: Ticket Office Closure

The ticket office will be closed from 12:24 on 23/08/2016 until the end of the day and from 02:00 on 24/08/2016 until the end of the day at Swaythling station.

*Last Updated:23/08/2016 11:16*

<="">

Totton: Ticket Office Closure

At Totton station, the following issues have been reported:  
The ticket office will be closed from now until 20:00 on 26/08/2016.  
Ticket Vending Machines are working correctly.

*Last Updated:23/08/2016 12:54*

<="">

Twickenham: The Stair lift at Twickenham is currently not working.

The Stair lift at Twickenham is currently not working. Our engineers have been advised.

*Last Updated:24/08/2016 16:46*

<="">

Twickenham: Ticket Office Closure

The ticket office will be closed from 18:40 on 22/08/2016 until the end of the day, from 18:40 on 23/08/2016 until the end of the day, from 18:40 on 24/08/2016 until the end of the day, from 18:40 on 25/08/2016 until the end of the day and from 18:40 on 26/08/2016 until the end of the day at Twickenham station.

*Last Updated:20/08/2016 09:55*

<="">

Virginia Water: Ticket Office Closure

The ticket office will be closed from 16:00 on 23/08/2016 until the end of the day, from 13:00 on 24/08/2016 until the end of the day, from 13:00 on 25/08/2016 until the end of the day and from 17:30 on 26/08/2016 until the end of the day at Virginia Water station.

*Last Updated:23/08/2016 15:50*

<="">

Walton-On-Thames: Ticket Office Closure

The ticket office is closed at Walton-On-Thames station.

*Last Updated:18/08/2016 18:09*

<="">

Weybridge: Staffing

Weybridge station has no platform staffing.

*Last Updated:18/08/2016 18:00*

<="">

Wimbledon: Lifts out of order

The lifts will be out of order between Platforms 9&10 and the overbridge from now until further notice at Wimbledon station.

*Last Updated:24/08/2016 17:09*

<="">

Wimbledon: Lifts out of order

The lifts will be out of order between Platforms 1-4 and station entrance from 16:35 on 23/08/2016 until further notice at Wimbledon station.

*Last Updated:24/08/2016 16:47*

<="">

Wimbledon: Lifts out of order

The lifts will be out of order between Platforms 7 and 8 and the overbridge from 16:36 on 23/08/2016 until further notice at Wimbledon station.

*Last Updated:24/08/2016 16:47*

<="">

Wimbledon: Lifts out of order

The lifts will be out of order between Platforms 5&6 and the overbridge from 17:53 on 23/08/2016 until further notice at Wimbledon station.

*Last Updated:24/08/2016 16:47*

<="">

Windsor & Eton Riverside: Ticket Office Closure

The ticket office will be closed from 18:40 on 22/08/2016 until the end of the day, from 18:40 on 23/08/2016 until the end of the day, from 18:40 on 24/08/2016 until the end of the day, from 18:40 on 25/08/2016 until the end of the day and from 18:40 on 26/08/2016 until the end of the day at Windsor & Eton Riverside station.

*Last Updated:20/08/2016 10:01*

<="">

Woking: Lifts out of order

The lifts will be out of order between Platform 5 and the overbridge from now until further notice at Woking station.

*Last Updated:24/08/2016 16:47*

<="">

Woolston: Ticket Office Closure

**A summary of some station problems, often repetitive, since mid-April**

SWT ticket offices advertised as closed during opening hours:

Addlestone, Aldershot, Alton, Andover, Ascot, Ash, Ash Vale, Ashford, Ashtead, Bagshot, Bedhampton, Bournemouth, Bracknell, Branksome, Brentford, Brockenhurst, Brookwood, Byfleet & New Haw, Camberley, Chertsey, Chessington North, Chiswick, Christchurch, Clandon, Cosham, Datchet, Dorchester South, Earley, Eastleigh, Effingham Junction, Egham, Esher, Ewell West, Fareham, Farnborough, Farncombe, Farnham, Feniton, Fleet, Fratton, Frimley, Fulwell, Grateley, Hampton, Hampton Wick, Hamworthy, Haslemere, Havant, Hersham, Hinchley Wood, Hinton Admiral, Honiton, Hook, Hounslow, Liphook, Liss, London Road Guildford, Leatherhead, Lymington Town, Malden Manor, Martins Heron, Micheldever, Milford, Mortlake, New Malden, New Milton, Norbiton, North Sheen, Overton, Parkstone, Petersfield, Pokesdown, Portchester, Portsmouth & Southsea, Portsmouth Harbour, Queenstown Road, Raynes Park, Richmond, Rowlands Castle, St Denys, St Margaret’s, Salisbury, Southampton Airport Parkway, Staines, Sunbury, Sunningdale, Swanwick, Sway, Swaythling, Thames Ditton, Tisbury, Totton, Twickenham, Upper Halliford, Vauxhall, Virginia Water, Walton-on-Thames, Wanborough, Wandsworth Town, Wareham, West Byfleet, Weybridge, Weymouth, Whitchurch, Whitton, Winchfield, Windsor and Eton Riverside, Winnersh, Winnersh Triangle, Woking, Wokingham, Wool, Woolston, Worplesdon, Yeovil Junction.

Ticket machines advertised as failed (closed ticket offices are frequently followed by out-of-use ticket machines, in a spiralling cycle of failure -staff who aren’t available to sell tickets also aren’t available to tend ticket machines):

Addlestone, Alton, Ash Vale, Bagshot, Bentley, Bitterne, Botley, Bookham, Bracknell, Brentford, Byfleet & New Haw, Chertsey, Chiswick, Clandon, Cobham & Stoke D’abernon, Crewkerne, Datchet, Earley, Eastleigh, Effingham Junction, Esher, Fareham, Farnborough, Farncombe, Feltham, Fleet, Gillingham, Godalming, Grateley, Guildford, Hamble, Hampton, Hampton Court, Hampton Wick, Hamworthy, Hilsea, Hinchley Wood, Hook, Hounslow, Kempton Park, Leatherhead, Liphook, London Road Guildford, Lymington Town, Martins Heron, Milford, Millbrook, Motspur Park, Netley, Overton, Petersfield, Pinhoe, Pokesdown, Portchester, Queenstown Road Battersea, Raynes Park, St Denys, St Margaret’s, Shepperton, Sherborne, Sholing, Southampton Airport Parkway, Sunningdale, Syon Lane, Tisbury, Totton, Twickenham, Upper Halliford, Upwey, Walton-on-Thames, Wanborough, West Byfleet, Weybridge, Whimple, Whitchurch, Winchfield, Windsor & Eton Riverside, Winnersh, Winnersh Triangle, Wokingham, Woolston, Worplesdon, Wraysbury, Yeovil Junction.

Disabled people beware: lifts advertised as out of use at various times:

Out-of-use station lifts can also help make it difficult for disabled people to buy tickets. This problem has been advertised for Aldershot, Axminster, Basingstoke, Bracknell, Brentford, Brockenhurst, Clapham Junction, Earlsfield, Eastleigh, Fareham, Farnborough, Feltham, Fratton, Haslemere, Havant, Kingston, Portsmouth & Southsea, Putney, Southampton Airport Parkway, Southampton Central, Staines, Surbiton, Vauxhall, West Byfleet, Weybridge, Wimbledon, Winchester, Woking, Wokingham.

**Some questions SWT won’t answer: contents of letter from Jeremy Varns of Guildford to Anne Milton MP about a 'Tweet The Manager' session on 26.7.2016:**

“You may be aware the South West Trains holds a Tweet The Manager (#TTMSWT) session at intervals throughout the year. Unfortunately, while the company has always been selective about engagement, yesterday was a low point with very little in the way of meaningful responses and a large number of tweets were simply ignored. I urge you to look yourself and make a judgement on whether SWT is attempting to listen and respond to passenger concerns.

As you know, I, along with a colleague have been campaigning for better services for SWT passengers through the Twitter account South West Trains Watch. Of the five questions we asked, not one response was received which I hope you will agree is unacceptable. I have copied the five questions, below. As previously outlined SWT will not respond to me directly via correspondence, so am requesting that you forward my five questions to SWT for a response which I will then be able to make public.

Deep cleaning used to be monthly, now yearly with carriages often in a terrible state. Is this a legacy you are proud of?

Why are TVMs programmed to sell expensive Peak and similarly priced Off-Peak tickets at weekends when ‘Super Off-Peak’ applies?

Does DfT have separate data for monitoring compliance other than misleading/omitted info on Journey Check?

Queuing standards not advertised at stations nor queue monitoring results. Why? Because it doesn’t happen?

We’ve let you know about ticket office closures over past month yet Journey Check NOT ONCE updated? Why?

I appreciate your on-going support in addressing my concerns and those of other passengers using SWT.”

**Same old complaints day after day, following two decades of operation by Stagecoach: Examples of passengers’ comments on Twitter (spelling and grammar modified, and expletives deleted)**

* THE STAGECOACH WAY: ACCEPT THAT A PASSENGER HAS BEHAVED HONESTLY AND THEN IMPLY THREATS:

[Passenger] Please reply ASAP! Booked on Pinhoe-Waterloo train at 18.36 but ticket machine out of order so can’t collect tickets!!! I’ve got my confirmation e’mail and the card I paid on.

[Response] Show that to the Guard and explain what happened; as long as you explain and they don’t come to you, you should be fine.

* Shocking service today from SWT with no information, no updates and no service. Pathetic. You really don't give a damn do you?
* [[@SW\_Trains](https://twitter.com/SW_Trains) 13:50 from fratton train door closed on us while boarding leaving my daughter alone on the platform. Door was open for a few secs](https://twitter.com/revjesse)

[@SW\_Trains](https://twitter.com/SW_Trains) 13:50 from fratton train door closed on us while boarding leaving my daughter alone on the platform. Door was open for a few secs

* 13:50 from Fratton; train door closed on us while boarding. My daughter was left

alone on the platform. Door was open for a few seconds.

* I don't have to put up with your useless company any longer. I feel

for those who do however.[@SW\_Trains](https://twitter.com/SW_Trains) I don't have to put up with your useless company any longer. I feel for those who do however.[@SW\_Trains](https://twitter.com/SW_Trains) I don't have to put up with your useless company any longer. I feel for those who do however.

* [South West Trains ‏@SW\_Trains [@SW\_Trains[@SW\_Trains](https://twitter.com/SW_Trains) I don't have to put up with your useless company any longer. I feel for those who do however.](https://twitter.com/SW_Trains) I don't have to put up with your useless company any longer. I feel for those who do however.](https://twitter.com/SW_Trains)[54m](https://twitter.com/SW_Trains/status/744972979868577792)
* [@p38380742](https://twitter.com/p38380742) I'm sorry you feel that way
* 0 retweets 0 likes
* Reply
* Retweet
* Retweeted
* Like
* Liked
* More
* [51m](https://twitter.com/p38380742/status/744973799892881408)
* [@SW\_Trains](https://twitter.com/SW_Trains) I don't have to put up with your useless company any longer. I feel for those who do however.
* [@SW\_Trains](https://twitter.com/SW_Trains) I don't have to put up with your useless company any longer. I feel for those who do however.[Sanjay Patel ‏@p38380742](https://twitter.com/p38380742) [53m](https://twitter.com/p38380742/status/744973799892881408)



* [@SW\_Trains](https://twitter.com/SW_Trains) I don't have to put up with your useless company any longer. I feel for those who do however.
* Once again, unable to use your services on Monday evening to pick my two girls up. Probably 50% failure rate.I don't have to put up with your useless company any longer. I feel for those who do however.
* Sure, e’mailed your customer relations team in February, they replied in April. I replied again a few days ago, and don't want to be waiting two months for a reply again.
* [15.6.2016] Thirty minutes on hold for customer relations to obtain a refund requested 4th April. Does SW stand for still waiting?

* The 0947 from Eastleigh didn't bother to wait for a disabled passenger. Any idea what went wrong?
* Hi there, can you explain why your staff at Southampton Central see fit to make me feel guilty for being a blind passenger?
* To the conductor of the 11:57 West Byfleet to Waterloo - how dare you leave a disabled man on purpose - you should be ashamed.
* Sat on late train at Waterloo, no announcements as next two trains depart. I could've switched. Terrible service as ever.
* [From SWT: Services to Shepperton are departing at 48 past the hour, travelling via Richmond - taking about 65 minutes today.] You need to let your staff at Waterloo know!
* So you show no platform for 20:52 to Addlestone until 20:52, then train pulls away at 20:54 with no one on it. Disgraceful.
* Absolute joke on trains again. Tannoy said train going to Portsmouth. Train ends up Southampton.
* Your service is the worst I have ever been on. 18.07 Weybridge departed early leaving 30 people on the platform.
* Punishing me because, for the first time ever, I forgot my discount pass! I take it that common sense isn't a requirement!
* On rail replacement service to Wimbledon and bus driver doesn't know where he's going.
* A replacement bus is needed for the replacement bus after this

most excellent of driving. Good job! [picture of bus in hedge]

* Why is the 5:50 Guildford to Waterloo delayed (again)? The guard can't be bothered to give a reason or apologise. Terrible service as usual.
* The passenger assistant at platform 11 needs customer care training. Positively vile to me for no reason.
* Really rude and unhelpful member of staff at Wandsworth Town station this morning. I know it's a Monday morning but still!
* It is not just what you say but the way you say it. Just seen an appalling example by a member SWT staff on platform 2 at Basingstoke.
* Can you please advise on previous tweet. You quite rightly do not accept aggressive behaviour *towards* your staff, so unacceptable!
* If you’re going to stop gold card holders coming through the barriers at Waterloo then at least man the gates.
* Staff were standing saying they had been told to close the station

and we had to go elsewhere. [SWT response: As far as were

aware the station should have been open and we are not sure

why you were turned away. Sorry about this.]

* There was a big crowd arguing with staff. Think you need to look into what happened and maybe have a look at CCTV.
* Not sure what the station team (one person?) can do if windows shut, long queues if people need help, and machines don't sell certain tickets.
* Can I claim delay repay for the one hour plus delay which faulty machinery at Clapham Junction ticket office has caused me?
* I have been at Clapham Junction ticket office for over one hour at lunch, and another 90 minutes and counting now, waiting for my ticket.
* Are there any plans to restore previous staff levels? Breaks necessary - problems when no cover. Ticket machines not an adequate replacement. [SWT reply: I don't believe there are in the short term. This has come about through the training of customer ambassadors.]

* The whole wooden roof is rotting, full of holes with water running

down electrical conduits. Beautiful station.

* The level of professionalism at Waterloo station tonight is a disgrace. No one has any info and staff just shrug. [23 June]
* What is going on at Waterloo? Nobody has a clue. They are still advertising the 15.45! No trains to Woking?? [23 June]
* We've been waiting nearly an hour. No one has any idea what's going on - apparently least of all your staff. [23 June]
* The one thing you can rely on is that you can't rely on SWT.
* I travelled to London from Salisbury last Friday and returned Saturday. Stood for entire journey BOTH ways. Is this acceptable??
* 20.35 Waterloo-Weymouth last night. Only one toilet working, no automatic announcements and no announcements from Bournemouth. Not good.
* Help! Shepperton train not stopping at any announced station. Just went barrelling through Raynes Park and New Malden.
* Maybe pay for the taxi to get me home as the conductor failed to mention the doors wouldn't open on my carriage.
* Why did the 7.59 from Richmond to Wimbledon decide not to stop at Strawberry Hill or Teddington? [SWT response: The train was delayed near Feltham, we're trying to prevent the delays spreading to the next journey and set of passengers too.] I know that but the guard did announce the next train would be stopping at all stops but it isn't.
* Your idiot staff close the doors while people haven’t got off yet, putting them in danger of getting trapped in the door. Explain.
* Please advise. If we get on your train and you decide it won't visit our stop but don't give us time to get off, what should we do?
* 13.28 to Windsor - your doors didn't open at Richmond and half the people at Twickenham have to go back. perhaps asking your staff to help rather than watch when babies are caught in your train doors.
* When my buggy and baby are stuck in the doors I do not care that it is to ensure the carriages stay cool. I want someone to help me! Perhaps ask your staff to help rather than watch when babies are caught in your train doors.
* Why don't the screens on the platforms say how many coaches the train is formed of anymore? Is this a permanent change?
* The usual bland corporate cop out - no apologies noted!
* Still waiting for my refund from 5 May delays. [3 July]
* Why are displays showing trains stopping at Vauxhall and Clapham from Waterloo, then sailing through to Guildford without stopping?
* Why does it say South West mainline has a good service when it blatantly hasn't?
* Waiting at Leatherhead. The 17:24 to Guildford was cancelled. Just gone through station without stopping. It could've stopped?!
* 17:52 Waterloo train leaves Teddington at 17:46. Not very happy as got off train to walk to end of carriage and train departed!
* Good evening, another day another delay! Just been dumped at Fulwell as train is terminated! Trying to get to Shepperton! Thanks a bunch!
* Why has everyone get off at Twickenham, then send the train off empty when the line is now clear?!
* Yet again the awful man in the ticket office in Poole has been rude and unhelpful. How is he still employed!!!
* Am sick to death of being held at barriers by SWT staff checking my VALID and PAID FOR ticket - making me miss my train. Shame!
* You can't help, telephone can't help, website can't help. You have my money but I don't have my tickets.
* In ticket Hall at Clapham Junction, poor customer service. In queue for 20 minutes whilst one customer is served. Poor...very poor.
* Actually, is it me or do I have to buy each ticket in a separate transaction? What happened to baskets? [SWT reply: You do at the moment - we're working to put this feature back onto the site in a future upgrade].
* Just had a very nasty run in with an eager revenue protection peep...this is overwritten?! [Photo of a free weekend travel ticket with date and season ticket number entered without any sign of over-writing]
* Toilets in cars 2, 3 on the 17.21 from Egham to Weybridge have been locked for months. Open them please.
* 17.37 supposed to stop at Norbiton but went through every stop until Wimbledon. No on-board announcement made. One hour late for dinner.
* Is anyone capable of explaining to me why the doors on the train didn't open at North Sheen?! Stuck in Richmond with a huge bag.
* You really need to have a system in place when carriage doors fail to open. Happens far too often on your new trains.
* I’ve been verbally abused by the conductor on the train in front of my family. Over-priced, overcrowded. Underwhelmed.
* Now at Clapham junction to find my train is not running. So-called SWT customer assistant would rather text than deal with me.
* Once again ticket windows closed at Woking. Queues blocking exit of the station. Same situation for weeks. Why is this?
* Any particular reason your train just didn't stop at Wimbledon?
* Delayed at Salisbury for 20 minutes so far because...... there's no driver.
* I was on the receiving end of very threatening behaviour at Haslemere station this morning, by one of your parking attendants.
* Driver forgot to stop?
* Went to ticket office where staff couldn't have cared less, great start to my trip with you after a 6hr journey!! Not looking forward to return trip.
* Air conditioning not working. Luggage blocking corridors. People

standing. Shameful. In EU countries for same fare better experience by far. Passenger safety compromised on SWT...ticket sales over safety and passenger comfort. Guard said management don't care.

* 11:34 from Epsom to Waterloo left at 11:32. Any explanation? I'm now going to be late for work as a result, unacceptable!
* Rail replacement bus service and the driver said he doesn't know where he's going or if the bus even works. Awesome.
* Three of five ticket machines out of service and no one to help

you to buy a weekly ticket in Walton-on-Thames. Thanks again SWT

* I actually work for a company that provides rail replacement buses for another train operating company. Run it properly like we do!!!
* Your service is \*\*\*\*. Low quality trains and pathetic staff. Nowhere for luggage.
* It seems the prerequisite to work in the ticket office at Guildford station is to be grumpy and rude.
* To clarify, we are here to record the mass problems that SWT give to customers. We are NOT part of their (dis)service.
* Every day of the week you have a different excuse. What a 3rd world "service"! Useless franchise. £4,000 per annum for this?
* Sitting on the sticky, dirty train floor with my 1st class SWT ticket. What did I pay the extra money for? This & crappy wifi.
* Your services from Winchester to Waterloo and return have been a joke this week. Serious lack of info on how long delays are!
* Waterloo: queues were 10-people deep for every machine. Waited 5 minutes but barely moved.
* I’ve just got on replacement bus from Reading to Ascot and the guy organising the buses made a racist remark about my partner.
* Your new website is the most awkward yet....over-complicating everything, not a bold move.
* Counter staff lied, she didn't have student railcard but that's NOT NEEDED for £16 summer special.
* Guard gets me off train at Wimbledon to get cab. Wimbledon put me back on to Clapham Junction. THIS IS AN UTTER FARCE.
* Booked tickets online - error with transaction yet the payment came out of my account? Emailed you twice, no reply!
* I'm sorry to say your bus replacement service is a shameful excuse for customer service, it's the worst I have ever encountered.

* Twickenham station platform announcements are a shambles lately, screens and staff say Platform 3, comes in on 4 every day.
* The reply was "how are we supposed to know, the screens know more than we do". Awful.
* You show no interest to investigate, or even challenge your staff who attack passengers
* Three unbelievably rude staff between Petersfield and Portsmouth. Really feel there is no point escalating as this poor service is a culture at SWT and despite concerns nothing gets achieved. Issues have been raised before by myself. Such as a 90-minute delay and you said I wasn't entitled to a refund!
* The worst customer service experience at the rail info desk at Waterloo! They were unhelpful, obnoxious and rude!
* How do I get a refund for my ticket? Christchurch to Weymouth train cancelled, now having to drive down. Not happy.
* NONE OF THE DOORS OPENED. No-one was able to leave the train.
* I was getting into the 17:50 Reading train with my 2 children and husband who is a season ticket holder. We had hands full of bags and when we used the barrier the guard looked at my husband’s season ticket and asked what it was. We showed our gold service cards with patience, but he showed no empathy or understanding.
* Your new site is awful. Trying to book tickets for different journeys or see different prices is impossible. Bring back the old one. Basically you’re hiding the cheaper options. I'll stick with thetrainline which does exactly what people need.
* How can you a possibly make people get a 1.5 hr bus replacement, then expect them to wait another half an hour on a Sunday evening? Absolutely shocking customer service. WHAT AM I ACTUALLY PAYING FOR?! I hope you get your contract taken off you in the next round.
* Clean your filthy disgusting trains from Guildford to Leatherhead. They have made my child sick again.
* Staff at Bracknell station being extremely rude. Picking on me for no apparent reason and pinpointing me out. Accusations too..
* Train moved off from Clapham Junction before everyone had alighted, Many passengers, including me, forced to go to Waterloo instead. Why?
* Your revenue protection staff at Bracknell are currently having a conversation about condoms, cling film and bicycle tyres...
* I almost wasn't able to get off your train at Clapham Junction and I saw at least one person didn't.
* Your new website is confusing and does not send confirmation emails!!!
* Why has the 19.37 left a full minute early? You know this connection is almost impossible without an early \*\*\*\*\*\*\* departure.
* So tonight the 17.54 late, people not called to platform 6 on tannoy. Staff shouted news, we all ran to platform 6 to find it leaving half empty!
* My train was cancelled this morning. Still none the wiser. No one at station knew, and site said no issues on my route.
* You must hate having to be responsible for handling the Twitter account. Everyday every other tweet is an apology.
* Just had the most thoroughly unpleasant experience with SWT and its staff. Awful and completely unreliable.
* Your guard on the 09.35 to Bournemouth is rude. She has zero care for customer service. No wifi, so no hope of getting work done!
* Why did the 07.45 New Malden-Waterloo just fly through New Malden without stopping? It's not like it was late...it was bang on time!!
* Any chance of putting on the air conditioning in the 19.35 Waterloo - Southampton. The stress, lack of seats and heat are making me feel faint. Overcrowded trains. Two-year-old expected to stand. Rude guard. Children hurt on journey. Your trains are not fit for families.
* No toilets open at Wokingham either, and apparently I can't leave the station for a "comfort" break! Is that customer service?
* 22.58 Windsor & Eton from Waterloo, 5 coaches instead of 10 and the only toilet is closed. Guard: “If it’s closed, it’s closed”.
* Any reason why the train missed the Liphook stop this evening? It’s not that bad a village is it?
* Can the Passenger Forum respond to online questions? Read through Q&A from the last one and the answers were worse than at PM Questions!
* Whoever is the guard on the 19:35 train from Waterloo to Weymouth is extremely rude. How can I put in a formal complaint?
* It said 18.11 train was cancelled. When train pulled in, the announcement was saying this train not stopping.
* Pretty sure I've just encountered your most useless employee: 'Excuse me where does this train go?' 'I don't know.' Walks off.
* Thank you for the apology, but what will be done about this? I pay a disgraceful amount for your service and you don't deliver.
* Just left Bournemouth station, communication non-existent about change of platforms. Not happy.
* Now 40 minutes still waiting to actually speak to someone rather than tweet about it.
* I want to use station loo at Axminster, but SWT thinks it acceptable to have no facilities in the station. What a joke! 1/2 hr wait!
* Cancelling half the stops is bad enough but your guard on the 17.12 Reading-Waterloo is one of the rudest people I've ever spoken to.
* The 17:22 from Waterloo, platform 16, towards Hounslow is so hot I think I am going to faint. Need air conditioning on as soon as possible. No guard to be seen.
* Your conductor can't take cards because his machine’s broken. Travellers have to find cash or they're booted off.
* Winchester to Waterloo this morning late and horribly crowded. Waterloo to Winchester this evening exactly the same.
* The 11.34 to Waterloo. I was pressing the button on the door at exactly 11.33 but it wouldn't open then it just went.
* Thanks SWT for telling me the train I am on will not now stop where it’s supposed to and so make me at least 49 minutes late for work.
* How come the delayed 9:53 Twickenham to Waterloo is not stopping even at Richmond?
* Having one of your staff kiss their teeth at me after asking for help is not why you expect on your way home!!
* How come the delayed 9:53 Twickenham to Waterloo is not stopping even at Richmond?
* You having a laugh? - crowded train - heating on - how do I get coach number - I cannot get over the Health & Safety nightmare this is.
* Not sure you need the heating on in the over-packed 17.58 Teddington to Waterloo Very uncomfortable journey. [24.8.2016 – about hottest day of year]
* You do need to sort your doors out though, that's the second time in a week that the doors have failed!
* Your customer service is shocking, can't even apologise for lack of air conditioning or having all windows shut on the train.
* Imprisoned at Wimbledon by SWT because crew can't get the doors open. Pleading with us not to pull emergency cord…We were kept cooking inside the train for quite a while.

**Easing road congestion and pollution: Totton-Hythe-Fawley branch ‘open with no trains’ south of Marchwood while the private Swanage and Minehead lines look set to link with the national network.**

The final oil train was due to run from Fawley refinery on 25.8.2016, with the branch from Totton then having no traffic south of Marchwood military port. We understand that the Marchwood-Fawley section cannot be taken out of use at present because DB Cargo has a contract for storage of wagons at Fawley. The case for restoration of a passenger service remains as strong as ever. Hythe is the second biggest population in Hampshire without a rail service, after Gosport. The danger is that the line will be left to deteriorate, increasing the costs of any future restoration of services.

Along with poorly-served Totton at the junction with the main line, the route could give some 55,000 people better access to Southampton and possibly a direct link to the other side of Southampton Water. Peak traffic congestion is a major issue on the parallel road, with pollution often at unhealthy and illegal levels towards Southampton.

This is the kind of issue which a public-focused rail operator could champion in tandem with stakeholders. Note the substantially increased passenger flows which First Group has achieved on the Severn Beach and West of England branch lines.

Trials of electric trains with auxiliary batteries have been encouraging and, under existing service patterns at Southampton Central, an hourly service should be achievable with such trains by extending either the Victoria, Brighton or Portsmouth (stopping) services to Hythe.

The local bus operator seems to have noticed the possibility of a train service. For years it has resisted re-introducing late evening buses via the substantial village of Marchwood, yet from 4.9.2016 back they come, seven days a week up to 23.00.

Compare the situation with Minehead. Network Rail has long resisted allowing the West Somerset Railway’s trains to run over its rails into Taunton station. Yet we understand from a member of the WSR that a direct commuter service from Minehead is now under active consideration because of peak traffic congestion in Taunton.

Swanage suffers from peak holiday traffic. On sixty days (Mondays and Fridays excepted) from 13.6.2017 until 3.9.2017, a trial service of 4 direct diesel trains each way is planned to operate between Swanage and Wareham. A ninety-day service is proposed for 2018.

**Acknowledgements / Contact details**

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Address for correspondence: Denis Fryer, 19 Fontwell Close, Calmore, Southampton, SO40 2TN (denis@fryer1491.fsnet.co.uk).