

ORR seeks information improvements from South Western Railway

The Office of Rail and Road says it will continue to monitor South Western Railway (SWR) plans to improve provision of timetable information, after discussions held with the operator.

In a letter to SWR Managing Director Andy Mellors on January 23, ORR Director of Railway Markets & Economics John Larkinson wrote: "We continue to have serious concerns regarding the information that SWR provides to consumers about its rail services."

Larkinson highlighted examples in January where customers had not received correct information on trains and were able to book tickets for trains that were not running on January 20, and that information for the weekend beginning January 27 was also incorrect.

"We are therefore concerned

that SWR may not be taking all the necessary steps to provide appropriate, accurate and timely information to enable railway passengers to plan and make their journeys with a reasonable degree of assurance," he continued.

He pointed out that the ability to plan or make a journey with a reasonable degree of assurance is a requirement of Condition 4 of SWR's passenger licence, and called on the company to explain what it is doing to remedy the situation.

On January 26, Mellors replied to Larkinson, highlighting the measures SWR was taking. These include an improved process for checking the engineering work affecting its services, publication on its website of a weekly synopsis of routes affected by engineering work, and information on which

services are available for booking and which are not.

The company says it is placing a banner on its website homepage to warn passengers of disruption, and that it is reinstating the direct National Rail Enquiries Service feed of disruption data to its website. It says its external website developer is working to resolve the issue.

SWR and Network Rail are also producing timetable requests 14 weeks in advance, rather than the industry standard 12 weeks. The first week affected by this will be May 12.

"I trust you will recognise the seriousness with which we are taking this issue and the proactive steps we have put in place in the circumstances until the underlying situation improves," wrote Mellors. Larkinson acknowledged the

company's efforts but said: "More is needed." He pointed out that while the SWR website has been improved, there were no similar facilities on its mobile application or journey-check site.

"As you will be aware, the weekly report from National Rail Enquiries provides information to industry and ORR on the number of errors in journey planners up to 12 weeks ahead. The extent of SWR's engagement with the relevant team is unclear; it appears that errors have been raised with SWR but not corrected.

"It is important that the further promised improvements are delivered in a timely manner so that passengers can fully realise the benefits. We therefore intend to continue to monitor progress," Larkinson confirmed.

Blackpool North wiring on track

Network Rail says the Blackpool North route is "on track" to reopen on March 26.

Recent work on the electrification project between Preston and Blackpool North and South has focused on wiring Blackpool maintenance depot. In addition, platform edges at Poulton-le-Fylde are being realigned in preparation for electrification, as are overhanging 'dagger boards' on the platform canopies at the station.

Work has started on removing the redundant signal box at Poulton, and the final piled foundations for overhead line equipment structures were being completed as this issue of RAIL went to press.

See pages 54-55.

News In Brief

ScotRail reward fund

ScotRail will be rewarding passengers who hold live Smartcard season tickets with an equal share of a £1 million reward fund from March 21. It is part of the Scottish Government's £3m fares fund and is aimed at encouraging passengers to switch to smartcard ticketing.

NR helpline contract

Network Rail has appointed Bristol-based outsourced customer contact company Echo Managed Services to manage its 24-hour helpline, helpdesk and out-of-hours media services, in a seven-year deal.

Class 92 tests begin with Sleeper Mk 5s

Tests using GB Railfreight Class 92s on Caledonian Sleeper Mk 5s began at Polmadie on February 15, using the first '92' fitted with a Dellner coupling for the new stock (92038). The '92' was coupled to a rake of the CAF-built coaches that will enter traffic from October. CS 73971 stands to the right of the stock. CALEDONIAN SLEEPER.



Grayling approves Hope Valley capacity upgrade

Secretary of State for Transport Chris Grayling has approved plans to increase capacity on the Hope Valley route between Manchester and Sheffield.

The scheme involves construction of a passing loop at Bamford, extension of the Dore South curve, and reinstatement of a second track through Dore & Totley station with associated capacity enhancements.

The project would increase capacity on the route by a third, from the present two fast trains and one stopping train per hour to three and two respectively.

An Inspector had recommended that the application for the Transport & Works Act Order should be refused, following an objection from CLH Pipeline Systems. CLH later reached agreement with NR and withdrew its objection.

"This work paves the way for a more frequent and reliable service. The increase in capacity will be welcomed by passengers who have been facing extremely busy services for some time," said Transport for the North Chief Executive Barry White.

"These improvements all form part of the first early building blocks of Northern Powerhouse Rail, which aims to transform rail connectivity in the north of England through better connectivity between our major economic centres and the proposed Trans-Pennine Route Upgrade work. It will all help pave the way for a comprehensive network of Northern Powerhouse Rail services, which will eventually link in with national main line rail services and to HS2."

Rail North Director David Hoggarth said: "The good news is we have already secured commitment to improve the

existing services, including more capacity and refurbished trains. We are also seeing further short-term improvements to rolling stock on the route."

Hoggarth added that Rail North "will be pressing" for the release of funding required to undertake detailed design work during 2018-19, with the aim of enabling physical works to start in the following financial year.

Lead member for transport on the Sheffield City Region Local Enterprise Partnership board Martin McKevey said: "It's good to see that the Secretary of State has been listening to us, and our collaborative efforts have paid off with this important decision. However, having had this breakthrough we will now be working with Network Rail to make sure the scheme happens."

See Open Access, pages 35-37.

Vivarail targets summer running for new battery unit



Richard Clinnick
Assistant Editor

richard.clinnick@bauermedia.co.uk

VIVARAIL'S first two-car battery unit is in the final-build stages and is due to run on the national network this summer, the company confirmed on February 21.

Two-car 230002, converted from redundant D-Stock, has been approved for passenger use and is the first production battery unit in the UK. The company described it as "a simple and elegant design that will allow battery trains to replace diesel units with a minimum of time and effort".

Power is provided by two lithium ion batteries per vehicle (four per train). This provides 106kWh, requiring an eight-minute charge

at the end of each journey to run 40 miles. Vivarail said that with a ten-minute charge that range is extended to 50 miles. As battery technology improves, so these distances can be extended.

On safety, Vivarail said: "The lithium ion batteries on our trains work only within defined temperature parameters and performance is constantly monitored - so should an incident occur it can be quickly contained and the gases

will be filtered before being allowed to dissipate naturally."

A seven-year lifespan is expected for the batteries. They fit into the same space as a diesel genset.

The two-car '230' can be charged via existing overhead line electrification or third-rail, while for non-electrified routes Vivarail has developed a static battery bank as an alternative charger.

The company has also developed an automatic charging point, whereby when the train stops at a certain point it connects to a power source. The rate of charge is identified by on-board electronics. Once the charge is complete, the

'230' can continue its journey.

For the charging point an electrical supply of 11kV or 33kV is required. If the supply is not strong enough, then the static battery bank can be used. They charge overnight at a low rate and provide power through the day as needed, similar to that used on motorway service areas for electric cars.

Vivarail also has three-car 230001, a diesel prototype, approved for passenger use. The company has a deal in place with West Midlands Trains to supply three two-car D-Trains for the Bedford-Bletchley route from later this year (RAIL 842). @Clinnick1

ScotRail's new-look HST unveiled

ScotRail 43033 and 43148 pass Trowell (Nottinghamshire) on February 13, with the 0810 Brush Traction Loughborough-Craigtinny. These are the first refurbished and modified High Speed Train power cars for SR, and the first to carry the company's revised livery for the HSTs. This includes an Inter7city logo that blends the Intercity brand with the intention to serve the country's seven cities. HSTs enter traffic with SR from May, operating with refurbished former Great Western Railway Mk 3s fitted with sliding doors. STEVE DONALD.



Heathrow group welcomes private investment proposals

Heathrow Southern Railway Limited (HSRL) has welcomed Secretary of State for Transport Chris Grayling's remarks about private investment in rail links, made during a recent Transport Select Committee hearing on the Airports National Policy Statement.

At the hearing, and in response to a question by Plymouth Sutton & Devonport MP Luke Pollard (Labour & Cooperative), Grayling said: "We intend to invite proposals for private investment in southern access to Heathrow in the next couple of months. I think that there is a genuine opportunity there to lever in private financial support for

that particular investment."

Grayling also revealed that the Department for Transport is making passive provision at Old Oak Common for a station to serve Chiltern Railways trains.

HSRL Executive Director Graham Cross said: "The Secretary of State's remarks recognise the importance of southern rail access to the future of Heathrow and the contribution private investment can make to its early construction.

"This new railway is needed even with the existing two-runway Airport.

"But if expansion is approved, Heathrow Southern Railway could

be open before the additional North West Runway, bringing immediate mitigation to road congestion and air quality."

HSRL plans to build eight miles of track from the west end of the existing Heathrow Airport Terminal 5 station, to enable trains to operate between Heathrow Airport and Waterloo via Clapham Junction, Putney, Hounslow, Twickenham, Richmond, Staines and other stations.

It will also create a new route to London between Basingstoke/Guildford to Paddington via Woking, Heathrow and Old Oak Common.

Teams prepare for IMechE challenge

Eleven teams of students from the UK, Germany and Egypt are preparing to compete in the Institution of Mechanical Engineers' Railway Challenge at the Stapleford Miniature Railway this June.

The competition requires students to design and manufacture a 10¼-in gauge locomotive in accordance with a set of precise rules. The locomotives are then tested in a series of track-based and presentation challenges. These include a design report and business presentation, as well as tests of the locomotive's traction, ride comfort, noise, maintainability and ability to store energy.

'Adopt a station' launched on DLR

Docklands Light Railway launched its 'adopt a station' scheme on February 15, in a bid to help communities, schools and businesses make more of their local station.

The scheme is being trialled at Poplar station. It will use space at the station to publicise events, classes and workshops taking place in the local area, as well as providing a 'platform' for art and the activities of local schools, gardeners and others.

Transport for London says the initiative will help to improve the station environment.