



ALTON LINE USERS' ASSOCIATION

www.altonlineusers.com

Founded May 1974 - Serving users of Ash Vale, Aldershot, Farnham, Bentley and Alton stations

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Stakeholder Consultation South Western Rail Franchise

Annex A: List of Consultation Questions

Passenger Satisfaction

- Do you support the key priorities that have been identified through the Transport Focus research?

Yes

- Are there other priorities you believe should be included to inform the new franchise specification?

The **Alton Line Users' Association (ALUA)** agrees with the objectives stated, but good intentions are not enough. Real investment in infrastructure and genuine flexible working methods by railway staff are required.

Franchise Objectives

- Do you feel that these are appropriate objectives for the South Western franchise?

Yes

- Are there any further objectives you believe should be included?

The new franchisee should contribute towards improved infrastructure, such as Woking grade separation and additional platforms at Woking and Guildford. These enhancements would benefit the Alton Line as well as other services.

Capacity

- Considering the planned schemes to deliver additional capacity, what are your views on additional opportunities to deliver more capacity elsewhere within the franchise area?

Restore double track on Farnham to Alton line to give capacity for oil and maintenance trains without affecting passenger services. Gaps and delays in current timetables could be removed. An Alton to Guildford service, as desired by Surrey County Council, would need this track capacity.

- Are there particular services or routes where you believe there is a need to introduce additional capacity to address overcrowding?

The Alton line services suffer from overcrowding on peak trains. With thousands of new homes being built in the area served by the stations on the line, overcrowding on trains will get worse.

- It may be possible to increase overall passenger carrying capacity by introducing different rolling stock that has more standing space and/or modifying the internal configuration of trains, including rebalancing first and standard class seating. Do you have views on these potential rolling stock changes?

For all trains except London suburban services, all seating should be 2+2 format and should have toilets. On current 2x2 coaches, doors are rather narrow for wheelchairs and buggies.

Future Impacts on Demand

- What factors may impact on demand for travel on the new South Western franchise, drawing on local impacts in particular? Please provide any evidence you may have.

Huge population increase (as referred to above) especially affecting the Alton line towns of Aldershot, Farnham and Alton. There is severe road congestion at peak hours, for example on A31 Hogs Back towards Guildford in morning and towards Farnham in evening peak.

Train Service Specification

- Where, if anywhere, would you like to see any changes to first and last trains on the South Western network and why? Do you have any evidence to support this?

On the Alton Line, later through trains would be useful for passengers having an evening in London. It is sometimes currently necessary to leave theatres early in order to get home. The last through train to Aldershot, Farnham and Alton currently leaves Waterloo at 23:23.

- Where, if anywhere, would you like to see any changes to weekend trains on the South Western network and why? Do you have any evidence to support this?

Earlier trains on the Alton line on Sundays. The first train currently leaves Alton after 8.15 arriving London Waterloo at 09:39. This is too late for onward connections for a day out or to get to work. Also, on Sunday mornings a 30 minute interval service would be an improvement, as would faster trains, which are particularly slow on Sundays.

- Would you support a specification which is flexible enough to allow the operator to review how station calls are allocated to train paths in order to improve overall line capacity? What impact might this have on passengers?

Yes. For example, to speed up services the Alton-Waterloo services should cut out the stop at West Byfleet, where Alton line trains historically did not stop. Other trains for Waterloo starting at Woking already stop at West Byfleet. (And see next question). We would not support removal of station stops between Woking and Alton.

- Respondents are invited to propose any changes to the current service pattern which they feel should be considered and to explain their rationale, for example by identifying specific local factors which might influence the future level of passenger demand which should be reflected in a revised specification.

All trains should stop at Clapham Junction to facilitate better connections with other routes. This is important with the extension of the London Overground to Clapham Junction.

Overall journey times should be speeded up (by removing dwell times at Surbiton) in order to speed up trains, which are said to be slower than before electrification! However, it would be useful for all trains to stop at Bentley which currently has an hourly service.

- Respondents who wish to promote service changes should clearly identify these in their response to this consultation, as well as any supporting business case or value for money (VfM) analysis.

As previously stated, there are very large new housing estates being built at Aldershot (4,500 new homes) and at Alton (1,700 new homes) and Four Marks nearby. Many more people will be commuting to work by rail to Guildford, Woking and London. Better connections to/from Alton and the Ascot line would also be useful.

Performance and reliability

- Are there any specific stations or services where you believe reliability or punctuality should be improved?

In the down direction approaching Aldershot, signal delays can occur to Alton trains because of a tight margin with preceding Guildford to Ascot trains arriving at Aldershot.

- Where possible, please explain your reasoning when responding to this question.

The delays at Aldershot may be due to the rolling stock currently used on Guildford to Ascot trains having to proceed slowly through Aldershot tunnel.

Managing disruption

- Respondents are asked to suggest what mitigating actions and steps the South Western operator should be expected to take to meet the needs of its passengers both during the planned disruption to the franchise as a result of enhancement works and when 'force majeure' events, such as extreme weather or unplanned events that impact the smooth operation of the network.

Better contingency planning and communication is needed, including accurate station platform information screens. All buses should be DDA compliant, for benefit of the disabled. Allowance must be made for over-running engineering, with replacement transport available. Staff should be kept informed and advise passengers accordingly.

- Respondents are asked to consider whether they would support replacing first/last train services with alternative transport where it can be demonstrated that a longer period of engineering access for Network Rail would improve the infrastructure reliability and reduce disruption overall.

Only in exceptional circumstances would this be acceptable.

Partnership working and collaboration

- We are interested in your view on the best way to achieve efficient operation of this railway through partnership and collaboration. Please describe how such working arrangements might support this objective.

Alton Line Users' Association has regular meetings with SWT (the current TOC) but would like to see real results from meetings.

Community rail and other local partnerships

- What opportunities are there for Community Rail Partnerships and other local partnerships to expand their role and range of activities to support local communities, businesses and other organisations?

Alton Line Users' Association attends regular Stakeholder Meetings with SWT. We aim to extend our membership to embrace a wider segment of the community.

Island Line

- What factors do you consider should be taken into account in assessment of options for the Island Line? ● Do you have any innovative proposals for how the Island Line might operate on a more self-sustaining basis?

The Island Line needs support from the local community.

Third party funded changes

- Are you aware of any proposals for third party funded changes?

No.

- Please provide details in line with the requirements set out above, or provide sufficient detail for further dialogue to take place to understand the proposals.

Not applicable.

Stations

- What improvements would you like to see at the station(s) you use to enhance your journey experience?

Better staffing is needed, especially at off-peak hours (all stations). Ticket offices fully manned. Staff need to be more aware of those passengers with special needs. Expansion of car parking is urgently required, including the installation of double deck parking. Ideally, all stations should have 2 ticket machines as a contingency.

- Please indicate the name of the station(s) and the rationale for your specific comments.

Ash Vale: Lifts or ramps to platforms and lengthening of platforms to 12 cars, although it is understood that this would be difficult and expensive to achieve.

Aldershot: An entrance on the down side would be very useful to passengers.

Farnham: Car parking capacity insufficient.

The platform 2 waiting room should be open to passengers, especially as in exceptional circumstances, trains are terminated here and onward passengers have to wait for next train. More and longer canopies are required.

Access points to Farnham station at south end of station would give better access to station car park and reduce passenger bottlenecks at peak periods.

Bentley: Car parking capacity insufficient.

Alton: Longer canopies are needed, especially where the new footbridge is some distance from the station buildings. Lengthening of platforms to 12 cars would be helpful, but difficult on this site.

Door-to-door journeys

- What are your proposals for providing passengers better and safer access to different modes of transport at stations (including bus, car, cycling and walking)?

At all stations, buses should be timetabled to link with trains and fully integrated with rail services. Better signage from stations to bus stops and better information from town centres to the railway.

Improved cycle routes to stations and more cycle parking facilities.

- What opportunities exist for improved integration between modes, citing relevant examples to support your comments?

Improved promotion of the Ash Vale / North Camp link, which is a half-mile walk. Perhaps the footway could be marked.

At **Alton**, not all bus routes serve the station. The station access on foot is across or alongside the car park and can be hazardous.

With the significant housing developments at **Bordon**, there should be frequent buses to and from Alton or Bentley to connect with trains. A shuttle service at peak periods to/from **Four Marks**, where there has also been much new housing development, would relieve car park congestion at Alton.

Coach services to London Heathrow Airport (LHR) currently run from Aldershot and from Woking, but frequencies need to be enhanced. Delays occur because of traffic congestion on the M25 and elsewhere. In the medium term, a rail link must be provided from the South Western franchise area to LHR. Ideally, Airtrak should be reconsidered. Airtrak had plans for a new main line from the Guildford area via LHR to Watford and beyond.

Fares and Ticketing

- What are your views on the availability of retail staff and the ability for passengers to have widespread access to ticket buying opportunities (e.g. through new and improved approaches such as smart ticketing, increased advance purchase ticketing or via mobile phones), adequate measures to ensure vulnerable passengers are not disadvantaged, and more effective customer service by both station and on-train staff?

On the Alton line, there is presently a lack of integration between Smart Card readers and the TfL Oyster card system. Smart card readers cannot be used for seasons. Smart ticketing will have its advantages, but cannot replace manned ticket offices which should be open for longer hours. As described below, on-train guards must provide a better service to passengers.

- Do you have any evidence to support your views?

Please see above. Some passengers cannot use mobile phone or other technologies. Standard ticket machines, smart cards and internet booking do not cover special ticketing requirements. Some ticket types, routes and reservations cannot be processed by smart ticketing or ticket machines.

Smart ticketing

- What are your experiences of using smartcard technology within the franchise area to date?

No experience to date in UK.

- To what extent do you believe that smartcard technology could be used to manage passenger demand and to create an integrated journey experience for passengers?

Fares set according to times of day and easier booking of through fares. Smartcards should cater for part-time workers. But ALUA believes that rail fares must be simplified. The higher tier of off-peak fares on SWT should be abolished. Reduced price period returns for shorter journeys should be available.

Passenger Information

- Are there areas of improvement in customer information and engagement you would like to see before, during and after your journey?

Already discussed above.

Also, more information displays in town centres regarding railway services and maps to stations.

Service quality

- What areas of customer service within your end-to-end journey would you expect to see monitored and reported on to improve the service quality for passengers?

Guards must be more pro-active in moving through the trains and assisting passengers with routes and ticketing. Additionally guards need to identify if any passengers have special needs. Too often guards currently stay in their small cabins on the train, only rising to open/close the doors. Many guards merely announce: 'I can be found currently in coach x'! This does not help the elderly, the disabled or those with luggage or small children.

The new franchisee should have in mind customer accessibility issues at all levels of decision making.

Passenger compensation ●

Please provide details of your experience with the current delay repay passenger compensation arrangements, and suggestions for how this might be modified in the new franchise to make compensation more transparent and convenient for passengers.

Delay/repay must be more efficiently handled than with the current franchise. Some claims take months to be refunded. Season ticket holders should be able to claim for refunds after delays, without having to wait for renewal. Delay/repay must be activated after 30mins (not 60mins) and be refunded in cash.

Security and Safety

- Do you have any proposals to improve security and safety at stations and on trains that you would like us to consider?

Please see above regarding station manning and pro-activity of train guards.

- Please provide details of the stations(s) and/or train(s) where appropriate that have informed your comments, and provide supporting information where available.

Staffing applies to all stations on the **Alton** line.

The active presence of guards would be especially effective in the evenings and on late night trains.

END.