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48, Spa Road, Melksham, SN12 7NY

30th March 2012

01225 708225

<http://www.wellho.net> (Training)
<http://www.wellhousemanor.co.uk> (Hotel)

Dear Sir,

Great Western Franchise – Service level, TransWilts line (Qn 21)

I run a business in Melksham, Wiltshire, visited by customers travelling from far and wide for our specialist IT courses, or to visit other businesses in the town. We're looking at around 400 different long distance visitors every year.

When we were growing the business between 2000 and 2006, just over 55% of our visitors arrived in the town, and left, by train. But when the train service was respecified in 2006, our customers lost the ability to arrive from London at around 09:00, and the ability to leave at about 17:00. The only connection from London on a weekday now arrives at 19:11, and customer who have completed their courses cannot leave until 19:47. Both of these timings are unacceptable to the majority of our customers, and as a result only around 4% of them now arrive in the town, or leave, by train; the majority now drive by private car, sometimes over very long distances. Taxis from the nearest railhead at Chippenham are often used, but customers are shocked at the price of this and can arrive in a negative frame of mind, and few use the buses which mostly run from the opposite side of Chippenham!

If Melksham was a village, I could understand the minimal service - but it's not. It's a town of some 23,000 people ... and I'm very much aware that the same issues are a concern to other businesses in the town too. I have been reading the figures, published earlier today, giving passenger journey figures for the year 2010 - 2011, and I have compared the figures for Melksham (11,046 journeys) with other nearby towns such as Bradford-on-Avon (416,602 journeys), Warminster (336,804 journeys), and Pewsey (202,962). What's remarkable is that each of these towns is smaller than Melksham, and with an appropriate level of train service, passenger journeys from / to Melksham should build up to a similar level.

What is an "appropriate service"? **I support the case put forward for a service that runs at least once every 2 hours during the day, and hourly at peak times - that's at least 10 service each way per day (Monday to Friday); I believe that a service of at least 8 round trips on Saturday, and 6 on Sunday is also appropriate.** And I believe that such a service meets your request (question 21 of the franchise consultation) for suggestion which will be practical, affordable, and provide significant social and economic benefits [for the places and area served]. This case is made in further detail in the submission you already have from the TransWilts Community Rail Partnership (it's online at http://www.twcrp.org.uk/DfT_GWconsultation_TransWilts.pdf), which is supported by technical work by the MVA Consultancy, and an operational feasibility study by Network Rail that concludes the service can be accommodated on the existing infrastructure, even allowing for extra trains between Swindon and Wootton Bassett after electrification. The two Wessex Chamber of Commerce surveys referenced in that report show **that 94% of businesses agree with us that a service would make a significant positive difference to businesses** (and that survey's over a wide area), and drew over 600 responses from members of the public saying that they would use the service to commute. The survey also

suggested a strong leisure traffic, something that was proven last year by the filling (and overflowing) weekend after weekend of a trial service from Swindon via Melksham to Weymouth, even though the advertising was muted.

As you may imagine, I have become actively involved with the issue of the TransWilts rail service which is very important to our business, and many others - indeed, I've been involved in understanding and checking the TransWilts submission, and in putting the Melksham Chamber of Commerce's response to you. So I'm very much aware of what other businesses need in terms of a rail service over the next 15 years.

Businesses need:

- * A reliable service with assured start date
- * A service with long term stability so we can plan our businesses based on it
- * Wideranging connections. People aren't just travelling between Swindon and Westbury - they are going beyond
- * Through information and fares which are easy to understand (I am NOT saying "cheap") and can be booked on one ticket

Our business visitors will, in my experience, happily move their arrival and departure forward or backward by up to an hour to use a train service from the nearest station. If there is no service available within the 2 hour time slot this gives, they will look for an alternative. This will very often change the mode for the whole of a long journey - so that "no train to Melksham" can mean driving to Canterbury, or flying to Glasgow (two recent examples).

I believe that any of the four established operators I saw mentioned today as potential franchisees (Arriva, First, National Express and Stagecoach) would be well able within an appropriate franchise specification to meet those needs, using staff who already have route knowledge and trains which are already running in the area and provide the current limited service. The provision of a longer franchise is encouraging both in terms of the stability and inward investment it can bring, but it is critically important that it avoids targets and specifications which distort provision for the travelling customer in order to meet the contract. I am thinking (for example) of the short services which run from Westbury to Warminster 10 minutes behind a Portsmouth train with (it seems) the sole intention of meeting the "no gap longer than 3 hours" requirement at Dilton Marsh; there is a better solution there, as outlined in the TransWilts proposal, which gives Dilton Marsh - now an urban area station - a much improved service.

There are also major commuter flows - already - between TransWilts stations, and a great deal of commuting by other means. Rail passengers from Westbury / Warminster / Trowbridge to Chippenham / Swindon double back via Bath (using overcrowded trains between Bradford-on-Avon and Bath especially). There's a comparison of journey times at http://www.wellho.net/mouth/3641_Swindon-to-Trowbridge-transport-and-travel-options.html showing that the direct train is the best option, the car comes third, train via Bath is fourth and the rush hour bus a distant sixth. Add to that potential flows from Melksham. Some of those are modal shift; others are new journeys as some 2,000 new homes are authorised and / or under construction as I write, and the core strategy has further housing earmarked, with only limited extra employment. At a recent meeting organised by Melksham Without Council, the council chair (Mike Mills) asked how many people actually work in Melksham. It was just 6 out of 100. Others work in Swindon, Bristol, Bath and Salisbury (places listed in order of numbers) and elsewhere.

At the ends of the day, commuters won't wait more than 60 minutes for a train on a regular basis - so a finish at 17:15 and a train at 18:45 won't be used. The time they will wait at the end of the day also depends to some extent on how early they have been in the morning - if they have arrived at 07:45 when they don't need to arrive until 08:45. An 07:45 to 18:45 layover at destination - 11 hours - is far too long as the only option and additional services as proposed will provide further options. Twice the commuter services give rise to four times the options; the retention of the existing service as part of the overall plan is important not only for continuity of service but also in terms of being an integral part of future provision. I am

conscious of experiences such as Islip, where an increase from 7 to 11 trains per day has turned around declining traffic into steep growth, and commend that to you as further support to show that the requested service level will work.

Bath and Bristol commutes from Melksham will NOT be direct under the proposals / request, but will involve a change at Chippenham or Trowbridge. But with nearly 20 services a day with connections, well spread (an operational necessity since Melksham is on a single line), Melksham truly becomes part of the "Bristol Metro". It is vital that good information is provided to ensure that travellers know which service to join at Bristol, and this is an area where the community rail partnership can work in conjunction with the Melksham Railway Development Group, the TransWilts Rail group, Wiltshire Council, the train operating company and other to ensure the service is well documented and easy to find out about.

Some 60% of working days are still traditional, Monday to Friday 9 to 5 (ish), but a growing proportion are not. I was struck when I travelled even on the extra summer Sunday rail service at 07:30 from Westbury to Swindon in 2011 that there were people (and NOT just rail industry!) using even that service as part of their working day. They were VERY disappointed that the service was only running for 8 brief weeks. I was also impressed by the loading (over 60 people up to Swindon) on what we had anticipated would be a very quiet train, and to hear of the long distance journeys very many of them were starting. The return working to Weymouth, full and standing and providing passengers for three other previously-quiet regular services, has been documented elsewhere and provides confirmation that a Sunday service would be used. Indeed, as far as our own business is concerned we often meet arrivals off the Sunday evening trains, which are an integral aspect of our business.

There is widespread political, local government, business and community support for the requested level of service on the TransWilts, and there is joined up thinking.

Everyone's been persistent over the years, and looks forward to gaining and retaining (and working to retain) an affordable service at an appropriate level - truly a good news story / winning combination for everyone. So I ask you - for businesses like our, for bigger businesses, for the people of Wiltshire - **please specify the TransWilts service in the next franchise for a minimum of 10 (M-F) 8 (Sat) and 6 (Sun) round trips, with an underlying environment which will encourage promotion and growth.** Everyone will be a winner, and those of us who have worked so hard to put this case together will be able to put equal energy into help making it work.

Yours faithfully

Graham Ellis
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To:

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Following page – footnote details / technical figures

Footnotes - London (Paddington) to Melksham and Trowbridge train times that are possible under the draft timetable for which the case is made:

23:30 -> 06:43, 06:53
06:30 -> 08:01, 08:11
07:45 -> 09:18, 09:32
09:30 -> 11:01, 11:10
11:30 -> 13:01, 13:11
13:45 -> 15:08, 15:18
14:15 -> 15:52, 16:02
16:30 -> 18:00, 18:10
17:00 -> 18:44, 18:58
17:45 -> 19:19, 19:33
20:45 -> 22:32, 22:44

New figures - growth again (ORR data for ticket sales, year to March 2010 and year to March 2011)

SWI	2835364	3039228	Swindon
CPM	1516726	1653544	Chippenham
MKM	10028	11046	Melksham
TRO	652406	740254	Trowbridge
WSB	378052	425248	Westbury
DMH	10188	12480	Dilton Marsh
WMN	311006	336804	Warminster
SAL	1758400	1824320	Salisbury

Totals of above: was 7472170 rose to 8042924 so 7.64%

Other Wiltshire stations / railheads:

AVF	16240	19650	Avoncliff
BTH	4779480	5217954	Bath Spa
BDW	83492	94584	Bedwyn
BOA	377774	416602	Bradford-On-Avon
DEN	22712	26710	Dean
FFD	30796	33456	Freshford
FRO	121236	135180	Frome
KEM	316616	340536	Kemble
PEW	181872	202962	Pewsey
TIS	208828	216572	Tisbury

Correlated by Graham Ellis from ORR data and Network Rail and MVA Consultancy reports

<http://www.rail-reg.gov.uk/server/show/nav.1529>
http://www.twcrp.org.uk/docs/mva_2011_03_07.pdf
http://www.twcrp.org.uk/docs/nr_2011_03_04.pdf

Other reports referenced in letter

<http://www.twcrp.org.uk/report.html> – Chamber of Commerce survey reports
http://www.twcrp.org.uk/DfT_GWconsultation_TransWilts.pdf – TransWilts Rail Consultation response

v 1.0 - 30th March 2012 – http://www.wellho.net/downloads/dft_gwconsult2012.pdf