# The Future Potential of Rural Railways: Illustrated by the Dorchester - Yeovil Line

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### A. OBJECTIVES

This study aims to see if a local provincial sector railway line can be made more viable by implementing new policies to reduce costs, and increase revenue, by the more efficient use of resources.

The section of the railway that I am concerned with is the Western Region route from Yeovil Pen Mill to Dorchester West, though this route is also considered in the context of the wider transport network. The line will initially be looked at in terms of cutting costs, then the local revenue will be examined and finally the possibilities of increasing inter-regional traffic will be assessed.

### B.THE RURAL TRANSPORT PROBLEM

Providing rural public transport has always been a problem. In earlier days when even the remotest areas were served by railways it was doubtful whether much of the system made any profit (P26). Perhaps the fundamental problem is that the demand for rural transport is low and the population is widely dispersed, with people wishing to visit the larger concentrated centres. This reduces the viability of public transport operation as conventional forms especially rail are just not flexible enough. Overall the level of transport available in rural areas has never been as good as it is now because the private car has had a liberating effect on most of the community. But for those without cars mobility is restricted and in some cases no public transport is available at all. The people in the community who are affected by this tend to be concentrated in three groups: the old, children, and housewives, who are left without the family car when the husband goes to work. These groups are in many ways those who can least afford to be isolated in this way and this must detract from their enjoyment of rural life.

These problems have been exacerbated in recent years by a number of trends:

1. Continued growth in car ownership has reduced the already limited custom for public transport.

2. A rise in the real cost of rural service provision has meant that fewer rural settlements now have facilities such as post offices and shops. These services being concentrated in larger villages and towns.

3. The trend of rural depopulation has continued in many of the least accessible areas further reducing demand for public transport.

4. An aging population and greater traffic hazards mean that walking and cycling can no longer pay as large a part as in the past.

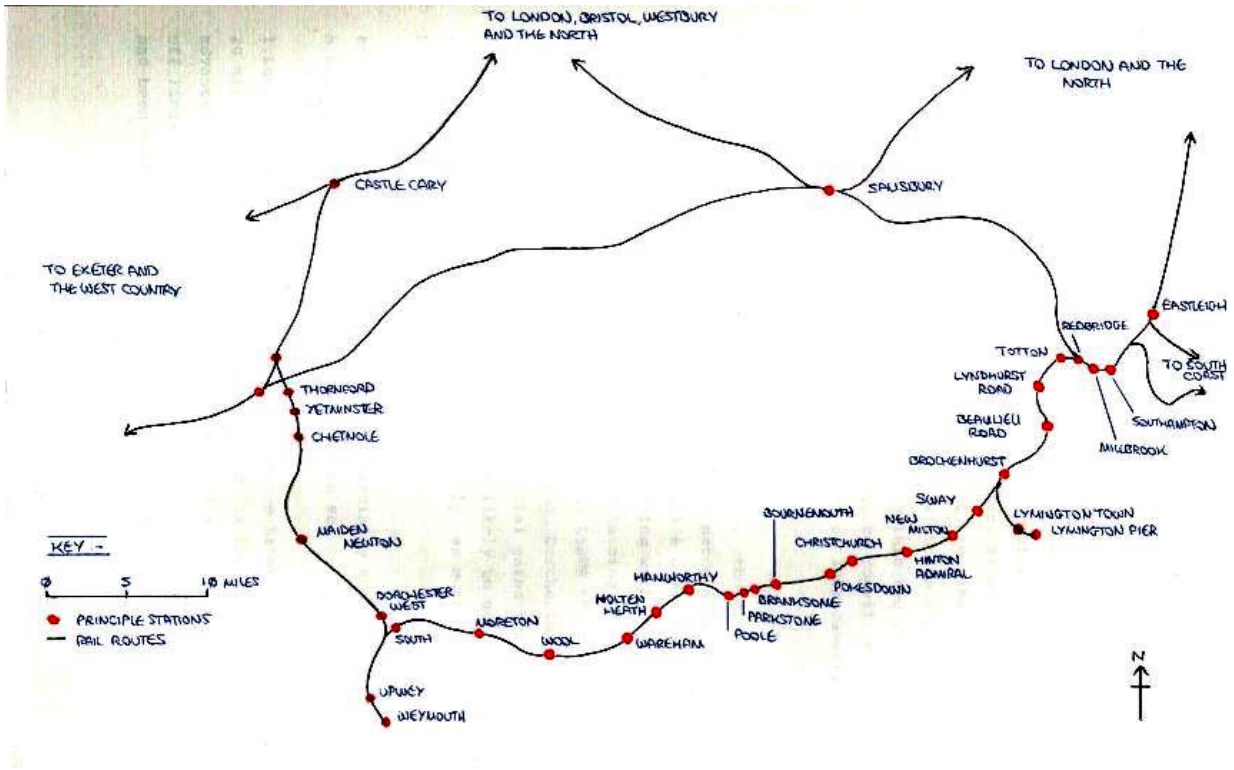
These problems have meant it has long been recognised that public transport has to be subsidised to some degree. However experience has shown, that without careful management these costs can escalate to a point where the service is cut back or withdrawn completely.

### C. THE RAIL PROBLEM

British Rail inherited a mass of often competing rural rail routes upon nationalisation and so its provincial sector is a dramatic example of rural transport problems. Railways formed the first large scale public transport system in rural areas and began to lose traffic in the 1930s with the development of bus services. From the late 1950s onwards the private car began to have an impact and the network became very unprofitable. Although some attempts were made to

rationalise the network it was not until Beeching's report in 1963 that any real progress was made. The report stated that in 1961 one half of the network carried only 4-5% of total traffic and that the railway had become almost insignificant in rural areas. When the report's recommendations were implemented, the rail network shrank from 20,237 miles in 1963, to 15,242 miles by 1968 (P26). Before the report had its full effect the 1968 Transport Act began to question its implementation. The social consequences of rail closures were now also to be looked at. As a result, some lines and services scheduled for closure under the Report have survived, notably those in the Scottish Highlands.

D. THE DORCHESTER-YEOVIL LINE




This line was constructed as part of a Chippenham-Weymouth railway by the Wilts, Somerset and Weymouth Railway Company. The line took a relatively long time to complete running through relatively difficult country and being constructed just after the "railway mania" years which meant finance was difficult to obtain. The latter problem caused construction to be halted in 1848 with the line terminating at Westbury. At that stage the Great Western Railway Company (GWR) became involved, and in 1851 the local company was absorbed into the GWR and construction was re-started. By October 1850 the line had reached Frome, here the line was delayed by the expiry of the parliamentary powers for construction and further financial problems. As a result several branch line proposals were dropped. Even after reducing their objectives there was still minimal construction, so writs were threatened, and petitions presented to Parliament, the line however continued to languish. Meanwhile in 1853, Yeovil had been connected to the GWR network on a different line, while Dorchester had been connected to the London and South Western Railway (L&SWR) in 1847. Finally in 1854 under mounting pressure, and the threat that Weymouth too would be lost to the rival L&SWR, the GWR obtained a time extension, with the relevant Act including clauses compelling completion within two years. Then in September 1856 the line was opened to Yeovil, with the last stage to Weymouth being completed on 20th January 1857.

The line had taken twelve years to complete, though with money short and substantial engineering work necessary, this seems understandable. It was built to Brunel's broad gauge, and boasted the longest tunnel in Dorset, ending with a sharp descent to the sea. The difficulties in financing the line are further explained by the awarding to the L&SWR the right to run their trains on the new line from Dorchester to Weymouth, thus reducing some of the potential gains for the GWR. In no way could the line be seen as likely to generate large returns for the investors, especially as much of it passed through rural areas.

Even in the beginning, the line was commercially suspect but a series of events promised to make it more so.

1. London traffic was restricted because the L&SWR route was 20 miles shorter than the GWR line, and in the 1880s this advantage was increased by the completion of a number of cut-off lines in the Bournemouth area. Although the GWR's line had been doubled between Yeovil and Evershot in 1858, initial traffic expectations were not fulfilled. So while the South Western's service developed, the GWR's declined. The situation became so bad that in the financial crises of 1866/7, economies were made, and there were sweeping cuts in train services (the number of London connections per day falling from five to three by 1868).

2. The GWR was finding its broad gauge a handicap in the development of through-traffic, but the money was not available for conversion or modernisation, and so the situation worsened. Eventually in 1874 the line was converted to standard gauge, and it was able to compete more effectively for the important Jersey potato traffic. However the GWR passenger traffic remained in the shadow of the L&SWR line, with journeys to London taking an hour longer on the former route, even on the fastest trains. Towards the end of the century the situation improved slightly as steamer traffic from Weymouth to the Channel Islands was developed. The GWR also opened a number of cut-off lines, and so by the early 1900s the times for both London services were at last comparable. Nevertheless it had taken nearly half a century to achieve this. The South Western line was now established as the main London route.

3. The new cut-off lines meant the northern part of the line was shared with other services and so the Weymouth line now effectively began at Castle Cary. The principle stations on this shortened line were at Yeovil, Dorchester and Weymouth. With the opening of a new L&SWR route from Salisbury to Exeter via Yeovil in 1860, all these settlements were now served more directly by this rival company.

4. Finally the growth of other resorts in the area, especially Bournemouth which grew rapidly from the 1860s, must have restricted the growth of traffic to the rival resort of Weymouth on both routes.

By the 1930s the GWR line had begun to make some progress, carrying substantial freight and seasonal passenger traffic. Channel Island traffic had been concentrated on Weymouth and to cope with this increase, Weymouth's harbour facilities were improved. The greater road competition led to the construction of a number of halts, on the southern half of the line, the last of which was opened in 1936, representing the maximum development of the line.

After the second world war the railways were nationalised into one network. However this was still divided up into regions, and in Dorset the lines were shared between the Western and Southern regions. This division roughly corresponded with the GWR/L&SWR one of earlier years. In 1950 the Southern Region took over the GWR route and the latter has declined ever since. As the Southern region was now in control of the two competing lines, all the traffic that could be, was diverted onto their original (L&SWR) line, on the original GWR route the track was singled and a number of stations closed.

Under the recommendations of the Beeching report the Dorchester- Yeovil line was not scheduled for closure although all the stations along it, except for Yeovil Pen Mill, were. When the time came for closure to be carried out it was realised that the proposals were just not practical. So a number of stations were reprieved. Dorchester West was saved as it generated a large proportion of the traffic on this part of the line and is the county town. Maiden Newton too, is a relatively important stop; and Chetnole, Yetminster and Thornford could not be served adequately by a replacement bus service. The line is currently divided between the regions at Dorchester and the only traffic that remains is a local passenger service and a few summer excursion trains. It is expected that unless there are cuts in British Rail's grant or other unforeseen problems the line will be safe into the 1990's.

B. THE CURRENT SCENE AND LIKELY DEVELOPMENTS

As well as the Dorchester-Yeovil line, two adjoining lines will be considered in this project, because of their potential links with the former. These are the Southampton-Weymouth and Exeter-Yeovil Junction routes.

The Southampton line has an hourly service between London and Weymouth, calling at most stations west of Bournemouth (few trains call at Upwey or Holton Heath). This is supplemented by additional trains running east of Bournemouth, where the route is electrified. The trains used are old and due for replacement. In the future the line is to be electrified all the way to Weymouth (the Department of Transport have just given consent) and new rolling stock is to be introduced.

The Exeter route has a two-hourly service from Waterloo, which calls at most stations on the line. Although only a secondary main line (and not electrified) its trains are usually more modern than those on the Southampton line. By 1990 it is proposed that High Speed Trains will be transferred to this route as they are displaced from other services.

The Dorchester-Yeovil line has a two-hourly service calling at most stations, though a recent trend has been to reduce the number of stops. The trains used on this service are usually Diesel Multiple Units (DMUs) of the same era as the Southampton line stock. Connections on this line are generally bad unless one wishes to visit the Bristol area. As more of the new "Sprinter" DMUs become available, it is expected this line will be so equipped.

The Dorchester-Yeovil lines competition is in the form of both local bus, and express coach services. National Express coach service 773 directly follows the line making stops at Dorchester, Evershot and Yeovil. National Express services 025 and 476 run via Bournemouth to the West Country, passing Dorchester and Bridport (P24/P25). Southern National service 495 runs from Weymouth and Dorchester to Axminster and Taunton. As it is no longer possible to get from Axminster across to Exeter and points west, this is an insignificant competitor. Southern National also run service X94 from Bournemouth to Yeovil. Pearce, Darch and Wilcox run a roughly parallel Dorchester-Yeovil service and include stops at Maiden Newton, Chetnole and Yetminster which are also served by the railway. This competition is discussed in more detail in later chapters.

## 2. REDUCING COSTS

Provincial sector railway lines in general are extremely unprofitable and offer little chance of increasing revenue, however they do present opportunities for reducing costs. The profitability of the whole Westbury-Weymouth railway line was looked at by the National Bus Company (NBC) in 1981/82 (C8). In their report using 1979 figures, the revenue generated was estimated at 88,000 per annum. The cost of maintaining the line in 1979 was also estimated and broken down into the following 5 groups: train services, terminals, track and signalling, general expenses and replacements. These in turn were divided between engineering and operating costs, the total being £1,762,00 p.a.. This gives us a gross operating index of 27.7%, which implies that the line was covering less than a third of its costs.

There are two aspects to cost reduction; it can be done using the present resources more efficiently and/or by cost saving investment.

In the first case, NBC suggest closing the line and instigating a railcoach alternative. This it is estimated would reduce total costs to £446,000. Although some areas may lose their service, overall journey times could be matched. So if there was no fall in revenue the route could produce a small surplus. However, experience has shown that this is not often the case. For example, Hillman and Whalley (P6) suggest that a transfer rate, from train to coach, of 60% would be optimistic. In their book they conclude that "the elimination of local rail travel has a dehabilitating effect on the health of the rest of the railway network". In the year before a branch line closure the authors reported that 77% of their sample population used long distance rail travel, after closure this fell to 20%. If the replacement service was marketed as part of the rail network with through tickets available and good connections, the transfer may be higher. But should the coach service prove un-profitable it could be withdrawn relatively easily, leaving some of the area with no public transport. Also a number of Dorchester-Yeovil trains run through to Bristol providing local services north of Yeovil. If the Dorchester-Yeovil line was closed many passengers using these northern stations (that remained open) would find themselves with at best, irregular services. British Rail would then have to decide whether to allow such a situation to continue, or to run extra services to compensate. Both of these alternatives are likely to increase costs and/or reduce revenue and feeder traffic. So in looking at these cost savings the rest of the network must be considered.

Generally the Dorchester-Yeovil line is already run as a minimum railway with all stations south of Castle Cary unstaffed except Yeovil Pen Mill. Low cost DMUs provide the train service and the line is single with passing loops at Yeovil, Maiden Newton and Dorchester. So there is little to economise on. Although some of these loops could be taken out, they are necessary during peak summer operations, or in special circumstances. The line is therefore not relatively costly to run, for example, it has no level crossings or large engineering works to maintain. Even so there have been recent closure scares caused by the alleged state of the short tunnels on the line. British Rail has confirmed that the tunnels are not as bad as was thought, and so will not threaten services in the near future. Perhaps the only operational savings that could be made are by the more efficient use of staff and multiple train units. For example, by carrying out more engineering work during the week, labour costs can be cut significantly.

Costs can also be reduced by cost saving investment (renewal of equipment in a simpler form). At present there are two main areas where cost saving investment is likely to be effective.

Firstly, Scottish trials of a new form of signalling for lightly used rural lines have proved very successful. This scheme is expected to pay for itself in two years. The technique is known as the "Radio Electronic Token Block", which is a form of signalling by radio. This replaces the elaborate manual tokens previously exchanged by drivers and signalmen on single track systems. The savings are said to be startling and the technology simple (P13). It ensures that only one train can

be on the line at the same time, and does so with less infrastructure and therefore less maintenance than conventional systems. It prevents the need for cable renewal and saves enough money to make "many threatened rural lines a sensible proposition in the future" (P13), having "a radical effect on the operating economics of lightly loaded lines in rural areas" (P32). Perhaps the only drawbacks with the scheme are that it requires dedicated stock, trains have to be fitted with radios, and this obviously costs money. However, on the Dorchester-Yeovil line there is no freight so only passenger trains would need to be fitted, which could be done while the proposed new units are being constructed, thus reducing costs. As track and signalling costs are 32% of the total cost of the line (C8), there are large potential savings to be made. Nevertheless the line is considerably shorter than the Scottish examples, and so savings may not be sufficient to justify the investment. Such a system may also make the operations of through and excursion trains difficult as extra dedicated locomotives would have to be found, though as the system becomes more universal this would be less of a problem.

The second form of cost saving investment has already been proposed, this being the introduction of new "Sprinter" trains. These will give better performance than current stock, having significantly lower running and maintenance costs. Their greater reliability means that fewer units will be needed to provide the same level of service. They will also show a marked improvement for the passenger, and it is hoped they will win back passengers from other modes of transport. It is also expected that the lightweight "Sprinters" will reduce the wear on the track. The new trains are expected to last 20 years, and the savings will be dramatic amounting to £3.5 million on fuel, and £6.3 million on maintenance per annum over the whole network (P14). On the Dorchester-Yeovil route train running costs account for 44% of total costs (C8), so once again major savings can be made.

The implementation of such cost saving measures can be seen by using an international example.

The Dutch Railways have introduced a whole range of measures including radio signalling (P33). It was found that when new, lighter trains were introduced savings on track maintenance were realised, as well as on running and train maintenance. They are also introducing driver-only operation during off peak periods when passengers boarding at unmanned stations can buy their tickets from the driver through a cash window, rather like pay-as-you-enter buses. These new trains have a higher availability so fewer are needed to run the service. To increase versatility the Dutch trains have guard's van with fold-up seats and cycle racks. Passing loops are operated with spring loaded points, which the trains change as they pass through. The jobs on the Dutch railways are more flexible, for example, a guard may become a carriage cleaner in off-peak hours and a driver may operate as a mechanic. This adds to the variety associated with the job and thus should increase job satisfaction. The obligation to fence the line has been removed in some areas resulting in significant cost savings. Stations have been adapted to this more modern environment and the fare structure has been simplified. Through-tickets are now available for all parts of the railway network and local shops now sell tickets. Regular travellers are able to buy books of tickets so the driver sells fewer on the train (this only operates at off-peak times). When these new measures were introduced they were accompanied by a substantial marketing effort.

Although there is little prospect for immediate cost reduction on the Dorchester-Yeovil line some of these new measures could be adopted. The introduction of the "Sprinter" trains would offer the chance of implementing a complete package, rather like the Dutch example. It is possible that some of the schemes may not be practical in the UK environment. British Rail has already had a dispute with the unions on a limited introduction of driver only operated trains, so one can imagine what an expansion of the scheme is likely to do, as even the Dutch have had some problems in this area. Similar problems may be experienced in attempts to make jobs more flexible. One area that could be improved in the UK is the provision of guard's vans. As new trains have been introduced guard's vans have been gradually getting smaller and in some cases disappeared

altogether, as have toilets. This can only serve to reduce the few advantages rail has over competing public transport.

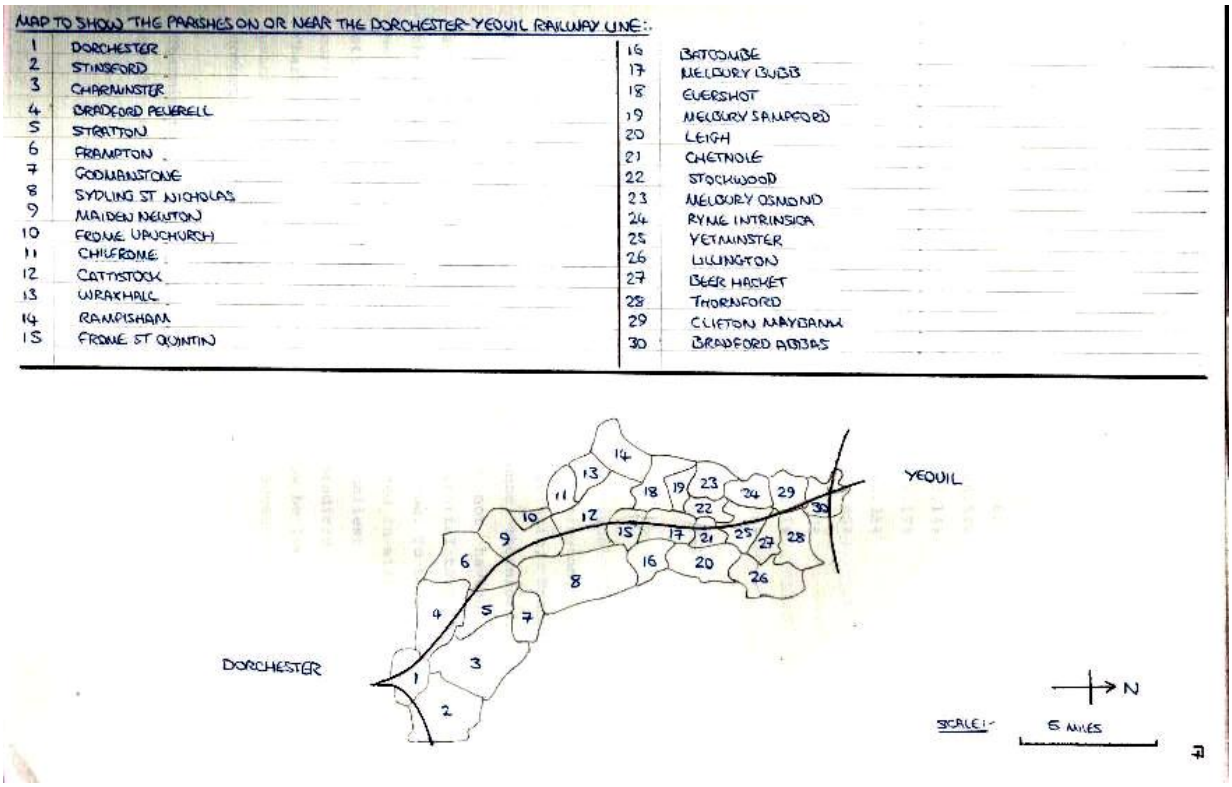
As many rural stations are distanced from part or all of the community they serve, it would seem reasonable for British Rail to encourage cycling. This in affect reduces the distance to the station for those who cannot use cars. The provision of cycle racks at the halts on the line may encourage traffic from cyclists as one could then leave a cycle safely chained up so the passenger feels more at ease when leaving a cycle during a journey. This may reduce congestion in the guard's van.

Simplified track layouts can replace complex old ones with new more reliable components being installed. Passing loops operated by sprung loaded points could be introduced on the line although tests have shown that speed over these has to be limited to 15 m.p.h.. It could therefore be introduced at Maiden Newton and Dorchester West, where most trains stop and the track is not used by other services.

Attempts have been made to reduce the legislative restrictions on rural railways. For example; removing the obligation to fence rural rail lines but so far there has been little progress. It is also hoped that assistance can be obtained in the maintenance of BR's many historic structures.

## 3. INCREASING LOCAL REVENUE

Although the line does not pass through an area of significant population, there may be some possibility of increasing local traffic and revenue in the future. The population of West Dorset rose from 74,067 (1971) to 78,849 (1981) which is a 6.4% increase (P9). Furthermore this rate of growth is increasing (P22). West Dorset's population is projected at 87,170 by 1996 (P10) and 26.7% of this population have no car.




This growth can be looked at for the parishes along the Dorchester- Yeovil railway line.

| PARISHES | POP 1971 | POP 1981 | GROWTH 1971-81 | CAR OWNERS |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| BRADFORD PEVERELL | 340 | 349 | 2.65% | 89.43% |
| STRATTON | 228 | 297 | 30.26% | 81.90% |
| FRAMPTON | 364 | 389 | 6.87% | 80.00% |
| MAIDEN NEWTON | 692 | 785 | 13.44% | 69.55% |
| CATTISTOCK | 406 | 481 | 18.47% | 88.89% |
| FROME ST. QUINTIN | 123 | 133 | 8.13% | 89.58% |
| MELBURY BUBB | 81 | 66 | - 18.52% | 90.00% |
| CHETNOLE | 212 | 305 | 43.87% | 88.07% |
| YETMINSTER | 811 | 898 | 10.73% | 78.92% |
| BEER HACKET | 96 | 89 | -7.29% | 92.86% |
| THORNFORD | 632 | 635 | 0.47% | 83.11% |
| CLIFTON MAYBANK | 70 | 57 | -18.57% | 76.19% |

This can also be done for settlements within one mile of the line:

| PARISHES | POP 1971 | POP 1981 | GROWTH 1971-81 | CAR OWNERS |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| FROME VAUCHURCH | 146 | 132 | - 9.59% | 76.36% |
| TOLLER FRATRUM | 18 | 12 | -33.33% | No figure |
| CHILFROME | 49 | 42 | - 14.29% | 92.31% |
| WRAXHALL | 59 | 40 | -32.20% | 76.47% |
| RAMPISHAM | 152 | 140 | - 7.89% | 91.49% |
| MELBURY SAMPFORD | 42 | 43 | 2.38% | 92.31% |
| MELBURY OSMOND | 185 | 189 | 2.16% | 80.82% |
| RYME INTRINSICA | 127 | 156 | 22.83% | 86.54% |
| STINSFORD | 332 | 295 | -11.12% | 93.14% |
| CHARMINSTER | 2,494 | 2,084 | -16.44% | 71.17% |
| GODMANSTONE | 138 | 117 | - 15.22% | 82.35% |
| SYDLING ST. NICHOLAS | 321 | 322 | 0.31% | 83.05% |
| BATCOMBE | 102 | 103 | 0.98% | 90.00% |
| LEIGH | 353 | 390 | 10.48% | 85.71% |
| LILLINGTON | 77 | 88 | 14.29% | 96.30% |

Note that the car ownership figures are only based on a 10% sample and so may be inaccurate (P9).

The growth areas are in order of magnitude: Chetnole, Stratton, Ryme Intrinsica, Cattistock, Lillington, Maiden Newton, Yetminster, Leigh, Frome St. Quintin, Frampton, Bradford Peverell, Melbury Osmond, Batcombe, Thornford, and Sydling St. Nicholas. Those settlements not having rail access could be the basis of a set of potential targets for the railway in an attempt to increase revenue. To this could be added other settlements that have declined in size but are still bigger than, say, Chetnole (the smallest settlement currently served by the line) i.e., Bradford Abbas and Charminster. The target settlements can now be looked at more practically in terms of situation, accessibility and competition from other modes of transport.

Charminster, although close to the line is separated from it by the River Frome and is well served by more convenient public transport.

Bradford Abbas is really too close to Thornford to warrant a separate halt, however, patronage from this village may be improved if the residents are made more aware of this halt. But even so, only longer journeys would be undertaken as the halt is one mile away form the village.
Stratton is directly on the line and is growing fast. Visits to the area have confirmed that this growth is continuing after the 1981 Census. New houses are still being built at what appears to be an increasing rate. The Stratton, Bradford Peverell and Charminster area has been earmarked for overspill growth from Dorchester.

Ryme Intrinsica is one mile from the line and is already served as well at it could be at Yetminster.

Cattistock can be considered along with Chilfrome, giving a combined population of 523, both settlements are almost directly on the line and are a mile from the nearest station (Maiden Newton). At present the potential traffic gain from reopening would probably not be sufficient to justify it, as the village is served by the bus and a halt here may reduce traffic from Maiden Newton.

The actual settlement of Lillington is two miles from the line and is also very small, so it is not really relevant.

Leigh is already served as well as possible by Chetnole (1.5 miles away).

Frome St. Quintin is one of the few villages in Dorset with no public transport and although only

half a mile from the line, is two miles from the nearest station at Maiden Newton. There are no other close areas of significant population, the only potential traffic would be provided by the police training centre nearby. However they have informed me that most recruits have their own private transport and those that do not are driven to Dorchester or Yeovil stations. Thus there is no case for a halt here.

Frampton is on the line and used to be served by it. But it is not big enough to justify the construction of a new halt and is well served by buses. Currently the nearest station is Maiden Newton (1.75 miles away) though if Stratton halt was to reopen, this distance would be reduced slightly.

Bradford Peverell is a quarter of a mile from the site of Stratton halt and the nearest station at present is Dorchester (2 miles). This village can thus be treated together with Stratton giving a combined population of 646 which makes this the most promising site on the line.

Melbury Sampford is one and a half miles from Chetnole and is served as well as it could be. Melbury Osmond is a similar distance from Chetnole and the same applies.

Batcombe is very small and its centre lies too far from the line for it to have any influence.

Finally Sydling St. Nicholas is two miles from Maiden Newton and is as well served as it could be.

The result of this analysis is that the best case for re-opening is at Bradford Peverell and Stratton. Perhaps the most significant point is that Bradford Peverell halt is still intact. With the addition of train information and the restoration of the path from the road, it would be fully serviceable. In an attempt to estimate the use of a re-opened halt a number of regression models were tried using all the stations currently served by the local trains. The variables were: distance from the built up area, population of the immediate settlements, car ownership rates and average weekday use of each station concerned. The passenger figures were made available to me by Dorset County Council who did a survey in March and August 1983. This data is shown in the table below:

| STATION | POP | DISTANCE | CAR OWNERS | LOADINGS |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Weymouth | 38,702 | 0 | 61.21% | 624 |
| Radipole | 3,640 | 0 | 65.23% | 10 |
| Upwey | 2,800 | 0 | 73.42% | 17 |
| Dorchester. W | 12,263 | 0 | 67.71% | 196 |
| Maiden Newton | 907 | 0 | 71.31% | 46 |
| Chetnole | 305 | 0.25 | 88.07% | 7 |
| Yetminster | 898 | 0 | 78.92% | 27 |
| Thornford | 724 | 0.75 | 84.31% | 8 |
| Yeovil P.M | 24,598 | 0 | 69.20% | 249 |
| Stratton | 635 | 0.25 | 85.97% | ? |

Some of these figures need explaining. Weymouth's population excludes Portland, Radipole, Upwey and Broadway. It's car ownership is also a (population) weighted average of these figures. Thornford's population includes that of Beer Hacket as does the car ownership figure. Finally Maiden Newton's population and car ownership levels take into account Frome Vauchurch. Stratton also includes figures for Bradford Peverell. Radipole is now closed. However because of the small size of the data set it was not possible to achieve any significant results from the regression.

It was decided that the only way to obtain an indication of likely use of the re-opened halt was to do a household survey. So this was carried out during September and October 1985. The interviews took place in both Bradford Peverell and Stratton with every house being visited. The questions used are set out below.

1. How many people are there in your household?
2. How many of them use public transport?
3. What would you say the household's top three destinations are?
4. If the railway station was re-opened how many people in your household would use it?
5. How often would this be?
6. What factors would determine this choice?

The following data was derived from the results:

1. Response rate: 49.07%
2. Number of people covered: Bradford Peverell 110 (31.52% of census population). Stratton 127 (42.76% of census population).
3. Proportion using public transport: 31.17%.
4. Most common destinations: Dorchester 73, Weymouth 21, Yeovil 13, Bournemouth 8, Charminster 5, London 4, Poole 3.
5. Number of people that would use the railway: 132 (57.14%)
6. How regular would this use be: daily 8, 5x week 3, 4x week 2, 3x week 5, 2x week 27, weekly 21, 2x month 4, monthly 5, less often 26, don't know 31.
7. Factors determining the choice: People were put off a proposed rail service by: filthy trains, inconvenience, distance to the station, high fares and crossing the main road.

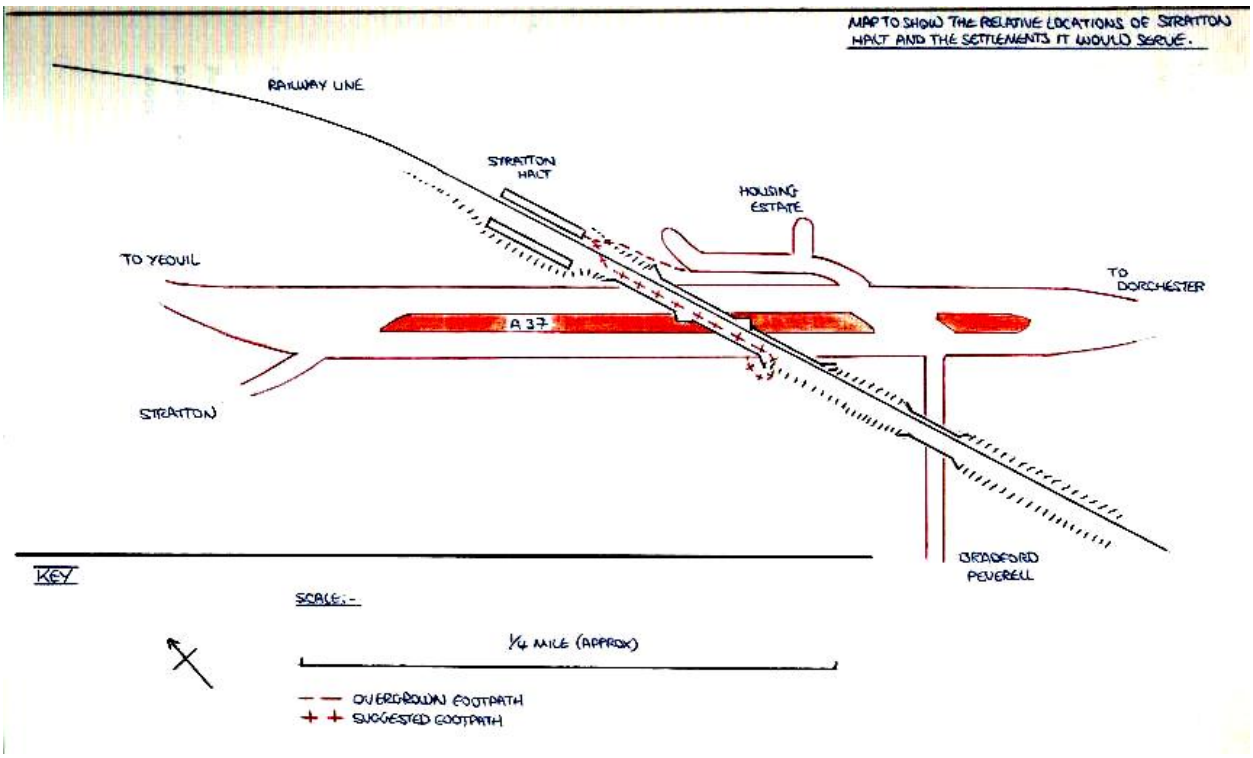
There were also a number of comments made during/after the interviews. A number of people said "you have got to have a car here". Housewives complained of being marooned while the husband was at work with the car. I was also told that the halt, when open, was one of the busiest on the line and that there was once a service of eight trains per day each way. Several people also commented on the parking problem in Dorchester.

These figures show that weekday passenger journeys could amount to approximately 27 passengers. If this was correct the halt would be one of the busiest on the line. It is significant that the most popular destinations are well served by the railway. However previous experience of

station re-opening has often showed the real figures to be significantly lower than surveys have indicated. Even so a look at the above table suggests that Stratton would be busier than both Chetnole and Thornford. Obviously this level of traffic is not sufficient to build a new halt but as the structure is already in place and the Speller Act means that BR can now close experimental stations without complex and expensive legal formalities re-opening must be a possibility.

However there are a number of complications with a re-opening. British Rail have said that they would not be prepared to finance this and would not even consider it unless the County Council were to suggest and part finance it. Dorset County Council are not very enthusiastic for two reasons:

1. Firstly they subsidise a parallel bus service which calls at Bradford Peverell and Stratton, as well as a number of smaller villages not served by the railway. If the halt re-opened part of the revenue from this bus service would be lost to the railway and the bus service may become more expensive to subsidise.




This argument suggests the Council would be better-off if the line closed, as the subsidised bus service could take over, reducing the level of support. But as Pearce, Darch and Wilcox's buses serve Chetnole, Yetminster and Maiden Newton as well as the two towns at either end of the route, in direct competition with the railway, it would seem fair to also allow the railway to compete fully, at any location, with the bus service, including Stratton. The bus timetable is complex as the company presents a number of alternative routes to take in the small settlements. Between Dorchester and Stratton there is an average of five coaches per day each way (no Sunday service), while travelling northwards to Yeovil there is one service per day each way. The current fares are Dorchester-Bradford Peverell 46p each way and Yeovil-Bradford Peverell £1.06 each way. Coaches between Yeovil and Dorchester average two per day each way. The only settlement where the railway has a monopoly is Thornford because it is too inaccessible for the bus company.

2. Secondly a previous attempt at re-opening was not helped by the County Council arguing that crossing the main road, to reach the halt, was too dangerous and they were not prepared to improve the crossing. This can be easily and cheaply rectified because the railway crosses the main road on a bridge built to accommodate two tracks, where now there is only one. A segregated footpath could thus be routed over the railway bridge to the halt (see map).

Park and ride could be encouraged because of the severe parking and congestion problems in Dorchester. Special shopper offers could also be introduced to cater for isolated housewives all along the line. Improved ticketing systems could also be used (using a form of carbon copy) similar to that on National Express which gives them total data coverage enabling more effective decision making.

Although these proposals cost money, it can be argued they would generate a reasonable rate of return. This is illustrated by recent experiences on other rural railway lines in Scotland and Wales. However some of this progress may be affected by bus de-regulation, though if a bus service operating on the more profitable routes available have to be subsidised, de-regulation may have little effect. De-regulation may lead to the withdrawal of the subsidy to the bus company as the restriction of cross-subsidisation under the Bill would make the Council's costs of sustaining the rural bus network higher.

A further way in which local revenue can be increased is through the better marketing of the service. There have been some good marketing attempts in the past but they have not been sustained. In the spring of 1984 a promotional campaign was launched with the help of Somerset and Dorset County Councils. A number of well set out, informative leaflets were distributed on a door-to-door basis including vouchers for free travel on the line. But these are expensive to produce and distribute which may be why it appears to have been a one-off exercise. Perhaps the local press could be used more in the future to counteract some of the bus and coach firms' publicity. There have also been attempts to clean up some of the stations on the line, but unfortunately the new platform shelter at Dorchester West has already been badly vandalised. During this promotional campaign questionnaires were also conducted which revealed the dissatisfaction the public felt about the separate stations in Yeovil. The eventual result of this was a Yeovil minibus link.

An illustration of the possibilities for encouraging local traffic on a rural line is given by the Cotswold line (P35). In 1981 it was expected that at least part of the line would close, but the delegation of authority to area level meant that local managers were now concerned with profitability as well as day to day running. This meant all factors could be taken into account by the area manger when making decisions. The result was a more effective promotion of the line as the local manager could exploit opportunities more quickly. He can still call for regional help if he wants it but he does not have to. Less time is wasted on paperwork which is now spent on publicity. An example of this is the hanging of posters in shop windows. This delegation of authority has also helped to remove inter-regional problems. The line has a supporters group "The Cotswold Line Promotion Group" who campaign for better services while supporting BR. The group have even taken leaflets around villages advertising promotions and put posters on village notice boards. This saves BR advertising costs and increases revenue. Most staff are dedicated and some of them have even rung up season ticket holders to advise of delays. There is a visible sense of pride illustrated with station gardens and at one station, staff sell newspapers and confectionary - ploughing the proceeds back into the station. More importantly, falling revenues have been reversed and are still increasing.

The Dorchester-Yeovil line also has a user group but this has not been as successful as the Cotswolds example. A further contrast is that areas are now being amalgamated which has

reduced the local contact of the line, essential for good results. The Bournemouth and Southampton areas are now combined, and the Westbury area (previously involved with the Dorchester-Yeovil line) has now merged with the Exeter area.

## 4. INTER-REGIONAL TRAFFIC

It is perhaps in the area of inter-regional traffic that the Dorchester-Yeovil line has most to offer. The line was built to compete with rival routes for freight (which is no longer carried) and mainline passengers from London to Yeovil, Dorchester and Weymouth. Over the years this function too has diminished as services have been withdrawn and the other lines have been upgraded. The Dorchester-Yeovil line is left with only the rural passenger traffic and the occasional excursion to Weymouth, which is not sufficient to enable the line to survive in the longer term. This suggests that if the railway has any future at all it must be through different operation.

The network map suggests the possibility of services to and from the West Country and the area between Weymouth and Southampton. This is a cross-country route that does not compete significantly with other rail services and if it does, the new route provides a more direct alternative. For these areas more competitive and direct links could be provided. Although these flows may not be great in national terms, they would be in the case of the Dorchester-Yeovil line, and if the latter is to be kept open it would seem prudent to develop this traffic. But why has this not been tried previously?

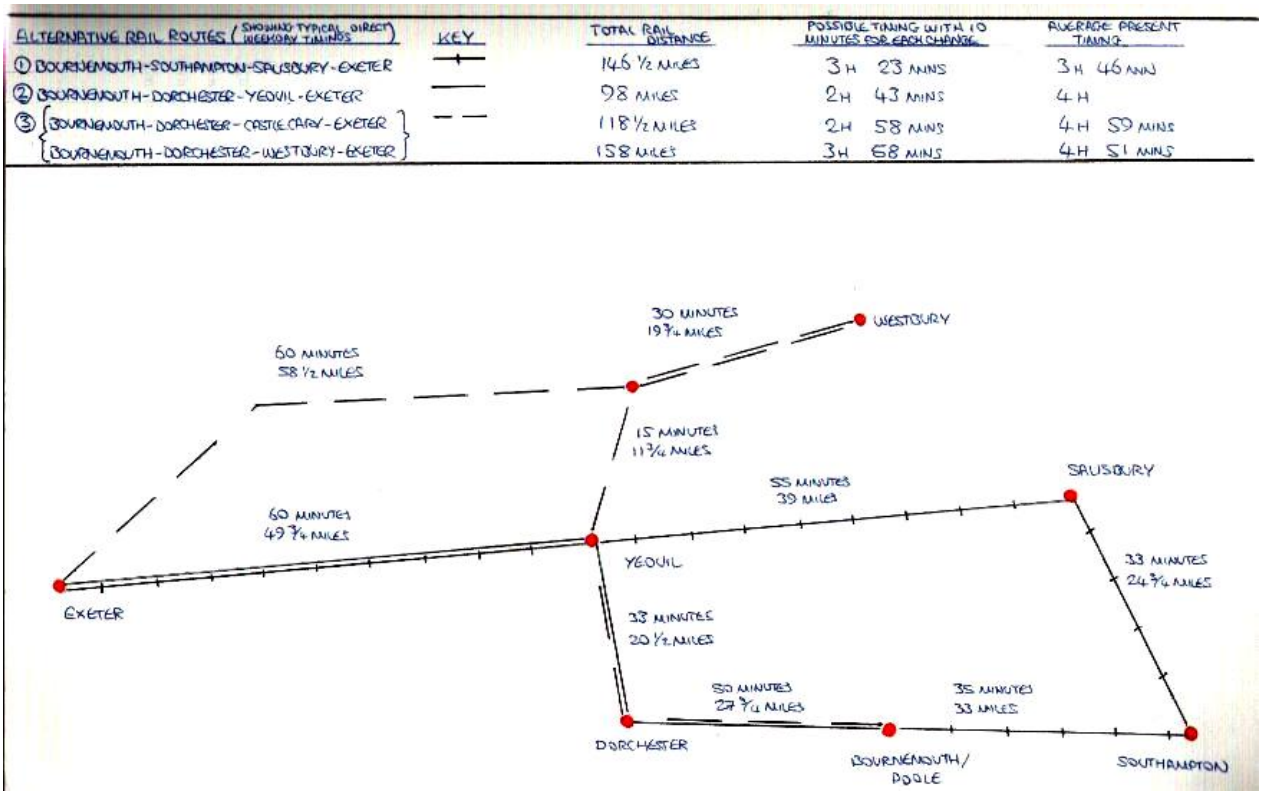
Before nationalisation it was not a possibility because of inter- company rivalry, which is partly responsible for the lack development today. For example there are separate stations in Dorchester and Yeovil and the routes necessary to combine into such a service are managed by different sectors and regions who do not appear to communicate.

To emphasize the difficulties of such a service. The stations in Dorchester (West and South) are 1/4 of a mile apart and the journey involves crossing two main roads. A connection can be made in ten minutes if the trains are on time, however experience suggests that the arrivals into Dorchester South cannot be relied upon to this extent.

The stations in Yeovil are altogether different (Pen Mill and Junction) being three miles apart by road, the latter is situated well outside the town. In Dorchester many people could be reasonably expected to walk, this is not the case in Yeovil. Attempts have been made to improve the situation at Yeovil by instigating a useful minibus link between the two stations and the town centre which has proved fairly popular. This is jointly subsidised (£4,000 in total) by British Rail, Dorset and Somerset County Councils and publicity leaflets are available at both stations. However for an adult this involves an additional charge of £1 each way between the stations reducing the attractiveness of the route, especially as so many difficult changes have to be made. Although the bus link leaflet highlights a number of journeys that benefit from using it, the direct South Dorset/Hampshire-West Country route is not among them. Through-booking is now available for the bus service from stations in South Dorset. But all passengers west of Wareham are routed via Westbury to the West Country and all passengers east of Wareham are routed via Southampton/Salisbury. So the bus link may as well not exist for through passengers to the West Country. Perhaps the best example of bad routing is provided by Southern Region whose reluctance to direct passengers on to the Dorchester-Yeovil line is illustrated by a new passenger route guide at Bournemouth station. This directs passengers from Bournemouth to the West Country via Southampton/Salisbury without even mentioning alternative routes. But the most stunning example in the guide is the suggested route for a journey from Bournemouth to Yeovil. This sends passengers via Southampton/Salisbury meaning that the passenger is taken to Yeovil Junction station (well outside of the town) and in doing so the passenger has to travel 33 miles in the wrong direction and pay for it, on a journey of 40 miles by road!

The potential of new cross country services and connections is perhaps best illustrated by a journey from Bournemouth to Exeter. At present using public transport, one can either go by National Express coach service 025, or travel on a roundabout rail route.

The coach service goes direct from Bournemouth to Exeter and the return fare is £7.75 for all except Friday departures. In the summer timetable there is one fast coach each way and two stopping services each way with an extra stopping service being added on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. In the winter 1985-6 timetable there is one fast coach per day each way, with a slow coach added on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. The former takes 2 hours and 45 minutes, while the slow coach takes 3 hours and 10 minutes. A series of journeys on these services have indicated that these times are somewhat optimistic as there was an average delay of 14 minutes. Nevertheless the coach provides a cheap and convenient alternative to the railway.




There are four rail options available and they are compared here using the 1985-6 BR timetable. The data has been selected by assuming a passenger is travelling from Bournemouth to Exeter on a weekday departing between 7 am and 5 pm. Although these times are purely arbitrary they remove distortions caused by bad connections during hours when services and demand are lower. The times were chosen to connect with the trains on the part of the journey that have the lowest service frequency. The selected start to finish times (allowing at least ten minutes for each connection) were then taken and averaged (see map).

We have already looked at the Dorchester-Yeovil route and the data shows this to be the cheapest (saver return excluding Friday departure [11) and potentially quickest route available. Currently the journey takes longer than the Southampton-Salisbury one and when the minibus fare is included (total [13) any overall advantage is eroded.

The BR "recognised route" involves changes at Southampton and Salisbury and is one of the longest routes available, involving travel in the wrong direction for 33 miles. It is also one of the most expensive routes (saver return excluding Friday departure [15.50). As this is the recommended route it has good connections and the present average times are thus quite close

to the routes optimum times.

The final alternative is via Westbury or Castle Cary. In the period under study there are only two daily connections via Castle Cary, both in the evening and involving long waits. It is impractical to go via Castle Cary and one has to change at Westbury, which is quicker despite involving 40 extra miles (20 in the wrong direction). These routes are the worst as current connections are poor, and even if they were improved the journey would be slower than the present recommended route.

The case against these longer routes is made more significant as passengers are actually charged for the unwanted mileage, which makes the current rail options totally uncompetitive. On numerous visits to the ticket offices in the Bournemouth area the existence of cheaper alternative routes has never been mentioned to me. Perhaps the most surprising thing about these journeys is that anybody goes by rail at all!

Faced with these choices the passenger is most likely to go by coach or car as it is both quicker and cheaper. In fact a BR area manager remarked to me that "there is no competition" on this route. Although this is a rather extreme example any rail journey between the West Country and South Dorset/Hampshire involves either a considerable amount of difficulty, or a needless journey in the wrong direction. Obviously the railway needs to improve its services on these routes, and the Dorchester-Yeovil line has the potential to enable this to be done. With some modifications through-services would benefit from reduced fares, improved timings and the benefit to the passenger of knowing that he would not be paying for travel in the wrong direction at any part of the journey.

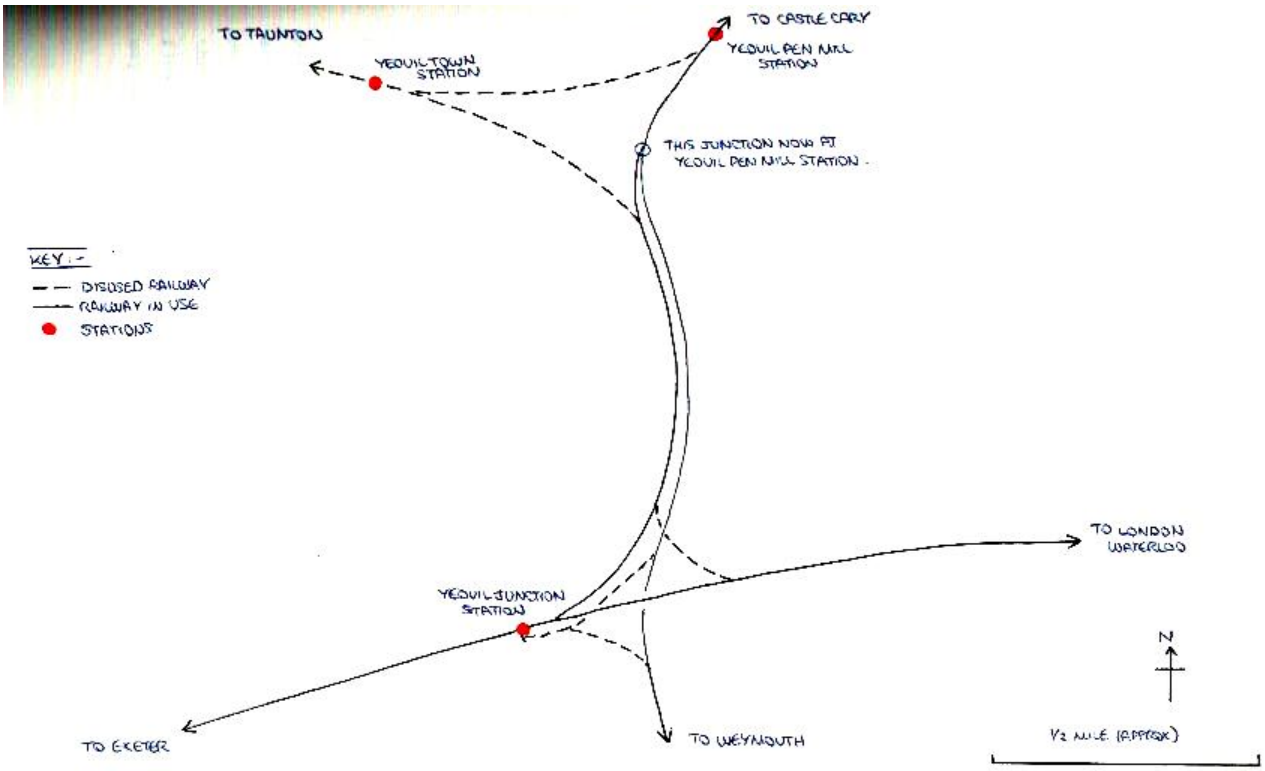
At first it appears that little can be done to improve cross- country connections on the route, but there are a number of opportunities.

The station at Dorchester South is to be rebuilt as part of a deal with the local brewery. This presents an opportunity for re-siting the station nearer Dorchester West, or perhaps replacing both stations in Dorchester with the new one. However this may not be practical as British Rail do not own the land needed for such a single station and this would be further from the centre of Dorchester. Even so as part of the development the pedestrian route could be slightly better signposted and more train information about connections to the West Country could be provided. Now that the electrification programme from Bournemouth to Weymouth is to go-ahead times on the direct route will be reduced, by approximately 10 minutes on the Bournemouth to Dorchester section. The extra passengers associated with electrification could benefit the Dorchester-Yeovil line via these through services. If it is not practical to improve the interchange at Dorchester it may be possible to alter the timings of trains into Upwey station (a few miles below the junction of the two lines) so that passengers could change here, as this would not involve any of the difficulties associated with Dorchester. The problem with this option is that few Bournemouth-Weymouth trains call at Upwey. Electrification may change this pattern of services presenting the opportunity of stopping trains every other hour at Upwey to connect with trains to Yeovil. This would still allow a fast service to run at other times. Should interchange at Upwey be considered too difficult passengers could change at Weymouth as a last resort.

Improvements can be made at Yeovil making new connections both more attractive to customers and more viable. However the Yeovil improvements may be expensive as some new track and signalling would have to be installed and BR, not surprisingly, may be reluctant to invest in this project without financial assistance. Before looking at the details of this scheme it is useful to look at the background to the situation at Yeovil.

We have seen that earlier inter-company rivalry has resulted in two competing sets of services. Yeovil provides a good illustration of this. Initially a line was opened to Yeovil from the east to

Yeovil Town which as the name suggests served the town centre. Soon after this the Wilts Somerset and Weymouth line was completed via Yeovil Pen Mill. These companies were then absorbed into the GWR and the two stations were connected. Finally the rival L&SWR built their route from London to Exeter which passed some distance away from Yeovil, and so they constructed a series of spurs that meant all their trains entered Yeovil Town station and then reversed out to continue their journey. This was obviously a time consuming process for what was supposed to be a main line operation and so they constructed Yeovil Junction station, some three miles outside of the town, which meant L&SWR trains no longer had to reverse. Some of the initial curves were dismantled and a shuttle service was instigated between Yeovil Junction and Yeovil Town which lasted until the late 1960s. Then in an attempt to improve the situation Yeovil Town (and the line to the east) was closed and the shuttle service withdrawn, but this isolated the mainline services at Yeovil Junction from the town and traffic declined accordingly (P5). The result is that now (see photo) the trains literally cross each other and the only connections between the two stations are provided by a freight line and the inconvenient and expensive minibus. Two years ago there was not even a minibus, and now that it has been introduced it is almost unknown in the Bournemouth area and so passengers from South Dorset are unlikely to use it as part of a through route.




Looking at the map of the railways, past and present, at Yeovil there is a unused earthwork to the south west of Yeovil Junction station which could connect the two lines in the south. There is still a northern connection between the two lines which is to passenger standards as it is used for diversions. If this southern chord was installed trains on the Dorchester-Yeovil line could run into Yeovil Junction, reverse out and then continue their journey northwards to Yeovil Pen Mill. As the photograph shows most of the pointwork necessary for such a manoeuvre is already in place at Yeovil Junction. This re-routing could be carried out (in theory) with no extra trains, one extra point, some signalling modifications and a few hundred yards of track. This would not only provide a connecting service between the two lines but it would also operate as a feeder for Yeovil

Junction services to London. The scheme would thus boost traffic on both routes and may secure their future, tapping Yeovil's growing population. It would also make interchange cheaper, quicker and easier than with the bus service.

The increased use of Yeovil Junction station generated by this scheme may increase the viability of passenger facilities on the station currently including toilets and refreshments. Another minor advantage of the scheme is that it would provide a service into Yeovil for the settlements near Junction station, e.g.: Barwick and Stoford, though the bus may prove more convenient. Apart from the initial investment needed there are other difficulties. For example, train times would be increased on the Dorchester-Yeovil route by the extra stop and reversing entailed, but the introduction of new faster units may cancel this out and because the trains used have cabs at both ends reversing would not be a problem. It could be argued that speed is not that important on this rural route anyway. Enquiries to the British Rail Property Board have confirmed that the land needed for this connection is still owned by BR, and is in the operational account which apparently makes it easier for them to use should they decide to do so.

Previously it was decided that the most cost-effective solution at Yeovil was the bus link which is now in place. But this did not take into account the full potential of through traffic. By analysing the volume of public transport flows on the routes from South-Dorset to the West Country we may be able to get some indication of the viability of the re-routing and the extra traffic it would generate for the Dorchester-Yeovil line.

This flow data was derived for the indirect rail service using British Rail figures. The direct route

usage was established from the use of the Yeovil bus link, and the competing flows were from the coach route run by National Express who would not supply information so I carried out my own survey.

British Rail kindly allowed me to look through their annual printed ticket sales records, which gave me the following figures:

OUTWARD
None recorded from: Branksome, Parkstone, Hamworthy, Wareham, Dorchester South, Upwey, Moreton, Holton Heath, Weymouth Quay and Dorchester West to Thornford inclusive.
Bournemouth to Exeter: 353, Torquay: 34, Plymouth: 344
Poole to Exeter: 19, Plymouth: 313
Wool to Plymouth 162
Weymouth to Exeter: 40, Newton Abbot: 40, Paignton: 29, Torquay: 36, Falmouth: 19, Newquay: 1, Penzance: 138, Redruth: 138, Truro: 11, Totnes: 8, Plymouth: 1,733

RETURN
None recorded to Branksome, Parkstone, Hamworthy, Dorchester South, Upwey, Moreton, Holton Heath, Weymouth Quay and Maiden Newton to Thornford Inclusive.
Bournemouth from Exeter: 337, Plymouth: 791, Newton Abbot: 146, Paignton: 20, Teignmouth: 3, Torquay: 100, Newquay: 7, Penzance: 28, Redruth: 35, St Austell 5, Liskaerd: 2
Wool from Plymouth: 36
Wareham from Plymouth: 11
Dorchester West from Plymouth: 151
Weymouth from Exeter: 284, Newton Abbot: 51, Paignton: 44, Torquay :95, Newquay: 4, Bodmin: 18, Penzance: 19, Redruth: 106, Truro: 82, Totnes: 20, Plymouth: 2,173
Poole from Exeter: 91, Torquay: 4, Plymouth: 469

This gives us a total figure for printed ticket sales that could represent traffic for the Dorchester-Yeovil route of 8,550.

Printed ticket sales do not cover all the rail travel between South Dorset and the West Country as they are only available for journeys considered common enough to justify printing them. As the routes we are considering have low passenger flows a significant proportion of total ticket sales are likely to be non-printed. So some estimation of non-printed ticket sales has to be made to get an overall picture. I obtained information on the sale of tickets with no destinations printed on them for a number of stations in Dorset. These were: Weymouth: 8.1%, Bournemouth: 10.6%, Wareham: 14.4%, Poole: 15.3%, Christchurch: 13.9% and Dorchester: 10.5%. This gives us an average figure of 12.13%. This means average printed ticket sales must be 87.87% of the total, we can thus multiply up our figure representing printed ticket sales by (100/87.87%) which gives an overall value of 9,730 tickets. This will still represent an under-estimate because the proportion of printed ticket sales on these cross-country routes are likely to be above the Dorset average because of the "unusual" nature of these journeys.

Many tickets are also sold for return journeys and so some proportion of ticket sales generate two single journeys and the figures have to be modified accordingly. To find this proportion I went to three local ticket offices and asked for a percentage figure. They all agreed on a figure of approximately 80% of tickets sold involved return journeys. We must now multiply our ticket sales by this factor which gives 17,514 p.a. (0.8 x 9,730 + 9,730). This figure gives us the potential traffic for the Dorchester-Yeovil railway line if all passengers west of Bournemouth were sent on this route. It should be noted that these figures involve a further under-estimate as passengers between Bournemouth and Redbridge should also be sent this way and they have not been considered above as this would at present involve them changing trains at Bournemouth.

However if this requirement was removed there would be a large increase in the above figure. To give a net increase in traffic 2,136 p.a. could be deducted from the total as this is the number of through tickets accepted on the minibus link. It is likely that more through-passengers used this route and were not recorded in the figures as not all buy through tickets. Even so this figure is unlikely to be out by more than a few hundred, and so the re-routing of through rail traffic would thus represent a considerable net gain (15,378 p.a.) for the Dorchester-Yeovil railway line.

The coach surveys may also be an under-estimate of the demand for public transport between the two areas as the surveys were done during the winter timetable when fewer coaches are run. I was unable to find exactly how full these extra summer services were as National Express would not provide me with information and forbade me to interview anyone on their services. However from the on-board counts I did do, and the information provided by a handful of passengers, I established that there was approximately an 80% load factor during the summer which corresponds well with the figures I witnessed during the Autumn/Winter timetable. When a number of services were so full relief coaches had to be run.

The figures for the winter service were obtained by taking four return journeys between Dorchester and Exeter, two on the fast coach and two on the slow coach, this gave me figures for the proportion of the passengers that stayed on the coach for the full journey between Dorchester and Exeter. This through journey factor was 81% on the slow coach and 88% on the daily fast coach. A number of passenger counts were then conducted at the coach stops at both Dorchester and Exeter which when multiplied by the through journey factor gave a figure for the total number of journeys between Dorchester and Exeter. As this is the section of the route that competes with the Dorchester-Yeovil railway line it gives us a passenger potential figure for the railway if the Yeovil cut-off was opened. It would of course been more reliable if I had just travelled on the coach enough times to get the data I required, but this would have been very expensive and there was no chance of any concession from National Express.

When looking at the number of passengers on the coach route one noticeable feature was that relief coaches were common especially on Fridays. This has the effect of making the figures for the fast service appear greater than the capacity of one coach. The average figure for the fast service was thus 57 passengers each way every day. For the slow service running on Friday, Saturday and Sunday the average figure was 25 passengers each way. These figures are now multiplied by the through journey factor giving the number of passengers that travelled through from Dorchester to Exeter on each service, (57 x 0.88) 50 passengers on the fast service and (25 x 0.81) 20 passengers on the slow service. These figures can be converted to weekly values by multiplying the fast service by seven and adding to this the slow service which is multiplied by three. The result is (350 + 75) 425 passengers per week each way.

This coach passenger figure must also take into account summer services when more coaches run between Dorchester and Exeter. Although I have established from passengers that there is approximately an 80% load factor on these services, this cannot simply be multiplied by the through travel factor as there are differences in the summer. One of the extra services 476 is a through coach from the north to Paignton and although this travels between Dorchester and Exeter it cannot be considered as potential traffic for the Dorchester-Yeovil railway because if British Rail captured this traffic it would be sent on other routes. However some of this traffic might represent a possible gain and so some account should be taken of it. A further problem arises because many of the small seaside villages served by the slow coaches would have more visitors in the summer and the through journey factor would be lower. In an attempt to rectify this I have ignored service 476 and kept the through journey factors the same for the other services. A further reason for ignoring service 476 is that it runs at approximately the same time as a much faster service 025 so any through traffic that is in competition with the line would use service 025. Thus any extra through journeys that would have taken place on service 476 should compensate

for the reduced proportion of through journeys on the other services. As I am only interested in the approximate volume of the traffic and as National Express would not supply me with any information on loadings, this data seems acceptable. This gives us summer service figures per week of: (0.81 x 25 x 7) + (0.81 x 25 x 3) + (0.88 x 57 x 7). The final weekly figure is: 554 passengers during the summer timetable. If we now average the summer and winter figures we can establish a general weekly loading (490 passengers) if this is multiplied by the number of weeks in a year an annual figure is obtained (25,480). This figure then represents the ultimate loss to the railway from coach competition.

When the rail and coach figures are combined we have an approximation of the total demand for public transport on this axis that could be channelled onto the Dorchester-Yeovil line (40,858 p.a.), although in realistic terms the railway could never win all the coach traffic.

During the coach surveys I noted that a large proportion of the coach passengers were of retirement age and this would suggest that even if the railway did offer a more direct route (and cheaper fares) the railway would also have to compete in terms of convenience and comfort, it is unlikely that many of these people would be attracted to a rail journey that involved a 1/4 of a mile walk at Dorchester. Allowing passengers to change at Upwey (with good connections) would alleviate this problem somewhat. Another way of improving the convenience of such a service would be the running of some trains between Weymouth and Exeter using the new spur at Yeovil. In fact BR's provincial sector has said in it's "sprinter" announcements that they had plans to "fill in north-south axis routes with inter-linking cross country connections" (P14). It would have been useful to do a survey on these issues but as I have mentioned I was refused permission for this from National Express.

Another cross country route that could be developed is that northwards from Weymouth up towards Bristol. But this does not have the same potential as services to the West Country as this route is already good with few changes needed and no walking between stations. The main competition on these services is in the form of National Express service 773 which again I was unable to obtain any loadings for. This service runs twice a day each way in the winter and five times a day each way in the summer. If the loadings on these coaches are anywhere near as good as those on service 025. It suggests that the railway is losing a substantial number of passengers on a route where it already provides a reasonable service. The only conclusion that can be made from this is that either the rail service is not as good as it first appears or that very few people know about it. To compare fares and times it is assumed the passenger is making a return journey (not day return) and is not travelling outwards on a Friday.

On the railway typical times and fares are as follows: Weymouth to Yeovil costs £5.80 return and takes 33 minutes. Weymouth to Bristol costs £9 return and takes 2 hrs 30 minutes.

By coach: Weymouth to Yeovil costs £2.50 and takes 1 hr 15 mins.. Weymouth to Bristol takes 3 hrs and costs £7.

This comparison shows the railway to be the fastest mode but it is also the most expensive, especially between Yeovil and Weymouth where the only rail tickets available are a day return or a single. So if a passenger wishes to spend more than a day making this return journey he is almost certain to go by coach. However the inferiority of the rail service is not so great as to allow this degree of competition, so either the service is badly marketed as a through route (some people I have interviewed thought the line had closed) or the loadings on this coach route are lower than expected. However as National Express is a profit making organisation the loadings should not be much lower.

Finally There is the possibility of putting the summer through- trains back on the Dorchester-Yeovil

line though there were  presumably good reasons for removing them in the first place.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS:

Looking at the Dorchester-Yeovil line it is clear that it has no long term future unless there is a significant change in the way in which it is operated and marketed. If the line carries on in its present form a long term crises is likely to develop that will eventually lead to closure. Weymouth's ferry and tourist traffic which for so long have provided much of the lines traffic are likely to diminish. As Sealink transfer their operations to other ports, the channel tunnel has its affect, and the prominence of Weymouth as a resort is reduced by more foreign holidays. The significant population growth on the Southern section of the line will not generate sufficient traffic to save it.

Although local traffic may not have a significant part to play in the future of the railway, it should not be ignored. There are some opportunities for making the best of the population present. Stratton halt could be re-opened experimentally and management could increase their local contact which would enable them to more effectively exploit market opportunities. This could be done through the more effective gathering of information, BR have not done much in this area and the only reliable figures have been provided by the County Council nearly three years ago. This need not be expensive as carbon-copy tickets could be introduced as on National Express, this would entail little extra expense or effort. Another way in which cheap information could be provided is if the passengers were given questionnaires to complete on their journeys which could then be left for the guard to collect. If BR acted on this information they may be able to reduce the loss of local traffic to bus and coach services. The County Council have already pointed out bad local timings and fare structure.

Freight may develop in the long term as the Dorset oil boom continues (exploration has take place at Ryme Intrinsica which is very close to the line). However no results have been announced and little oil has been found so far in this part of the County.

Cost saving must have a part to play in the development of any rural rail line and there are a number of opportunities for cost saving investment on the Dorchester-Yeovil line. This is one area where BR's record is not so bad. But they must strike a balance between saving costs and discouraging passengers by making the service un-attractive.

Most importantly inter-regional travel appears to provide the only opportunity for the lines survival. Virtually all of this traffic has been diverted away from the line by the Southern Region. Although some of the schemes, such as the Yeovil link may be expensive to implement, they illustrate a choice for BR. The improvements are either carried out, or the line is allowed to die slowly and expensively.

Although BR have made some efforts to encourage traffic on the line they do not compare well with other examples from, for example, Scotland or Cornwall. There is a need for a continued marketing effort to accompany any reforms that are introduced. BR should sought out it's regional differences, as the spirit of inter- regional competition does not seem to have died with nationalisation. Unless regional boundaries change, or there is more co-operation through traffic is unlikely to be generated with each region sending the passengers the way that suits their own interests, rather than those of the passenger. BR have to make a decision.

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6. Mr J.O.H Norman British Rail Waterloo
7. B. Doe Transport 2000 Dorset

CORRESPONDANCE:
1. British Rail Property Board Bristol
2. Police Training Centre Cattistock Dorset
3. Area Manager British Rail Westbury
4. Area Manager British Rail Southampton
5. Southern National Bus Company
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