The First Meeting of the West London Line Group held at the Earls Court Exhibition Centre, Warwick Road, London SW5 on Monday 29 November 2004

Present:

Mark Balaam	MB	Chairman
Molly Storck	MS	Lillie Road RA
George Jasieniecki	GJ	West Brompton User

Nick Woollven NW Earl's Court Neighbourhood Association

David Wardrop OW LBHF LA 21

Jerry Gold JG London Transport Users Committee Simon Fisher SF Eardley Crescent RA, WLL User

Debbie Thomas DT Earls Court Olympia John Slaughter JS LB Wandsworth

Gerry Devine GD LB Brent Caroline Wilson CW Silverlink Paul Griffin PG Silverlink

Alan Peakall AP Transport Consultant, WLL user

Susan Armstrong SA Sands End Resident Philippe Auclair PA Sinclair Road RA

Denys Robinson DR GLA - Office of Chair, Transport Committee

Bill Mount BM RBKC Chris Bainbridge CB LBHF

Ade Egunnike AE LUL

Jennifer Ware JW Earl's Court Neighbourhood Association Verite Reilly Collins VRC FairPlay, Friends of Brompton Cemetery

David Charlton DC Watford Rail Users' Group

2. Apologies:

These were received from:

Arthur Tait AT Friends of Brompton Cemetery
Kathy Fawcett KF Multiplex (White City Development)
Angie Bray AB GLA, Member for West London Central

Peter Stapleton PS Silverlink

Denis Carroll DC West London Railwatch
Cllr Brendan Bird BB LBHF Sands End ward
Cllr Andrew SlaughterAS Leader of the Council, LBHF

3. Background to this meeting:

Mark Balaam welcomed everyone to the meeting — the first full meeting of the Group. He briefly summarised how the Group had come into being, with its origins in first the RBKC Earl's Court SRB Partnership, which inspired the formation of the West Brompton Station Users' Group. This had already made significant progress, including the reintroduction of a District Line service on Sundays and the introduction of a Sunday service by Silverlink.

Now there were at least two more new WLL stations in prospect, together with major developments along the corridor such as the full occupation of the Empress State Building by TfL and Metropolitan Police, the commercial developments at Shepherds Bush/White City and the residential developments at Sands End. Encouraged by verbal support from local authorities, the LTUC and others there seemed now to be a

natural synergy towards forming a larger group taking an active interest in the whole route, and the inter-connecting services beyond. Exploratory meetings had led to the formation of a Core Group whose first task had been to work on the parameters of the larger Group now in process of formation.

Comments on these parameters were now invited, together with any other suggestions regarding objectives and organisational structure. The present organisation needed to evolve, with people assigned specific tasks.

Jerry Gold said that the scope of representation proposed did not appear to include inbound commuters. Simon Fisher sought additional clarification of how inclusive the Group was to be whilst David Wardrop suggested it should include significant employers, such as those in the Empress State Building and Earl's Court Olympia. It was noted that those who had responded to the recent on-train exercise to raise awareness of the SRA proposals for the Southern service had been commuters over a wide area as well as those travelling for non-work reasons.

4. Parameters of the Group:

These were noted

5. Minutes of the Core Group Meeting held on 15 November 2004:

Those present at that meeting accepted them as correct. The Chairman noted that the meeting of the West Brompton Station Users Group planned for 7th December had been postponed until a date in the New Year.

6. Present Activities:

Mark Balaam clarified that at present the Group was an informal association but discussion would continue as to what its ultimate character should be. Denis Carroll and Nick Woollven had undertaken to look into how it might be administered and to look at options for a Constitution.

Mark Balaam expressed thanks to Debbie Thomas and her colleagues at Earls Court Olympia (ECO) for their practical help with the recent passenger survey, providing 6,000 photocopies and a small budget for running costs. He was particularly grateful for the staff time allowed for the e-mail site, vital for collecting views expressed by passengers to the SRA.

Mark Balaam summarised the SRA's Brighton Main Line Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS). The Group's primary concern was the impact this would have upon the Watford — Gatwick service but a further concern was the proposed cessation of the dedicated Gatwick Express service, which the SRA wanted to see integrated with Southern commuter services and extended to Brighton. This would be a battle fought by the BAA. Mark had contact details of Bernard Ashley at Gatwick. The whole basis of the RUS was to achieve increased route performance of 0.6%, for which SRA claimed it was necessary to discontinue through services from Watford to East Croydon and beyond and terminate all trains at Clapham Junction. It was not clear in the RUS Document whom the SRA would expect to run such a truncated service, which might well not be commercially attractive to Southern (who had previously bid to run the original service twice an hour). The Group had already serious concerns about the physical interchange facilities at Clapham Junction (inimical to the disabled): these would be exacerbated if all trains were to terminate there.

Verity Reilly Collins thought the position for Gatwick Airport passengers would be intolerable. Every airport now had a Development Officer looking to maximise traffic and she queried the rationale of attracting extra airlines and services to Gatwick without improved egress and exit. There was no solace to be gained from Virgin Trains, whose passenger information for their service to and from Brighton incidentally left much to be desired. David Wardrop confirmed this perception whilst Alan Peakall confirmed that the existing Virgin service calling at Gatwick should in fact have already ceased but had not yet done so because Virgin found pathing difficulties in getting an alternative route via Redhill. Reading — Redhill itself was to be reviewed for the next GW franchise in 2006. He doubted if there was ever any chance of developing it as a service via the WLL. It would never stop at Clapham Junction and it was unlikely it could ever be stopped at West Brompton.

Mark Balaam said that the WLL route was not included amongst the Brighton Line RUS, hence objectors should write to the SRA Chief Executive and not just the SRA official running the consultation process. He would be pressing for more consultation later in the week.

The LTUC had looked at the situation with some care — a holistic look at the three elements that had to interlace together. Within the RUS, the Plan was as if things were current and static. The case for the proposed actions was based upon false figures, which had taken no account at all of the growth in traffic and the significant traffic generators still to come (e.g. Shepherds Bush). Jerry Gold explained LTUC had commissioned survey work to determine people's journeys and then asked further questions, telephoning a selected sample. There were really three issues, which they had discussed with Southern. There were three main SRA issues to be contended: a) volume of passengers travelling (they had now accepted that LTUC figures were correct and that theirs were not); b) capacity and performance problems between Clapham Junction and East Croydon (but there was no such capacity conflict!) and c) questions of affordability - could SRA find any subsidy for an operator? This last point was interesting because to date the Southern service had always been provided free of subsidy. Moreover, such "capacity conflict" as there was lay between Victoria and Clapham Junction. Revenue attributed to the service was reduced by mis-reporting of the figures and mis-attribution of revenues to other London operators.

Jerry Gold's conclusion was that the LTUC should very firmly support not only the retention of the service but its increase to half-hourly — and the restoration of further destinations. He would be meeting the West Coast people at the SRA later that week. The proposed changes flowing from Eurostar withdrawal from North Pole and Waterloo would release paths and doubling the service would more than double its value. He would also reiterate the concerns about Platform 17 at Clapham Junction; using Platform 2 instead was not operationally practicable.

Simon Fisher asked whether there was any indication of Southern's own response to the SRA. He considered that outside of peak hours there should in fact be extra capacity on the fast lines. There would be value too in serving other stops, notably Baiham. Jerry Gold agreed but counselled it was not a point to be pushed strongly at this stage.

Mark Balaam then summarised the current position on lobbying. There had been no success with the media to date but the local authorities along the route had been much more forthcoming. All were in process of making their own supportive responses, with the possible exception of Croydon. He had also written to key GLA members of whom Bob Blackman, Denys Robinson and Lord Tope had responded.

The Group had also written to 35 MP's but so far only Karen Buck and Peter Ainsworth had responded. The Group had also written to 80 employers in RBKC and Hammersmith & Fulham but with only one response so far. Alan Peakall said the only approach he had had was from the White City developer who was interested to ensure that Gatwick was still served by the Southern service when the new station is completed and opened. Denys Robertson said that it was difficult to get an All-Party response from the GLA Transport Committee and that if this proved impossible the Liberals would make their own. (Simon Fisher would help with this). Denys undertook to report back on how far TfL had got. Simon Fisher said that the political campaign could continue after the consultation deadline and whilst the SRA still existed. Philippe Auclair said that he had met with the Hammersmith & Fulham MP the previous week who had undertaken to write to SRA, and that H&F Liberals and Conservatives would do too.

David Wardrop asked what the basis was for the SRA assault on Gatwick Express. Jerry Gold explained that the SRA claimed it was seriously underused whilst Southern services to Brighton were claimed to be over-filled at 140 — 150%. SRA therefore proposed to end the dedicated Gatwick service. LTUC found the basic SRA premise suspect: the downside to the proposed integration made it not a sensible thing to do. To say the least, Gatwick passengers with heavy luggage would find the situation very difficult.

Mark Balaam then turned to look in detail at the written response that the WLLG itself had prepared, inviting comments from the meeting. Simon Fisher pointed out that the approach reflected the Southern bid, earlier rejected by SRA. Mark Balaam pointed out — with reference to Platform 17 — that the DDA in fact exempted railway premises that were not new. Denys Robertson said a more cautious approach should be taken towards "service pattern": it was not a Brighton Line issue as much as a WLL one. He had heard that TfL were in negotiation with Silverlink for an extra train per hour. He believed this extra train would run from May 2005. The unit which would be needed was already available, but not the crews. This was news to the Silverlink representatives. Jerry Gold pointed out that the WLL would have developed even better passenger figures were it not for the two years of disruption on the West Coast Main Line. This was now reducing so improvement would bring another growth factor from Watford and Denys Robertson commented that southbound trains in the evening peak were now much more heavily loaded from Watford (although this could be due to Thameslink problems arising from the King's Cross works, and people therefore avoiding it).

Mark Balaam then asked if there were any comments on the Group's appendices to its SRA submission. Chris Bainbridge gave an update on the situation with the new stations. He believed that the administrative hurdles would be overcome as Network Rail were "running out of excuses." Work at Shepherds Bush would start in late December/early January and were planned to take nine months. Works at Imperial Wharf (Sands End) would start in March and take 6 months. However the "sod-cutting" dates were still to be confirmed. The meeting was reminded that construction at West Brompton was accomplished within nine months.

Jennifer Ware applauded the Chairman for all the work that had gone into the Group's submission to the SRA and proposed a formal Vote of Thanks to Mark Balaam. This was carried nem con.

Philippe Auclair clarified the reasons for the Sinclair Road Residents' Association's withdrawal from the WLLG but said SRRA would work with the Group in the future.

It was agreed that the issue of setting up a dedicated website would be postponed to the next meeting, along with the Administration issues and the finalisation of the Activity Programme.

7. Future Activities:

Mark Balaam explained the conflicting views on the breadth of the Group's Brief. Philippe Auclair had raised the idea of viewing the lineside as a whole (with the range of issues which might arise) being amongst the Group Objectives, and then there was also the big debate about freight issues (not in themselves resolved in any way by the demise of the Central Railway project). Mark suggested that the Group should nevertheless concentrate upon the passenger traffic issues. Simon Fisher suggested that first and foremost we should concentrate upon forming a clearly defined Executive Committee that was more representative of the users of the Line. Moreover, the Group needed to respond to all those who had lent support to us by sending e-mails. It was agreed that these points must be dealt with amongst the Administrative proposals and further work on the scope for the website.

8. Any Other Business:

Simon Fisher drew attention to the imminent engineering possessions required by the recent Shepherds Bush water main burst. These would occupy at least the next two weekends. However, 52-hour possessions did not prevent a temporary Silverlink shuttle being operated between Clapham Junction and Olympia! There were two football matches and special concerts at Earl's Court to be catered for. Mark Balaam asked whether there would be substitute bus services. Paul Griffin said that there would be. He confirmed that he had personally been to see the Southern DMS to get improved passenger information put up at Clapham Junction.

Simon Fisher commented that station staffing still left something to be desired. Whilst the Kensington Olympia booking office was now opened on Sundays, West Brompton staffing was a disaster.

Verity Reilly Collins had a separate concern about accessing Eurostar services. At present Eurostar passengers from West London found Waterloo convenient. The same would not be true of St Pancras when services switched to there. If however the Silverlink West London and North London services became "one train without change" she felt that would be a very positive response to this.

Denys Robertson said that the proposed depot at Temple Mills (reportedly underwritten by HM Treasury) would not take over all Eurostar maintenance. It would deal with running repairs but heavy repairs would still be done at North Pole. Therefore there would be perhaps a third of the present e.c.s. movements — but over the North London Line. Jerry Gold said that Eurostar had said otherwise and the Department of Transport had announced that they would be funding Temple Mills as a full-blown depot so that Eurostar would no longer occupy paths on either the WLL or the NLL. This depot would incidentally come with a £400M price tag. There was now a benefit to be seized for Metrolink. The Silverlink franchise was up for renewal in 2006 and the Mayor for London and TfL would have a much greater say over the process and the outcome. TfL were to go out to public consultation over Metrolink in the new year. Two trains per hour from WLL onto Stratford were already implied. Simon Fisher commented that we did not want strategic cross-London services squeezed out by the expansion of Metro services.

9. Date of next meeting:

Wed nesday 23 February 2005 — venue to be announced.