

Community owned rail co-op applies to ORR to run services in the south west

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Go-Op, the first community-owned public transport academy in the UK, has applied to run services in the south west.

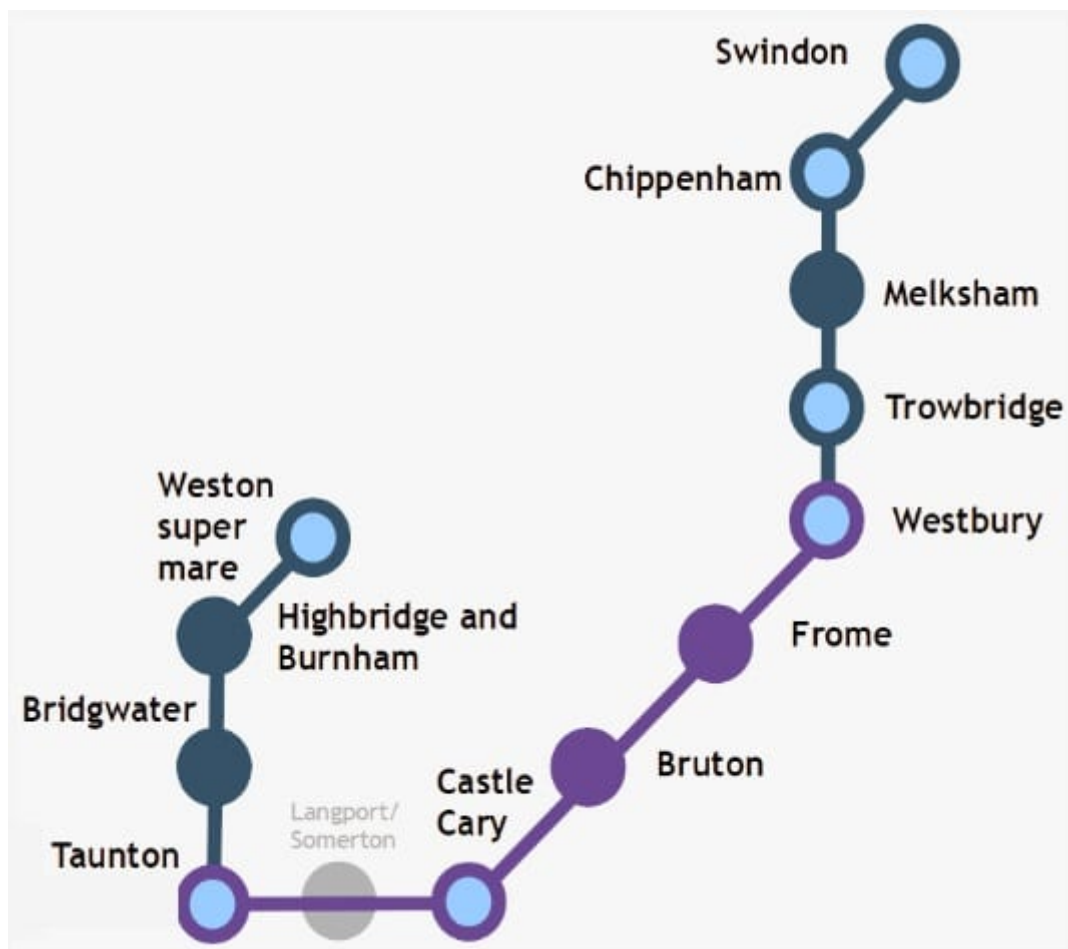
The community led operator, has handed a formal application to the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) to run services between Taunton and Westbury from 2023.

Go-op's vice chair Alex Lawrie told Coop News: "Go-op has taken several years of careful research and planning to ensure that our plan is both compliant with the highest standards of rail operation, and commercially viable too."

"As a co-operative, not only can Go-op improve transport links for some of our important local growing towns but we could help reduce CO2 emissions by 2.7 million kg annually if people move their journeys to our railway."

The plan to operate six services a day, serving towns such as Swindon, Frome, Melksham and Taunton. In time, they plan to extend their route past Swindon, ideally out to Oxford and the midlands, with a view to

making market towns more self-reliant, and not so reliant on distant cities.



Initially, they plan to use Class 153 diesel trains, but eventually hope to move to a more sustainable transport option.

The project would see the community owned rail service put social mobility and environmental improvement at the forefront, with a plan to involve the local area heavily in its business plan. The operator would be owned by users and workers, with operations run by industry professionals.

Funding of £1.1 million is required to get the project on track, and a funding round has been launched, with Go-op seeking investment from passengers and the local community – however, after paying all remaining profits will apparently be spent on further improvements to the network.

Lawrie went on to say: “A debate about private versus nationalised rail system misses out the benefits that a co-operatively owned train business can bring.

“We are confident that we can bring together the benefits of a community and worker focus to create a sound commercial operating model.”

As well as running the service, Go-Op also has a training academy, Go-Op Learn, which is designed to train

drivers, community energy specialists and transport planning technicians from within the local community.

The project's website details other organisations in Europe where this principle has worked well. Citizens' Rail provided frequent services, marketing campaigns and refurbished stations in France, Germany and the Netherlands, and Railcoop run freight services across France and are planning to launch their first passenger services in December.