



South West Trains *news*

Special update for guards at South West Trains

May 2007

RMT warns: 'drop door plan or face strike vote'

RMT is to meet with South West Trains and demand that the company drop its plans for driver-only operation – or face an immediate ballot for strike action.

RMT Helpline
0800 376 3706
info@rmt.org.uk

General Grades Committee
Paul Burton
07956 576 683

Peter Gale
07946 386 762

RMT Regional Organiser
Phil Bialyk
07976 362159

RMT Company Council Reps
John Imm
07957 236422

Dave Butler
07967 949612

Peter Brown
07764 286053

RMT South West Regional Office
Andy Robertson
0117 925 5018

UNION officials were mandated with the task at a recent meeting of SWT guard reps and the meeting between RMT and the company is expected to take place very soon.

The company will be told that it has until June 1 to unconditionally withdraw its proposal on DOO or the union will consider it to be in dispute and a strike ballot activated.

The company wants to remove the guards' responsibility for opening train doors during station stops – a clear breach of existing agreements – transferring the task to drivers by the end of the year.

RMT guards have voted to strike at SWT over the same issue in the past – delivering a massive 85 per cent vote for action in 1998 and causing the company to back down. The union is confident that any strike ballot undertaken today would gain similar

support from the members.

“South West Trains should take a lesson from history and withdraw this insidious scheme or feel the full wrath of our members,” said RMT general secretary Bob Crow.

“Management claims that the plan will improve performance and safety – but they are fooling no-one. It is a creeping attempt to introduce DOO onto the franchise and transform the guards' role by stealth,” he added.

“Feelings among the guards are running extremely high over this issue. The company can defuse this row quite easily – by withdrawing the plan and allowing the guard to do his or her job and the driver to do theirs.

“When RMT advises its guard members to *keep your key, keep your job*, they know very well what the union means and will be ready to fight to defend that aim with strike action.”

STOP PRESS: SWT ops department warns on doors

SOUTH WEST TRAINS' own safety department has contradicted the company over its DOO plans, instructing guards to “stop, open the local door, step out onto the platform, check the train is correctly positioned on the platform. Once this has been done the train doors can be released as necessary.”

The May 4 bulletin, issued by the company's operational standards department as this newsletter went to press, vindicates RMT's stance on the issue. More in the next issue of the union's *SWT news*.

Exposing the flaws in the SWT scheme

In December 2006 South West Trains announced plans to remove responsibility for opening (releasing) train doors from guards and transferring it to drivers by December 2007.

RMT has made it clear to SWT that any attempt to reduce guards' operational control over power operated doors will be opposed by the union - because it undermines guards' jobs and is detrimental to safety.

Many SWT guards and drivers have written to the union strongly supporting our view and detailing some of the main flaws with the SWT proposals. Here are some of them.

OPERATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

SWT claims

"The proposal does not remove operational responsibility from the guard".

RMT replies

This is factually untrue. The SWT proposals remove guards' control over the release of power operated doors on trains in passenger service – a clear removal of operational responsibility in breach of SWT guards' job description.

For the record SWT Guards' Restructuring Agreement (1999), which SWT guards voted for states:

10.4 GUARD

10.5 COMMERCIAL GUARD

10.6 SENIOR COMMERCIAL

GUARD

PURPOSE OF THE JOB:

Operating doors as appropriate:

(Power door stock) Open doors at stations observe loading of passengers, close doors as necessary and signal driver when safe to depart.

(Slam door stock) Observe the loading of passengers, close doors as necessary and signal driver when safe to depart.

PERFORMANCE AND SAFETY

SWT claims

"In line with practice on many other TOCs it is felt that drivers operating the doors will improve both performance and safety".

RMT replies

No other train operator has introduced or is planning to introduce the modified system of train working proposed by SWT.

Virgin Trains operate 2 types of purpose-built stock where the guard gives the driver the bell code to close passenger doors, but retains control of local door operation in order to observe the train/platform interface before giving the driver the 'ready to start' bell code.

Virgin does not operate SWT's

intensive suburban services, Virgin does not operate over the wide variety of routes covered by SWT with differing platform lengths and heights, nor does it have further complications of selective door operation (SDO).

South East Trains and Southern operate 377 units, which were also purpose-built without 'door release' controls for guards. They also use a completely different system of SDO. SWT guards manually operate SDO in person.

CORE RESPONSIBILITY

SWT claims

"Sometimes the guard may get caught up in ticket sales or dealing with passengers and this can cause delays"

RMT replies

SWT misunderstands the guards' responsibilities and is in danger of importing a degree of additional risk to their passengers with this rash proposal.

It is essential that the guard is able to observe alighting and loading of passengers to monitor safety and since only the guard can know when s/he is not otherwise engaged the guard must retain control of door opening.

The only stock operated by

SWT where the guard has to operate the doors from a cab other than the leading cab from which the train is being driven is class 458 stock where doors may only be operated from the middle of the train.

Instead of reducing guards' control over door operations, creating more work for drivers and importing risk, SWT should modify door controls of 458 stock to match that of 455, 170, 159 and 'Desiro' stock by inserting door control panels at intermediate points throughout the train.

GUARD-DRIVER COMMUNICATION

SWT claims

"The guard must use the 2-2 signal to notify the driver ... if they do not want the doors to be opened".

RMT replies

The guard can only communicate with the driver by bell/buzzer code from the cab (other than the leading cab) on class 458 stock and therefore are unable to remain within the train while at station stops as instructed.

On class 450/444 stock the bell/buzzer does not become operational within the train until

the speed of the train falls below 3mph.

The proposed system of work is inherently unsafe because it fails to take into account that the guard may be prevented from communicating with the driver for some reason.

SELECTIVE DOOR OPERATION

SWT claims

"What will happen at SDO stops?"

RMT replies

Precisely. SWT's proposal will mean responsibility for opening doors is split because until a new system of SDO is authorised on class 444, 450 and 159 stock the full procedure can only be controlled by the guard from a place in the train other than the leading cab.

This inconsistency in proposed lines of operational responsibility imports risk and will be confusing, especially during 'deteriorated working' such as stop/not to stop orders, diversions or single line working.

SDO as currently operated on SWT is an essential reason why responsibility for control of door release must remain with the guard.

STOPPING SHORT

SWT claims

"Incidents have occurred where drivers stop short by mistake or because of TPWS interventions and the guard has released the doors."

RMT replies

If a driver stops short for reasons other than TPWS intervention, it is possible that s/he will be unaware of the mistake and will proceed to release the doors in dangerous circumstances.

The guard provides an additional check to ensure that doors are only released when the train is accommodated fully in the platform. If the guard is performing revenue or customer service duties in the train when the driver opens the doors, as SWT propose, any mistake by the driver in releasing the train doors when the train is not fully accommodated in the platform is made critically more dangerous.

The guard may be unaware of the driver's mistake for a potentially unlimited amount of time and there could be serious delay in the guard communicating to the driver not to release doors, or reaching a position from which doors can be closed. The critical danger period would expand.

RMT general grades committee decision

"The general secretary is instructed to demand that an urgent meeting be arranged between our lead officer and conductors company council and South West Trains. The company to be informed that unless they inform this union in writing by June 1 that their proposal is unconditionally withdrawn, then we will be in dispute with them, and that we will ballot all our relevant members for strike action accordingly.

"Further, we reiterate our previous instruction that the lead officer and members of this general grades committee should attend depot and branch meetings within South West Trains to inform members and prepare for a possible dispute.

"Regional councils to take an active part in promoting this campaign. Particular attention should be given to membership levels at all locations, with major recruitment activity taking place where membership levels are low. Branches and regional councils to be informed."

May 2007

Grades conference pledges support

RMT train crew members have pledged to stand behind South West Trains guards in the dispute over driver only operation.

DELEGATES at the recent Train Crews and Shunting Grades conference held in Plymouth unanimously backed a resolution rejecting the company's "spurious" arguments for DOO and pledging to support any action taken by SWT guards.

The resolution, moved by Waterloo branch, reads in full:

"This Conference notes the proposals put forward by South West Trains to force drivers to open power-operated train doors on arrival at stations, further diluting the operational role of the guard.

"SWT argue that this is in line with safety considerations to prevent opening doors if the driver has overrun the platform.

"We believe this argument is spurious and that the real reason this change in procedure is proposed is to allow the guard to continue other non-operational duties, such as ticket sales, for as long as possible without effecting train timekeeping.

"This is a clear breach of previous commitments to maintain the full operational role of the guard.

"We note the robust position taken by the union, at local, company and national level to oppose this move, rightly refusing to get involved in any discussion about 'safe practices' and instead making sure that SWT understand that our members are prepared for industrial action to rebut this scheme if SWT take it any further.

"We pledge our support to any moves taken by our train crew members at SWT in defence of the guard's operational role."

Support for the motion reflects the growing strength of feeling within the grade over the plans.

The grades conference, including the SWT debate, is available to be viewed in full as an archived webcast on the RMT website.

Simply visit www.rmt.org.uk/webcasts and enter your user name (RMT membership number) and password (surname in CAPITALS) to log on.

Spread the word on DOO!



Show where you stand on driver-only operation at South West Trains with these special RMT campaign stickers, available from your SWT rep.

RMT on the web – www.rmt.org.uk