

railfuture

Sevenside Branch Newsletter No. 30 Summer 2016

Contributions to the Newsletter are welcome and should be sent to the Branch Secretary, Nigel Bray.
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More information about campaigns is available on the Railfuture national website.

Branch Meeting at Yatton, 9 July 2016

The next meeting will be in the Strawberry Line Café, Yatton station, North Somerset, at 2 pm on Saturday 9 July. This is an informal gathering and will be held in the café garden if the weather is fine. The café is on the westbound platform (Platform 1) and serves drinks, hot and cold food, although not large meals. Last orders for hot food are at 3 pm and the café closes at 4 pm. We hope that GWR will be able to send a representative.

Yatton is on the main line between Bristol and Taunton, with a half-hourly service for most of the day. There is a car park (charging £1.40 after 10 am) behind the eastbound platform (Platform 2).

Future Branch Meetings

Saturday 19 November 2016 at 2 pm in Manvers Street Baptist Church, Bath with guest speaker Paul Johnson, Chair of TransWilts Community Interest Company. This venue is under five minutes' walk from Bath Spa station and has a café.

A Saturday meeting on 25 February 2017 is likely to be at Swindon, date and venue to be confirmed in due course. After that, the AGM is likely to be in Gloucester.

The Branch is working on a 12-month programme of meetings to give members as much notice as possible. Any suggestions for speakers and venues will be welcome.

Report of Bernard Kennedy's presentation at Branch AGM

Bernard Kennedy, ASLEF Bristol Branch Secretary and a driver with Cross Country Trains, was guest speaker at our AGM in Bristol on 9 April 2016. He originally joined British Rail as a guard and from 1980 to 1996 worked at the now closed Bath Road depot, which is to become the site for the Bristol Arena. He became a driver in 1989, later being based at Barton Hill depot and occasionally worked the Royal Train.

He began by saying he was very impressed by Railfuture's Conference held in Bristol in November 2015 and said he would like to see stronger links between ASLEF and Railfuture, although he accepted that Railfuture was "fiercely independent" of all other organisations.

ASLEF had produced a Rail Franchise handbook, listing the various Train Operating Companies (TOCs) and their owners. He was very concerned at the award of many franchises to foreign state-owned rail companies such as Abellio, the international arm of NS, the Netherlands Railways. "All of this money should be invested in our own railway," he said.

Bernard said the rail system in Britain needed more capacity because it was now carrying more traffic than when it was double its present size. He had worked for DB Cargo (formerly EWS) until 2014, when he transferred to Cross Country because of concerns about the future of rail freight. He described freight as being at a crossroads because of the downturn in coal and uncertainty over steel. Freightliner had made 20 drivers redundant at Bristol. Container traffic was the main hope for growth but a lack of joined up thinking had resulted in distribution depots such as Morrison's, Bridgwater, not being rail-connected. Two major warehouses at Smoke Lane, Avonmouth, did not have sidings either, although one sent wine via Bristol Freightliner depot.

Referring to the slow progress of MetroWest, he said the Henbury loop had been in danger of closing in the 1990s before the bulk handling terminal at Avonmouth had been built. He understood that the Port of Bristol Authority had invested heavily in the line, redoubled it and renewed the signalling.

Questions and Answers

Asked by Julie Boston about the new GW franchise due to start in 2019, Bernard said the current franchise extension made sense because of the need to complete the electrification programme, although the scheme would not be completed by then.

Chris Hughes said most people were unaware of the extent of foreign ownership of TOCs. He believed this needed more exposure. Bernard commented that there was little awareness of who owned what in the railway industry.

Asked by David Redgewell whether MetroWest could make progress without a combined transport authority, Bernard considered there was no hard and fast answer but campaigners needed to persuade North Somerset Council in particular of the benefits of a Combined Authority.

Nigel Bray said many firms may be reluctant to consider moving their goods by rail because of fears about disruption from engineering work or industrial action. Bernard accepted these were genuine concerns and said set-up costs for new sidings were high. It needed to become easier to get rail freight grants. In reply to Philip Shelton, he was not aware of any other haulage companies following the lead of Stobart in hiring trains.

Asked by Chris Hughes about lorries of over 60 tonnes being trialled in Continental Europe, Bernard suggested inviting a speaker from the Rail Freight Group who would explain the extent to which road freight was subsidised.

Cirencester Town GW 175 commemoration

At least five Railfuture members attended the exhibition held on 31 May in the former Cirencester Town station building to commemorate the opening of the line from Swindon and Kemble on that day in 1841. For a brief period, Cirencester and Chippenham were the joint western termini of the GWR until its main line between London and Bristol was completed later that year.

The exhibition, which was well attended throughout the day, included a working model of the former station and numerous relics. A plaque commemorating the station building was unveiled by the Town Mayor in the presence of Earl Bathurst, High Sheriff of Gloucestershire. During a reception in Waitrose Cirencester, the Mayor said he hoped the event would not be just a destination but instead a step towards greater use of sustainable transport.

Railfuture literature was displayed at the exhibition by agreement with the organisers and had mostly been snapped up by mid-afternoon. The Branch is aware of the Cirencester Community Railway proposal to reinstate the line from Kemble, which closed in 1965 and the Secretary has written to the promoters, inviting them to discuss the scheme at a future meeting. The project would appear to be at the discussion stage but in Consultations we have asked Gloucestershire County Council to safeguard the formation of the route, which is largely intact from Kemble station to Love Lane, Cirencester. New housing planned at South Chesterton, alongside the track-bed, would strengthen the case for reopening. During the successful campaign to redouble the main line between Kemble and Swindon, Railfuture argued for retention of the branch junction at Kemble, which serves a siding into the former bay platform. Car parking is an issue at Kemble station, where recorded passenger journeys increased from 167,000 in 1997/98 to 341,000 in 2013/14 according to the Office of Rail and Road.

Thanks are due to local members John Friedberger and Chris Yapp for their advice on this subject.

News from Minehead Rail Link Group

David Latimer, from our affiliated member Minehead Rail Link Group, has sent the following progress report.

“MRLG members who were unable to attend the meeting on 26 May have asked for an update, so here is a summary of recent news as we understand it.

Firstly, we had a successful meeting with a course leader from Bath Spa University who is running a course for American students this autumn, whose project will be to investigate the economic and social benefits of a proper train service being provided between Minehead and Taunton. We are to work closely with the course leader and to provide any assistance we can to him and his students. Needless to

say this is marvellous news and will be of immense value in furthering our campaign and raising awareness of the railway's potential.

Also, we understand that one of the local authorities may be offering a significant sum towards a feasibility study into establishing the very sort of rail service we are advocating and coupled with the project which the U.S. students will be working on, this is a huge shot in the arm for us.

Finally, we now understand that following talks involving Taunton Deane Borough Council, Great Western Railway and Network Rail, it is hoped that an experimental rail service between Taunton and Bishops Lydeard can begin as early as April / May next year. This is a huge boost and although the service will be running only as far as Bishops Lydeard and is experimental, it will be a major step in the right direction.”

Another TOC axes Quiet Coaches

Railfuture media spokesman Bruce Williamson was interviewed by BBC Radio Gloucestershire on 7 June 2016 in response to the news that East Midlands Trains is to scrap designated Quiet Coaches on its services. The Company has said it has been unable to enforce the rules which had applied in these carriages.

Bruce said the change did not represent an improvement for passengers. He pointed out that, from the time railways began, on-train staff had been required to enforce rules such as preventing persons from smoking in non-smoking carriages but accepted that people able to live without hand held electronic devices might now be in a minority among rail passengers. He suggested that seat utilisation might be an underlying issue because a designated Quiet Coach might have empty seats while persons using mobile ‘phones were standing in the vestibules. He agreed that EMT’s decision might reflect a wider trend towards removal of minority accommodation such as First Class, buffet cars etc. in the interests of squeezing in more seats.

Listen to the radio interview (3 mins 55 secs) by clicking [HERE](#).

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