

railfuture

Sevenside Branch Newsletter No. 33 Spring 2017

Contributions to the Newsletter are welcome and should be sent to the Branch Secretary, Nigel Bray. Email: nigel.bray@railfuture.org.uk

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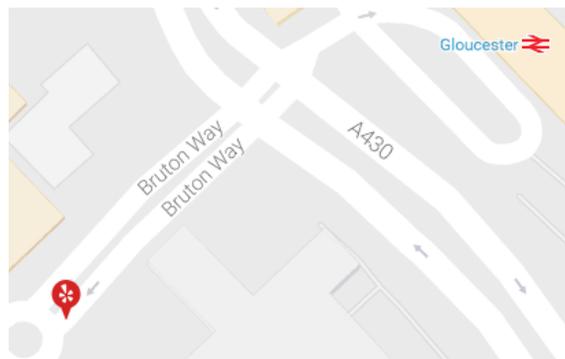
More information about campaigns is available on the Railfuture national website.

Railfuture Sevenside Branch Annual General Meeting at Gloucester, 8 April 2017

The Branch AGM will be held on Saturday 8 April at 2 pm in Studio 5, GL1 Leisure Centre, Bruton Way, Gloucester, GL1 1DT.

The venue is about five minutes' walk from Gloucester station and is a large grey and red building with a glass frontage.

See <http://www.thecityofgloucester.co.uk/things-to-do/gl1-leisure-centre-p914973> for more details.



Nigel Bray will give a digital slide presentation on rail developments in the West of England in recent years. This is based on talks he gave in 2016 to Wells Railway Fraternity and Pewsey Vale Railway Society.

If arriving by train, the easiest route from the station exit is to walk down the station approach and cross Bruton Way using the left hand pedestrian crossing (i.e. the one next to the BR double arrows sign). Once across the dual carriageway, turn left and continue for about 200 yards until Langley Wellingtons (a red brick building) appears on your right. GL1 is then diagonally to your right. Turn right at reception and walk past the café to the end of a corridor. Turn right again and then left into Studio 5.

Parking at GL1 is limited, although there is a pay and display car park at the corner of Station Road and Nettleton Road nearby.

The Agenda for the formal part of the meeting is as follows:

1. Apologies for absence.
2. Minutes of 2016 AGM and matters arising.
3. Election of Officers.
4. Chairman's Report.
5. Secretary's Report.
6. Treasurer's Report.
7. Any Other Business.

Minutes from Railfuture Severnside Branch Annual General Meeting in 2016

At the AGM in Bristol on 9 April 2016 16 members were present. John Hassall was in the Chair.

Before the formal business of the meeting, guest speaker Bernard Kennedy gave a presentation on the challenges facing the railway industry.

1. Five apologies were received.

2. Minutes of the previous AGM at Melksham on 11 April 2015 were approved.

Matters arising: Unsatisfactory information about onward bus travel at Bridgwater station was discussed. John Hassall referred to the lack of interest from Somerset County Council in a bus link proposed by Webber Bus. David Redgewell said First Group had an ongoing bus / rail integration working party and he expected GWR to convene a meeting at Weston-super-Mare similar to the one in 2015.

3. Election of Officers.

John Hassall announced that he would be standing down as Chairman after a further year in office because he had been invited to Chair a Somerset group of Bus Users UK. Simon Taylor said he had agreed to stand as Vice-Chairman for the coming year with a view to standing as Chairman in 2017. He gave a summary of his career and said he believed the Branch should ask the membership what its priorities should be. (*post-meeting note*: Simon has since had to stand down because of family health problems).

Nigel Bray took the Chair for the election of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman.

The following were elected unopposed:

<u>Chairman:</u>	John Hassall
<u>Vice-Chairman:</u>	Simon Taylor (stood down 24 October 2016)
<u>Political Chairman:</u>	David Redgewell
<u>Treasurer:</u>	Tony Lloyd
<u>Media spokesman:</u>	Bruce Williamson

Committee members:

Julie Boston (Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways)
John Dixon (Portishead Railway Group)
Gerard Duddridge (representing Somerset)
Anne Lock (Corsham Station Campaign)
John Stretton (Ashchurch, Tewkesbury & District Rail Promotion Group)

It was agreed that Glen Burrows would be invited to represent Friends of Bridgwater Station to succeed Philip Bisatt, who has stood down from the Committee.

During discussion, John Hassall considered that ideally all Groups affiliated to the Branch should be represented on the Committee. Graham Ellis said he was happy for TransWilts Community Rail Partnership to be represented.

It was agreed to renew the Branch's affiliation to Bus Users UK.

4. Chairman's Report

John Hassall referred to the highly successful national Conference which the Branch had hosted in Bristol in November; Consultation responses; groups newly affiliated to the Branch; and major campaigns including the Henbury loop.

David Redgewell commented that the Hendy Report had stated that the Henbury loop would be signalled for passenger services.

5. Secretary's Report

Nigel Bray thanked members by name who had helped organise the Bristol Conference. The Branch had made number of Consultation responses which could be viewed on the Railfuture website. Severnside had contributed input to a unified Railfuture response to the South West Franchise Consultation and he had also attended a meeting between Railfuture and DfT officials on suggested improvements to the Cross Country Franchise. He expressed concern that enhanced rail services promised in a few years' time might have few onward bus connections. Branch membership had risen to 103, the highest for 10 years, with four corporate members joining in the past year.

During discussion it was noted that many proposed bus cuts had been averted by vigorous responses to Consultations. South Gloucestershire Council had reversed some cuts and he understood that Gloucestershire County Council had reprieved some bus links from stations. Graham Ellis referred to his meetings with Wiltshire Council Cabinet members to promote a flyer proclaiming "use the bus to reach the train."

6. Treasurer's Report

Tony Lloyd presented the Accounts for 2015 and said he regarded the Branch's financial position as healthy. The loss had been largely caused by a cheque for a grant to Friends of Bridgwater Station drawn in 2014 but not presented until 2015. The current account balance was now £ 1,369.30. Funding for the Branch in 2016 from the Railfuture Board would be £ 550. The 2016 Budget bid had included £ 200 for grants to local campaigns. John Hassall asked for this last item to be put on the Agenda for the next Branch meeting.

[Report of Ashchurch, Tewkesbury & District Rail Promotion Group round table meeting held at Tewkesbury, 7 February 2017](#)

Railfuture was represented at ATDRPG's round table meeting which was called to discuss its proposal for a third platform at Ashchurch for Tewkesbury station and its aspirations for an hourly train service. ATDRPG has produced more detailed Minutes.

David Mather, a former senior BR manager and most recently with East Midlands Trains, welcomed attendees and said the Group's aim should be an hourly service at Ashchurch, half-hourly in the peak. He believed this could be achieved in conjunction with other schemes to improve capacity between Bristol and Birmingham, noting that a stop at Ashchurch would use time otherwise spent waiting for a path at University station.

John Stretton, ATDRPG Treasurer, outlined the Group's achievements since the last Round Table meeting in 2015, ie the station garden, which had won an ACORP Silver Award; lighting in the waiting shelters; benches on both platforms (from 25 February); and the steady increase in recorded passenger journeys at the station. He noted that the Army would be retaining its camp for another 10 years but it was anticipated that 1,600 houses would be built on MoD land. The 20th anniversary of the present station would be reached on 30 May and a theme was needed to mark the occasion.

Ken Radbourne, ATDRPG Chairman, referred to a journey he had made from Ashchurch to Dorchester by direct train to see an exhibition of historic railway posters. Railway companies had been very successful at promoting travel destinations in the 1930s yet nowadays many people in Tewkesbury were not aware of the full range of places served directly from Ashchurch.

How can we achieve an hourly service at Ashchurch ?

He said ATDRPG had worked to make the station more welcoming, for instance with the station garden and an extended car park. He believed that one reason why its train services were not more frequent was that Tewkesbury was the most northerly area of the South West Region and the station did not fit neatly into any grouping. Another was its position on a 100 mph route used extensively by Cross Country and freight. The limitations of current infrastructure meant that stopping at Ashchurch usually delayed other trains. David Mather noted that existing freight loops were unsuitable for the longer freight trains operated today.

Referring to ATDRPG's proposal for an additional platform line at Ashchurch, Ken said part of the infrastructure existed already and the work could be undertaken when the Gloucester area is re-signalled. Alexander Maltby, for Network Rail, said the platform loop might not be the optimum location for the timetable as a whole. He suggested instead discussion of an hourly train service with TOCs before contemplating any infrastructure enhancements. NR's view was that the main capacity constraints between Bristol and Birmingham were at junctions. It was planned to upgrade Abbotswood Junction in Control Period 6 (2019-2024) but this would probably

require some third party funding. David Mather commented that improvements in the East Midlands had been achieved through the collaboration of MPs and LEPs.

Matt Barnes, GWR Regional Development Manager, agreed that no one location held the key to increased capacity in the Bristol-Birmingham corridor. He noted that Gloucestershire County Council had strong aspirations to improve the service between Gloucester and Worcester. The current Direct Award to extend the GW franchise had focused more on route enhancements such as electrification but these would release rolling stock. The West Midlands Franchise ITT included options for improved service frequencies between Worcester and Gloucester. Derek Potter, Vice-Chairman of Cotswold Line Promotion Group, said CLPG had suggested a two-hourly service between Birmingham Snow Hill and Gloucester via Kidderminster. Together with the existing GWR service south of Worcester, this would provide an hourly service between Worcester and Gloucester.

Try the TransWilts approach !

Jane Jones, GWR External Relations Manager, said Mark Hopwood, GWR MD, had suggested using the TransWilts model of a three-year subsidy for an enhanced service which which would attract enough users for it to be included in the franchise specification. John Stretton added that Gloucestershire County Council had funded the Ashchurch stop in the 05.21 Worcester-Paddington for a year and it was now in the franchise Service Level Commitment.

Matt Barnes said the situation was more favourable than two years ago because there was now a route to getting an hourly service through the combination of the GWR rolling stock cascade and / or the next West Midlands franchise. David Mather said the paths in the alternate spare hours needed to be safeguarded to ensure they were not taken up by freight as a result of the proposed deep water port at Avonmouth.

Alexander Maltby commented that freight might in future be routed via the Marches line because of capacity problems at Bromsgrove; if this proved to be the case, loops on the Bristol-Birmingham route might not need to be extended. He added that ATDRPG needed to be clear about what sort of service it wanted, ie through to Birmingham or not, as there might be pressure on capacity in Birmingham. Tim Maddocks, a retired senior manager at NR and now an independent consultant, considered that an extended loop at Ashchurch would relieve the very limited siding accommodation at Cheltenham.

[Portishead Railway Group press briefing on significant cost estimate increases for MetroWest](#)

[Phase 1 \(9 March 2017\)](#)

“The announcement that the cost of MetroWest Phase 1 has risen suddenly from £58 million to as much as £175 million is a huge shock. It’s very difficult to believe, let alone accept, that suddenly, at nearly the end of the planning of a major infrastructure project, the cost can treble overnight. Imagine building a new house on the site of an old one, and you’re being told after

you've spent a lot of money on buying the land and on the architect's fees you suddenly find that the house you thought would cost you £300,000 or so is now going cost you closer to a £1 million?

For many years, the four local authorities, the MetroWest project team and all the other stakeholders have been working to deliver a transport network that made good economic sense and was financially viable at a cost of £58 million, or even a few million more. Around £10 million has been spent in good faith by our local authorities to achieve that.

An increase in cost was expected, due to delays and the challenges of the Avon Gorge. However, to announce an increase in costs of some £100 million, with no apology and no coherent explanation of the amount, is impossible to accept without challenge.

- How long has the West of England Joint Transport Board known about the dramatic increase?
- Exactly what is the extra £100 million needed for?
- Why has spending continued on completing GRIP 3 and the DCO, when this potentially show-stopping cost hike was about to happen?
- If a short new access road and mending some bridges and rock faces in the Avon Gorge really cost £100 million, what are we doing wrong as a nation, to make infrastructure projects so expensive?

This has been one of the best kept secrets and one must wonder why? Less than a week ago, Parliament's Public Accounts Committee described the Great Western electrification programme as "... a stark example of how not to run a major project, from flawed planning at the earliest stage to weak accountability and what remain serious questions about the reasons for embarking on the work in the first place."

Network Rail responded that, "Today we do not take forward major projects until they are properly scoped, properly planned and we have a robust estimate of what the cost will be". Today's news challenges the truth of this statement by Network Rail.

Portishead Railway Group have contacted Liam Fox, North Somerset Council and MetroWest in order to establish the true picture behind the simplistic headlines. We are striving to establish all the facts, in order to work out the best steps that we and the community can take next to help ensure that the MetroWest project and the Portishead line reopening in particular continues if at all possible."

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