

railfuture

Severnside Branch Newsletter No. 38 Summer 2018

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 Trowbridge, 30 June 2018

The next Branch meeting will be on Saturday 30 June at 2 pm in Bethesda Baptist Church, Gloucester Road, Trowbridge BA14 0AA. The venue is about five minutes' walk from Trowbridge station. Tea and coffee will be provided.

If coming by train, leave the station and cross Stallard Street to be on the same side as the Rose & Crown and some cafes. Walk away from the Rose & Crown so that a terrace of stone houses, including a BUPA dental practice, is on your left and Holy Trinity Church is on your right. At the roundabout, turn left so that Newtown Social Club is on your left. Just past Unique Dentures on your right, turn right into Gloucester Road. Bethesda Baptist Church is then immediately on the left.

If you are coming by car, the Church is happy for you to park there but space is not guaranteed.

The meeting will be an opportunity to learn of progress with campaigns and also decide on the award of grants to local campaigning groups

Railfuture stand at WSRA Steam & Vintage Rally, 4 and 5 August

The Branch will have a stand at the West Somerset Railway Association's Steam & Vintage Rally at Norton Fitzwarren, near Taunton on Saturday 4 and Sunday 5 August. The site is in fields adjacent to the West Somerset Railway's Norton Fitzwarren Triangle.



If coming by train to Taunton on the Saturday, Buses of Somerset Service 25 will take you near to the venue. Service 25 stops in the main road near Taunton station bridge, on the opposite side of the road to the main exit from Platform 2. The nearest stop to the showground is at the Ring of Bells. This route does not operate on Sundays but Service 28 calls at Bishops Lydeard station, from which WSR will be running a shuttle service to its Norton Fitzwarren platform on both dates.

We need volunteers to staff our stand. Anyone who can spare an hour or two on either date should contact John Hassall on 01823 974745, Mobile 07939 304406 or hassalls53@gmail.com

Report on DfT Great Western Franchise Consultation briefing, Worcester, 12 January

Dan Okey, GWR Regional Development Manager (Central), gave a Business Update to the recent AGM of the TransWilts Community Interest Company. The CIC incorporates TransWilts Community Rail Partnership, which is affiliated to Railfuture.

Mr. Okey said GWR was now “seriously talking with South Western Railway about an extended TransWilts service.” Both TransWilts CIC and Railfuture have suggested combining Swindon- Westbury services with the existing SWR Salisbury-Eastleigh-Romsey loop to create regular direct trains between Swindon and Southampton Airport.

Describing recent rolling stock cascades on GWR, Mr. Okey said four-car HSTs would be used mainly on the Cardiff- Taunton route, with some trains extended to Exeter. He admitted that Class 166 performance on the Severn Beach line had been bad but anticipated this would improve after the quadrupling of Filton Bank.

GWR now had 29 five-car InterCity Express Train (IET) sets in service, although these were mostly running as 10-car formations because splitting the sets had often caused the electronic seat reservation displays to fail. Hitachi was working to rectify the software. Asked about the design of the IET seats, which had been criticised for being too hard, Mr. Okey said these had been specified by the Department for Transport. He believed the designs would be modified over time.

He showed a map highlighting GWR stations where car parks had been extended. Some of these improvements were franchise obligations, while others had been funded by GWR’s Customer & Community Improvement Fund (CCIF).

Electrification and other major upgrades were resulting in some Engineering possessions being announced at less than 12 weeks’ notice, which sometimes caused difficulty with advance booking of tickets. I questioned the wisdom of posters and leaflets advising Gloucester-London passengers to take a substitute bus to Reading (two-thirds of the distance) when local staff were suggesting an alternative rail route via Bristol Temple Meads during recent Engineering blockades at Swindon. Mr. Okey appeared to agree with me that a bus journey of some 75 miles was not the best way to promote rail travel; he added that GWR needed to listen more to local groups as to what would be sensible journey plans in connection with Engineering possessions. He also agreed that the disruption caused by upgrading the network might be a factor in a 3 % drop in passenger numbers evident in 2018.

GWR and Network Rail were holding daily Joint Task Force meetings in Swindon to address infrastructure issues.

After Dan Okey's update, I asked for any news of progress on a safe walking route from Pewsey station to the town centre. Graham Ellis replied that a route already existed but needed signage.

Nigel Bray

Pilning station “back on the map”, says user group

Pilning Station Group, which received a grant from Railfuture last year, has welcomed the reinstatement of the station in GWR's Cardiff- Taunton pocket timetable and on the timetable cover map. Last year the only references to trains calling at Pilning were in footnotes in the booklet. The group launched a campaign for the station to be restored to the station bank and timetable cover; this has now been achieved for the current booklet effective from 20 May.

Group Chair Olga Taylor said in a press release on 18 May, “This represents a small but very significant victory - at least our station ‘officially exists’ again and people can see at a glance which trains stop here, which is a basic essential for any timetable. But there is still much to do - we want a better service than our current two trains a week on Saturdays only and ultimately we want our footbridge back so we can once again catch a train in both directions, and not have to go into Wales and back again in order to get back from Bristol.”

Overcrowding on GWR trains to Somerset Cricket Club home games

Our affiliated group Friends of Bridgwater Station (FOBS) has written to the Chief Executive of Somerset Cricket Club asking it to press GWR to provide longer trains on days when County cricket is played at Taunton. FOBS spokesman Dave Chapple, who joined our Branch Committee at our recent AGM, said it was necessary for GWR to be encouraged to understand that these home matches are full social days out for thousands of local people, many of whom would prefer to travel by train if it were comfortable and convenient.

He added that supporters joining at Bridgwater were often crammed into two-car trains when three- or four- car sets were needed. Overcrowding has been worst on one-day matches. GWR ought to add Somerset home cricket fixtures to its register of special events requiring planning to achieve maximum passenger capacity.

The Branch has followed up FOBS' initiative by writing to Dan Okey of GWR and intends to raise the subject at GWR's Community Rail Conference in Swindon.

Railfuture Severnside AGM was held at Bridgwater Railway Club on 14 April with a buffet lunch kindly provided by FOBS. £ 20 for Branch funds was raised from a raffle of railway books and a WSR Day Rover, the latter provided by Lee Robbins of FOBS. Minutes of the AGM will be posted on the Railfuture website in due course.

Ashchurch, Tewkesbury & District Rail Promotion Group news

ATDRPG has a meeting on Friday 1 June 2018 at 7.30 pm in Tewkesbury Library, situated in High Street, with guest speaker Toby Ratcliffe from West Midlands Trains. WMT is owned mainly by the Abellio Transport Group, which took over the West Midlands rail franchise last December. Its most notable recent achievement has been the reopening of Kenilworth station, which had closed in 1965.

Both ATDRPG and Railfuture want to see an hourly service at Ashchurch for Tewkesbury station introduced before major housing development takes place in the area, otherwise it is likely many of the new households will buy second cars and continue to use them.

The Group believes there is a possibility of an hourly service between Gloucester and Worcester commencing in January 2019. It understands that DfT has asked GWR to improve services frequencies in this corridor.

Railfuture urges Metro Mayor to expedite MetroWest Phase 1

Following the refusal by the Government of additional funding to meet the revised cost estimate of MetroWest Phase 1, the Branch Secretary wrote the following letter to Tim Bowles, Mayor of the West of England Combined Authority, on 30 May.

Dear Mr. Bowles,

The Government's recent rejection of a £47 million bid for funding to make up the shortfall between the earlier and most recent cost estimates for MetroWest Phase 1, has naturally caused concern that the project may be delayed even further.

Railfuture strongly supports the implementation of MetroWest as soon as possible, including its extension to Gloucester, for the following reasons:

- The high cost of road congestion in Bristol, estimated to reach £1.6 billion by 2025, according to Inrix Highway Analytics which applies the DfT's "value of time" to calculate minutes wasted at traffic hotspots.
- The enhanced train services of MetroWest will maximise the benefits of Bristol Area Signalling Renewal and Filton Bank quadrupling.
- The record of rail in attracting people from cars is well demonstrated by the massive increase in usage of local stations in recent decades, e.g. from 4.1 million recorded journeys at Bristol's 12 stations in 1997/98 to 13.2 million in 2016/17 according to the Office of Rail and Road.

We urge the West of England Combined Authority to urgently pursue alternative sources of funding to deliver MetroWest Phase 1, if necessary using some of the money promised for rail in the West of England Joint Transport Plan.

People in the Portishead area have been told each year for several years that 'the trains will be running in four years' time.' Further delay to the scheme will be a wasted opportunity because, in the absence of trains, people moving to new housing developments will continue to use their cars. We hope you will use your best endeavours to get this scheme moving.

Next Railfuture Severnside newsletter will be number 39 in late summer 2018.

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