

THAMES VALLEY BRANCH Newsletter 96 September 2019

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Forthcoming events

Members might be interested in this free lecture organised by the IET:

The Elizabeth Line - Network Rail Readiness

19th September, 6.30 -8.30pm, Reading UTC, Crescent Road, Reading, RG1 5RQ

Speaker: Paul Stanford, Programme Director Western Route, Network Rail. A visual presentation from Network Rail on its readiness for the Elizabeth Line; including infrastructure interventions, working with the wider industry and timetable work and differing ways of running a high intensity railway by Paul Stanford, Programme Director on Network Rail Western Route. With behind the scenes photographs; giving a unique insight into efforts that have transformed the railway from Shenfield to Reading ready for Elizabeth Line service.

Details and to book:

<https://events.theiet.org/theelizabethlinenetworkrailreadiness/>

RAILFUTURE ANNUAL NATIONAL CONFERENCE "EVERY PASSENGER MATTERS"

Inclusion and Accessibility for passengers using the rail network

SATURDAY 21ST SEPTEMBER 2019 Registration from 9.30am Starts 10.00am to 4.30pm

St Michael's Church Centre, Stoke Gifford, Bristol, BS34 8PD Very close to Bristol Parkway.

To book: www.railfuture.org.uk/conferences/railusers

Joint branch meeting with the Chipping Norton Railway Club

Tuesday 5th November 2019, 7.30 pm, Chipping Norton Town Hall, Market Place, Chipping Norton, OX7 5NA

"Cotswold Line Task Force"

A talk by rail development consultant and former Cotswold Line Promotion Group Chairman, Ian Baxter.

Free tea or coffee and biscuits. Visitors welcome, admission £2.

Chipping Norton is served by the S3 Bus service from Oxford. The 1745 departure from Gloucester Green bus station (10 minutes walk from Oxford Railway Station) arrives at Chipping Norton West Street stop near the Town Hall at 1838 in ample time for the start. Afterwards, the 2135 service from West Street arrives at Oxford city centre at 2240 and at Oxford railway station at 2245.

There are normally also adequate car parking spaces near the Town Hall but if full use the New Street car park (free).

So forget fireworks parties, put the date in your diary now and venture out to Chipping Norton for what should be a fascinating talk.

Receiving Thames Valley branch newsletters – electronically, or by post?

Some Railfuture members have already chosen to receive their newsletters by email and this is much appreciated (not least by Railfuture's Finance Director, Jerry Alderson) because it helps to keep our costs down. The monthly *Rail User Express* and occasional *Rail Action* have long-since been to email subscribers only, for just that reason, and nationally the organisation in common with many others wishes to move away from paper-only options wherever possible. It means that we can spend proportionately more of our limited funds on campaigning for better services over a bigger railway. Although Railfuture's national Board of Directors has approved a budget for printing and posting branch newsletters in 2019, it does not necessarily wish to see it all spent!

Our intention is that over time progressively more Thames Valley members will receive their branch newsletters by email. This issue No.96 is in the transition phase of steadily increasing that number of members, to help initially drive down our postage costs. Downloading and printing newsletters via the branch web page where they appear remains an option.

You can in future be emailed a copy of Thames Valley's branch newsletter on the same day that it goes to the printer, so you will receive it well before other people. To switch to receiving it by email, please contact Lloyd Butler, who manages our database, at renewals@railfuture.org.uk. Your co-operation will be appreciated.

If you still prefer to receive a paper copy by post, that's fine. If you don't wish to keep it afterwards however, please don't discard it. Perhaps pass it on to a friend or neighbour, take it to a meeting you may be attending and pass it on there, or leave a copy at your local surgery, library etc. You could even bring your copy to the next Railfuture branch meeting so that we can give it to someone else.

Railfuture Thames Valley Branch AGM 23rd April 2019, Oxford Town Hall

21 members and supporters were present. Apologies were received from: Magnus Smyly, George Huxley, David King, Chris Bates.

Chairman's Report for 2018-2019

The RAILFUTURE strapline is "A Bigger and Better Railway"; we exist to lobby for this and in the last 12 months this has been delivered in the Thames Valley Branch Area.

Electrification has been delivered to Swindon (despite Steventon Bridge issues), platforms have been lengthened, in the Thames Valley and on the Cotswold Line, the Oxford Area Remodelling Scheme has been completed (for now), delivering a step change in reliability, mainly to Cross Country and Chiltern.

HS2 works continue far too slowly along the route.

The Bicester - Bedford TWA Enquiry is nearing completion and preliminary works have started, where existing powers exist and work starts on Bletchley Viaduct this Easter weekend.

As ever the Branch has had a busy year, and our reputation for being unaffiliated and unbiased experts has held us in high demand by those seeking advice.

Our last AGM was addressed Dr Robin Rees who talked of his various work in the Rail Industry. It was more varied than most, including involvement in the original inspired, scheme for Oxford - Marylebone. I found his involvement in the digital transformation of National Rail Enquiries fascinating and particularly how few people were involved.

Today the paper timetable has become a rarity and I have always felt online travel planners are a factor in the younger generation flocking to rail transport.

The Branch had a well-attended trip to Chiltern Railways Depot at Aylesbury, where we were able to witness the hard work undertaken every day to keep units in service. The Oxford route has been far more successful than expected, leading to a need for every unit in service, to prevent overcrowding.

We appreciate the hard work Chiltern do, but it is clear they really do need more coaches, to meet the demand.

The big event this year was the NATIONAL Rail Users Conference at Reading. It has been well covered in Railwatch and in the newsletter, and was a fantastic success; the speakers were excellent and the venue was superb. The main issue was the number who attended, giving a slightly crowded room.

It gave the opportunity to showcase the huge upgrade over the last few years in the Great Western and the potential for modal shift at Heathrow.

I would like to thank everyone involved, in what was probably the best rail conference of the year.

Speaking to members from other parts of the county, it is clear that members were impressed by Reading Station and just how busy everything is; I would stress that what we take for granted is better than found elsewhere.

Reading is now in the national top 5 for Customer Satisfaction (92%), Oxford is towards the bottom.

Much of the branch's work is now involved in "Tactical Lobbying", in contrast to 25 years ago when most work was public meetings and defending the network from attack.

This is the way forward in an era of rail expansion.

To this end we have met with Robert Courts MP, Layla Moran MP, we meet with Oxfordshire County Council and other public bodies and our unbiased advice is well received in almost all events. I would urge members to alert us to any lobbying opportunity they spot.

The other area is inquiries and consultations; these determine the future of planning policy and the role of rail within it. To this end we have made excellent submissions to the Oxfordshire growth plan, and a superb Proof of Evidence to the TWA Order Inquiry for Railfuture. This is in addition to numerous smaller matters.

I have been involved in Railfuture's response to the Bedford - Cambridge Consultation; the final route will affect the branch.

I continue to enjoy the Oxford Green Fair; it gives us the opportunity to talk to non-rail enthusiasts, i.e. our target audience. At the Green Fair it was clear the main talking point is now the Cowley Branch and how it can relieve Oxford's congestion and deliver economic growth.

I thank all our affiliated groups; it may be helpful if I go through our core objectives and progress this year.

1. Witney Oxford Transport.

The campaign continues, there has been good coverage in the press, the highlight being a short article in *New Civil Engineer*, assisted by Railfuture, giving the campaign serious credibility. Also we have in part sponsored a video - see website: <https://witneyoxfordtransport.wordpress.com/> "Dare to Imagine" which I would commend to explain the problems. The simple fact remains that a rail link is the only real solution and has a good BCR, but will take time.

2. Bourne End - High Wycombe. (Milton Keynes - Heathrow)

The feasibility study is done, we await the results being published.

The study of the works at Bourne End is progressing to GRIP 3 (slowly), held up now by Level Crossing studies.

3. Grove - Wantage.

Any decision will be dependent on the Oxford Corridor Study and funding from the Treasury.

It will be necessary to quadruple more of the Didcot - Swindon route.

4. Cowley Branch/Hanborough - This is being considered in the above study.

5. East West Rail. The Inquiry has gone far better than the Oxford-Bicester Inquiry.

Hopefully there will be a report by the end of the year.

6. HS2. It is all taking too long, in contrast to the Expressway; there is an issue of over-specification.

7. Heathrow - 2 excellent speakers at the Reading conference, Heathrow Southern seems to have been pushed back in the market led proposals.

We continue retain close links with Bus Users UK (Oxford Branch).

I would like to thank our Branch Committee and Andrew McCallum, our Secretary, for their hard work and support during the year and look forward to progress next year.

I continue to be amazed at the number of campaigns this the branch gets involved in and we need to keep lobbying.

Whilst we do not get directly involved in train services in the branch, it is clear there is now a growing issue of overcrowding, luggage and underinvestment on Cross Country, putting new customers off rail travel and this is now of concern.

Should anyone wish to become more actively involved in the group, we would welcome the help.

Richard Stow

Secretary's Report

Members' Meetings: Since last year's AGM in West Oxford Community Centre we have held a visit to Chiltern's depot at Aylesbury and have organised and hosted Railfuture's national conference in Reading which has been reported on elsewhere. We hope to have a meeting in Reading in the autumn with Hitachi Rail.

We published two newsletters, August and February, having moved from three shorter ones to two longer ones. Please submit photos or news items. The next issue will cover this AGM.

Membership: A year ago was 126 (118 the previous year). Today it is 128, an increase of just two. We recruited 6 members at the Oxford Green Fair and gained some others during the year yet these new recruits only slightly exceed the lapsed/deceased members, (only about 12% women – no change there). Broadly static membership perhaps suggests difficulty recruiting when no serious threats to railways in our area are perceived. However the special offer of £5 for the first year if you join at an event is clearly worth keeping up and we know Railfuture's board is seriously looking at the whole issue of membership, rates and recruitment, news of which we should hear after the national AGM next month. So if any of you can recruit new members for us (especially younger/women) please do so; they'll be very welcome!

Andrew McCallum

Treasurer's Report

The branch accounts were distributed at the meeting and copies are available from the Secretary. The accounts were accepted by the meeting.

Elections

The officers and other committee members, having all indicated a willingness to continue to serve, were elected as follows:

Chairman: Richard Stow

Proposed by John Elvin and seconded by Nigel Rose

Vice-Chairman: David King

Proposed by Richard Stow and seconded by Andrew McCallum

Secretary: Andrew McCallum

Proposed by Nigel Rose and seconded by Martin Smith

Treasurer: David Plato

Proposed by John Elvin and seconded by Andrew McCallum

Other committee members: Alan Francis, Vic Angell, Nigel Rose, Nigel Phillips, Martin Smith, Chris Bates, John Elvin were all unanimously re-elected. Ralph Hilsdon was elected as a new member of the committee.

Our guest speaker was Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Oxford City Council's Board Member for Planning & Transport.

Cllr Hollingsworth said the city work well with the county council and they "see eye to eye". They also have good contacts with GWR, Chiltern and EWR but less so with Network Rail. The challenge is growth: Oxford is growing and two thirds of journeys in the city centre are by public transport but that level should be over a wider area. Only 5% of those coming in to Oxford do so by train and cycling is similar. Rail improvements involve both infrastructure and service; expansion of Oxford station and the Botley Road bridges are needed. He mentioned the cycle park at the station in Oxford's twin city of Leiden having 5,000 spaces. Cycling infrastructure needs to be connected to stations like Oxford Parkway and Hanborough. Buses to the hospitals need to run more freely and more housing in the "nodes" of Summertown, Headington, Cowley and Botley would allow for good quality public transport directly

between them as well as with the centre. The council is considering introducing a workplace parking levy as in Nottingham and needs to decide between rail, light rail & bus. They hope to put in a good submission in Local Transport Plan 5.

Regarding the Cowley branch he said the challenge is at Oxford station and the widening of the Botley Road Bridge for two extra tracks (one for Cowley). He pointed out that Cambridge has a good offer for integrated travel and Oxford should aspire to something similar such as a county-wide ticket.

Finally, on the Expressway, Cllr Hollingsworth said the City Council is officially opposed to it; they don't see how a road can be a sensible investment given CO2 reductions and it undermines investment in EWR.

Andrew McCallum

East West Rail Inquiry

The East West Rail Phase 2 Transport Works Order Inquiry closed on 30th April. The Inquiry was held in Central Milton Keynes and opened on February 6th with Network Rail presenting the case over four days of evidence. The widespread national and local support for the scheme (including the link to Aylesbury) and the major socio-economic benefits were emphasised. Supporters including Railfuture Thames Valley gave evidence in support on February 13th. However, concerns were expressed about the lack of future proofing for electrification, shorter platforms at Winslow and Bletchley, the removal of freight loops and the loss of double track between Claydon Junction and Aylesbury which will inevitably lead to an overcrowded service between Aylesbury and Milton Keynes.

242 objections and 413 expressions of support were received. 43 objections were withdrawn during the Inquiry. The majority of objections related to the closure of crossings in Woburn Sands and Lidlington (on the existing Marston Vale Line which will be upgraded). Network Rail said that footbridge alternatives would be difficult to provide in the tight spaces and still meet accessibility regulations. They also hope that signalling changes by 2021/22 will resolve concerns about Bicester London Road crossing down time.

Other objections related to Compulsory Purchase Orders relating to sites needed for access, compounds or environmental mediation. In addition to highway issues some councils and Natural England raised concerns about the adequacy of studies and the impact on bats (including those at Swanbourne station which is to be demolished) and great grey crested newts. About 30 objectors appeared to present their case in person but Network Rail responded directly to those who could not and informed the Inspector of their responses. Listed building consents have been agreed for platform extensions at Woburn Sands and Ridgmont and for fencing and building modifications at Quainton Road (Buckinghamshire Railway Centre).

The Inspector made unaccompanied site visits on 24th April, including to Woburn Sands and Lidlington. As he closed the Inquiry he said he hoped to finish his report by the end of July. It will then be down to the Secretary of State but with the current turmoil in government there could be some delay. Network Rail had originally hoped for a report by June and a decision by September so that work could start by late 2019. A delay would increase costs and care will be needed to avoid the bird nesting seasonal impacts. However, some preliminary work has been undertaken along the Bicester – Claydon stretch and in providing environmental mediation sites. Work in the Calvert – Claydon area is covered by the HS2 Order.

Chris Wright/Nigel Rose

Marketing Message

As an experienced marketer who has recently joined *Railfuture*, some marketing areas caught my attention so I have summarised them in a short presentation. The key areas are:

- Our aim - we have a clear mission
- Campaigns - scope could be wider
- Success - shout out and be the reference expert
- Market - who do we want to reach with what message
- Keep it Simple
- What Marketing Tools to use where

The full presentation is available to members on request by emailing: thamesvalley@railfuture.org.uk *Ralph Hilsdon*

Chiltern Railways News

Fleet.

Chiltern Railways are being pressed on the subject of increasing their fleet size to cater for increased passenger numbers particularly on their London to Oxford and West Midlands services. CR said they had been in touch with various ROSCOs in trying to bid for class 170s coming off lease elsewhere but, due to their current franchise ending in two years (Dec 2021), they had been unsuccessful as other interested TOCs had been able to commit to longer leasing periods. CR are also working with DfT to try to obtain additional rolling stock. Meanwhile the current DMU fleet and loco hauled sets fleet continue to be heavily utilised in traffic resulting in unit failures from time to time.

Passenger comfort

CR's current fleet are generally agreed by stakeholders as having comfortable seats - particularly in the loco hauled Mk3s - compared with new trains being delivered elsewhere (700s, 800s 345s etc) that have hard 'ironing board' type seating. CR then confirmed that 'passenger seat comfort' was a specific requirement in their franchise requirement.

Franchise End

Although CRs current 20-year franchise finishes at the end of 2021 (with the possibility of a 5-year extension at the DfT's option), no discussions or preparations are currently underway on renewing/extending it pending publication of the forthcoming 'Williams Report' in the Autumn.

Ticket Offices

Opened out areas that include removing glass barriers between staff and passengers are being rolled out at various stations (Aylesbury, Leamington Spa, Gerrards Cross) based on pilot installations at Oxford Parkway and Bicester Village. TVMs are being upgraded to permit the use of 'smartcards' at ten of the busiest stations and a staff training programme is underway. These smartcards are a standard industry product, run off the same database as other TOCs and much work is being done on this project with the RDG.

May 2019 Timetable Changes

In addition to the existing peak hour trains, direct services to Stratford-upon-Avon from London throughout the day have been reinstated from May 2019 by extending forward every other Banbury terminating service giving a two hourly frequency from Marylebone. Although the total journey times are a little longer for these direct trains, it obviates the need to change trains (using footbridges/lifts) at Leamington Spa or Dorridge. Passengers can, however, leave/arrive London later/earlier by changing at Banbury where Birmingham trains overtake the Stratfords.

Confirmation of Access for All Funding Award

Further to Railfuture's support for CRs 'Access for All funding' application late in 2018, it was confirmed that Beaconsfield station had been successful in being awarded DfT funds for step free access between the platforms and adjacent car park.

John Elvin

Appeal for help – University research

Railfuture's Membership Director wishes branches to try to engage with universities in their areas, to help us engage with a younger audience and the Severnside Branch have had some recent success with two universities on their patch. Rather than add to the workload of the committee, we are looking for a member to offer:

To research all the universities in our branch area (Berks, Bucks, Oxfordshire) to establish which have relevant departments, such as Transport or Planning, and find the contact details for the relevant person. This can all be done online. How much more is up to the volunteer; you could just present your findings to the committee or, better still, make contact and engage with universities – its up to you! The intention is for the Branch to maybe attend events, give presentations or engage with individual students.

Interested? Please contact the Branch Secretary as above in the first instance to find out more.

Chairman's Comment

On 14th August BBC Oxford ran with rail matters for most of the day. Railfuture were represented at a local and national level. In the morning I did a slot with the County Council, Railfuture pushing the Cowley Branch and Yvonne Constance, Cabinet Member for transport, pushing Wantage Grove Parkway. In the evening Oxford opt out there was a well edited summary of our views; again we pushed for the Cowley Branch. The day showed, through the phone response, the total support for Rail and sustainable transport out there from the public and both I and the BBC were surprised how well the day went. As ever the issue is not winning the argument, it is trying to lobby to get such obvious solutions implemented. Wantage/Grove Parkway, Cowley, Witney and Milton Keynes- Heathrow all have BCRs of over 2, far

more if carbon reduction had a value in the calculations. Oxford Parkway, as it pushes to 2 million passengers a year, is a perfect example of what can be achieved.

Witney Oxford Transport

West Oxfordshire District Council defeated a motion, by the Liberal Democrat Group, to support the reopening of the Witney Branch much to the shock dismay of WOT and Railfuture (and A40 users stuck in traffic for 2 hours a day). The branch responded with letters in the local Press, and will be seeking to engage with councillors who support the principal of a proper link to Witney and Carterton. The population of the catchment area is now heading to 60,000 making it one of the largest rail deserts in the UK.

Meeting with Anneliese Dodds MP.

Railfuture constituents have recently have a very successful meeting with Anneliese Dodds, MP for Oxford East. She is fully committed to the Cowley Branch and is able to see the benefits. Like us she would love to see this low cost scheme pushed over the finishing line. This is a very unusual re-opening scheme in that it is almost all in one constituency.

Richard Stow

Photos



Platform extensions being built at the east end of Slough station, seen on 22nd May 2019.



Class 319 units have arrived at Reading depot prior to conversion for GWR to tri-modes. *Both Andrew McCallum*



Railfuture's Nigel Rose & Martin Smith on our branch stand at the Didcot – Oxford 175th anniversary event at Grandpont, Oxford on 15th June 2019, close to the site of Oxford's first station. *Richard Stow*





Class 802 units now operate the Paddington – Bedwyn hourly trains. Having arrived with the 11.06 from London on 22nd July 2019, 802001 waits in the recently lengthened siding before returning with the 12.36 return service. Andrew McCallum



A new waiting room/ticket office has been opened at Hanborough station, seen here on 24th July 2019 with, left, an 802 unit forming the 09.21 Paddington to Worcester service. Andrew McCallum



Vivarail 230003 waits at Bletchley Platform 5 to form the 15:01 to Bedford on 12 August.

Inside is a bright, airy, open feel with a mixture of transverse and longitudinal seating. *Both: John Elvin*