

railfuture

Sevenside Branch Newsletter No. 43 Spring 2020

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 Annual General Meeting at Kemble, 4 April 2020

The Branch AGM will be held on Saturday 4th April at 2 pm in the Function Room, **Tavern Inn, Kemble, Gloucestershire GL7 6AX**. The venue is very close to the station, which is on the railway line between Swindon and Stroud.

Before the formal business of the meeting, guest speaker Peter Langman will talk about the **Cirencester Community Rail Project**, which aims to reopen the Kemble- Cirencester line as light rail and for which a feasibility study is now funded. He will be accompanied by fellow promoters Richard & Jane Gunner and Andrew Lennard, who will be happy to answer any questions.

If coming by train, leave the station by the down side (Platform 2) entrance and the Tavern Inn is straight ahead. There is no direct route from the up side (Platform 1) entrance, so those arriving from the Stroud and Gloucester direction will need to cross the footbridge



The venue is being offered free of charge on the understanding that at least some of those attending will buy food and / or drinks.

Other forthcoming meetings in 2020

Thursday 4th June at 6.30 pm in the Whitehorse meeting room, Platform 1, Westbury station, with guest speaker Paul Johnson, Chair of TransWilts Community Interest Company.

Details of a September meeting in Taunton and a November meeting in Bath will be advised in due course, via the Railfuture website and future Newsletters.

John Dixon, 1932-2019

John Dixon, who died in October aged 87, was a longstanding member of Railfuture and Portishead Railway Group. He lived all his life in Portishead and, at meetings connected with transport, he would raise the subject of reopening his local railway with the words, “Don’t forget the Portishead line,” years before this became official policy of the local authorities in the Greater Bristol area.

In his final years he suffered from throat cancer and was unable to speak but continued to campaign with the aid of a voice machine. On his behalf I spoke at a North Somerset Council meeting early last year, urging it to press ahead with the Development Consent Order application for MetroWest Phase 1, which I am pleased to say it did. John was the eyes and ears of the Branch in North Somerset, often providing me with cuttings from local papers. He was a character who will be missed.

Nigel Bray

Minutes of Railfuture Severnside Branch AGM at Dilton Marsh, 6 April 2019

Twelve members and six visitors were present. John Hassall in the Chair. Seven apologies were received. Minutes of the previous AGM at Bridgwater on 14 April 2018 were accepted. There were no Matters Arising.

Chairman’s Report

John Hassall referred to campaigns to reopen train services and stations in Somerset. DfT approval was awaited for the extension of some GWR Cardiff- Taunton services to Bishops Lydeard to link with the West Somerset Railway. This would improve the economy of the area. Railfuture needed to assist these campaigns.

Secretary’s Report

Nigel Bray said the major victory in the past year had been the restoration of four tracks on Filton Bank, giving Bristol a high capacity main line towards the Midlands and South Wales. The resulting segregation of faster and slower trains would be crucial to the implementation of MetroWest. The four-track main line ought to be promoted as a gateway to the city, a point made in Railfuture’s response to the West of England Joint Local Transport Plan 4.

It was encouraging to see that several recent transport Consultations have mentioned the health benefits of using public transport. Electric or driverless cars would not reduce congestion and would if anything reinforce inactive lifestyles which are a major factor in ill-health.

Probably the biggest disappointment in 2018 was the Department for Transport’s shelving of the Cross Country Franchise Consultation, on which we had been working with other Railfuture Branches to produce a unified response. The challenges in 2019 would be to prevent slippage of MetroWest and get things moving with some priority station reopening campaigns. A public meeting was being planned in the autumn to campaign for Stonehouse Bristol Road station.

Branch membership at 106, of which 11 were affiliated groups, was fractionally up on a year ago. It was hoped to widen our membership base by attracting some younger people and he was in discussion with a Professor at Gloucestershire University on the possibility of an essay competition sponsored by Railfuture.

Treasurer's Report

In Tony Lloyd's absence, Nigel advised that room hire costs in 2018 were £97.50, a significant reduction on 2017, thanks to free meetings at Bristol and Bridgwater, the latter through the generosity of Friends of Bridgwater Station. Nevertheless, expenditure exceeded income by £35.27 in 2018. This deficit would have been only £5.27 had a refund promised by Gloucester Leisure Centre been paid promptly. This refund of £30 represented 50% of the charge for our September meeting room, where the lighting failed.

£250 was paid out in grants in 2018 and it might be necessary to reduce this amount in future. The raffle at Branch meetings raised over £ 65, while a similar amount was generated by donations from members, including one of £ 20 towards the cost of Newsletters.

Tony, who has been Branch Treasurer since 2007, wished to stand down but was prepared to continue for another year if there were no other nomination.

Election of Officers and Committee

The following were elected unopposed *en bloc*:

Chair: John Hassall

Vice-Chair: David Redgewell

Secretary: Nigel Bray

Treasurer: Tony Lloyd

Media spokesman: Bruce Williamson

Dave Chapple (Friends of Bridgwater Station)

John Dixon (Portishead Railway Group)

Gerard Duddridge (representing Somerset and liaison with Devon & Cornwall Branch)

Sophie Martin (TransWilts Community Rail Partnership)

Horace Prickett (TransWilts Community Rail Partnership)

John Stretton (Ashchurch, Tewkesbury & District Rail Promotion Group)

A.O.B.

John Hassall said a decision was needed on whether to have a stand at the West Somerset Railway Association Steam Fayre this Summer. He also invited suggestions for a Railfuture presence at any other public event.

The raffle of railway books raised £23 and donations £4.70, for Branch funds.

After the formal part of the meeting, Graham Ellis gave a presentation, *Rail Developments across wider Wiltshire*.

Post-meeting note:

Philip Bisatt succeeded Tony Lloyd as Branch Treasurer in February 2020. To thank Tony for nearly 13 years in the post, Nigel Bray presented him with two railway books at the recent AGM of Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways.

Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways' AGM, 14th February 2020

FOSBR's AGM was held at All Saints Church, near Clifton Down station, on 14th February, hosted a very informative talk by Professor Stuart Cole, Emeritus Professor of Transport at the University of South Wales, on the Cardiff Metro project.

Prof. Cole said the scheme involved replacement of existing Valley Lines rolling stock by 2023 and electrification of the core Valleys network linking Aberdare, Merthyr, Rhymney and Treherbert with Cardiff. Tri-modal Class 769 trains, which can run on batteries, diesel or overhead power, will be used on the routes to Barry Island, Ebbw Vale, Maesteg, Penarth and the Vale of Glamorgan, which are not being electrified. He admitted the 769s would be heavier than purely electric trains, but this was a compromise arising from the bid by Transport for Wales which operates the Wales & Borders rail franchise. New diesel trains were being ordered for longer-distance routes such as Cardiff- Manchester.

FOSBR Chair Rob Dixon asked whether there had been any local authority input to the specifications for the Metro. "None," replied Prof. Cole, who pointed out that everything had been specified by Keolis / Amey, trading as Transport for Wales.

Some very revealing statistics on modal share were provided by Prof. Cole. On one corridor in north Cardiff, over 8,000 peak journeys into the city centre were currently by car, 3,700 by rail and only 200 by bus. The low proportion using buses was not surprising given that they had to use the same congested roads as cars. Despite the abundance of local stations in the Cardiff area, rail journeys in the peak were suppressed by the inability of short trains such as Pacers and Class 150s to accommodate more passengers. This was particularly acute at inner suburban stations such as Llandaf, where trains arrived already crowded with passengers. This was the result of the previous Wales & Borders franchise, which ran from 2003 to 2018, lacking provision for growth in passenger numbers.

The Class 769s were designed to accommodate 425 passengers, of whom 191 would be standing. Prof. Cole said it was inevitable, given the numbers wishing to travel in the peak, that many rail passengers would have to stand. Without this greater capacity, it was likely that people unable to board would revert to using cars.

However, the Newport- Cardiff commuter flow was a major success for rail, with 11,000 out of 12,200 passengers using the train. The reasons were frequent services (six per hour), many of which were formed by 10-car GWR IETs.

Although the Metro scheme also involved bus / rail integration, the new Cardiff bus station had only 14 stands compared with 24 at the old one.

Restoring Your Railways Fund

On 19th February 2020 DfT announced the rules for applications to its £500m fund to reopen railway lines and stations. The Fund will be split three ways in order to assist schemes at different stages of development, i.e.

- an Ideas Fund, for embryonic schemes needing more detailed business cases.
- Accelerating existing proposals, which already have existing business cases.
- Proposals for new or existing stations.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/re-opening-beeching-era-lines-and-stations>

The deadline for applications, which needed to be sponsored by MPs for the relevant constituencies, was 28th February. Robert Crockford has confirmed that Siobhan Baillie, MP for Stroud, met the DfT's deadline for registering an interest in reopening Stonehouse Bristol Road station. We understand that Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown was being asked to register an interest in the Cirencester Community Railway. Rebecca Pow was being approached by Somerset West & Taunton Council to support reopening of Wellington station and a regular rail service on to the West Somerset Railway. DfT intends to announce in April which proposals will qualify for funding.

An upbeat article in the *Daily Telegraph* for 28th February reported that five stations opened since 2017 in England and Wales with assistance from the New Stations Fund have recorded more than 970,886 journeys in 2018/19 according to the Office of Rail and Road. "The Government said the surge in use was a vindication of its £500 million rollback of the closures wrought in the Sixties Beeching Review."

Just as this Newsletter went to press, DfT made a further announcement that candidates for the New Stations Fund could be submitted by local authorities, on condition that the proposed stations will be in use by 2024.

Railfuture response to Western Gateway Rail Strategy Consultation

Western Gateway is one of the Sub-National Transport Bodies recently created by the Government in an attempt to devolve transport policy with a view to meeting expected growth in housing and employment. In the South West Region there are two SNTBs. Western Gateway stretches from Gloucestershire and Wiltshire to Dorset. The other is Peninsula, covering Cornwall, Devon and Somerset. An anomaly of these boundaries is that a rail journey into Dorset from other Western Gateway counties involves travelling through part of the Peninsula territory or via Southampton through the territory of SNTB Transport for the South East.

In autumn 2019 Western Gateway invited stakeholders to suggest a Rail Strategy for the authority as it did not already have one! The Consultation invited comments what the Strategy should contain. The Railfuture response, submitted on 30th December, was composed by Tony Smale, Secretary of Wessex Branch, with input from Severnside. Some of the main points were:

- In order to fulfil WG's growth agenda of accommodating 300,000 new homes and 190,000 new jobs, sustainable modes of transport such as rail should be favoured above those which exacerbate pollution, climate change and congestion.
- The Transport Strategy should set a target of net zero growth of road traffic volumes and set out what is required of the rail network's capacity and connectivity across and around the Western Gateway in order to achieve it. The Strategy should therefore aim to develop the rail network sufficiently to accommodate travel demand growth arising from increases in population and economic activity, and from modal shift to rail from existing road users.

Our comments on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the rail network made the following points:

Strengths: ability to move larger volumes of passengers and freight in greater safety and with less use of land than by road; the potential to become a zero carbon mode through electrification; penetration into city and town centres which are usually bypassed by motorways and trunk roads; and the opportunity for passengers to work, study or relax on the move.

Weaknesses: low investment in infrastructure compared with other Regions; cost-benefit methodology failing to identify social and environmental benefits of rail; some significant centres of population and planned new housing have lost their rail connection, eg Cirencester; poor connectivity between the South West and the South Coast; slow north-south services; poor or non-existent bus connections at rural stations.

Opportunities: spare capacity for passenger and freight on most routes; stations could become community hubs encouraging business and improved local environment; regular services on heritage railways, e.g. Swanage; innovative systems to carry parcels and light freight on passenger trains; light rail systems for Greater Bristol and Bournemouth-Poole; linking existing routes e.g. by track remodelling to enable Bristol- Weymouth trains to serve Yeovil Junction.

Threats: some routes vulnerable to effects of extreme weather; plans for housing or commercial development on disused railway formations which could otherwise be restored to use; rail may lose its environmental advantage if replacement of diesel traction does not keep pace with the decarbonisation of road transport; organisational upheaval and industrial disputes.

The Railfuture response pointed out that the new Worcestershire Parkway station, although just outside the study area, has an important role in improving connections between two routes which run through it, Cardiff- Nottingham and Paddington- Worcester- Hereford. We also called for close cooperation with neighbouring SNTBs because there is no self-contained railway network in Western Gateway, other than the planned MetroWest, lending itself to Western Gateway oversight.

Gloucestershire Local Transport Plan Review Consultation

See: <https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/transport/gloucestershires-local-transport-plan-2015-2031/ltp-review-201920/>.

The Railfuture response to the consultation was submitted on 18th February, ahead of the County Council's deadline of 26th March. At a stakeholder meeting in Cheltenham on 28th January, Luisa Senft-Hayward, GCC's Transport Planning Team Manager, said one reason for reviewing the LTP was to take account of climate change and reduce carbon emissions.



We were advised some time ago that the Review would take a “neutral attitude to reopening stations” and its Rail Strategy hardly mentions any additional stations with the exception of one “north of Stonehouse and south of Gloucester.” The most striking impression of the Review is its blandness, making some of the right noises but short on commitments.

Some points made in our response, which can be read on the Railfuture website shortly, were:

- It doesn't do enough to address climate change or meet the growing demand for rail

travel.

- It underestimates the potential of rail in the county and appears to regard train services as largely set in stone.
- It concentrates too much on the county's London train services, which have recently been improved and ignores the need for a direct rail link between the third largest urban area (Stroud / Stonehouse) and Bristol.
- Without definite proposals for new stations and train services, Gloucestershire risks losing out to local authorities with more ambitious plans for rail.

Thanks are due to Philip Colls, Robert Crockford, David Smith, John Stretton and Julian Tyson-Woodcock for their advice in the drafting of the response.

On 10 March, Railfuture issued the following press release:

Rail campaigners say the Gloucestershire Local Transport Plan Review doesn't do enough to address climate change or meet the growing demand for rail travel.

'The County Council's Rail Strategy is not bold enough,' says Nigel Bray of Railfuture. 'It underestimates the potential of rail in the county and appears to regard train services as largely set in stone.'

Railfuture's response to the current Consultation says the Review concentrates too much on the county's London train services, which have recently been improved, and ignores the need for a direct rail link between Stonehouse/Stroud (the third largest urban area in the county) and Bristol.

'Unless Gloucestershire advances definite proposals for additional stations and train services,' says Nigel, 'it risks losing out to local authorities which have done so.'

Railfuture National Conference in Leeds on 3 October 2020

Railfuture's 2020 national conference will focus on upgrading and expanding Britain's railway network, including progress on the government's modest 'Restoring Your Railways Fund' for reopening railway lines closed in the 1960s.

Speakers are being sought at the time of writing. Updates and full information about the conference will be available at <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/conferences/>, which is also the website page to book your place. It will cost £30 for members up to 31st July 2020 and thereafter at the non-member rate of £35.

Next Railfuture Severnside newsletter will be number 44 in autumn 2020.

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