



campaigning by
The Railway Development
Society Limited

THAMES VALLEY BRANCH
Newsletter 84 **July 2014**

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Next members' event: visit to the Network Rail Thames Valley Signalling Centre at Didcot.

The new TVSC at Didcot currently controls the railway from Paddington to Didcot & Newbury but will in due course take on a much larger area. This visit will afford a rare opportunity to see a state of the art signalling centre in operation. I am fortunate enough to have visited it already as part of a U3A course and can assure you it is a unique chance to view at first hand the latest signalling technology in action. Access to such centres is a privilege and I can recommend this as a most interesting experience.

If you would like to join this visit then please in the first instance register your interest with the Secretary (by email preferably) who will keep a list of those interested and will then contact you nearer the time once the details have been finalised. We are intending the visit to be on a weekday early evening in September and depending on numbers could be split over two days. Please note that you are not committing yourself at this stage by registering your interest.

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting on Wednesday 7th May 2014 19.00 The King's Centre, Osney Mead, Oxford.

Approx 20 members and supporters were present.

Apologies were received from: David Eldridge, Ted Eele, Roger Blake, Harry Maugham, Alan Francis, Chris Wright & Ian East.

The Chairman's Review of the Year is below.

The Secretary reported that since last year's AGM at Bicester, where our guest speaker was Richard Harper of Chiltern Railways we have organised visits to FGW control centre at Swindon in September, with thanks to Chris Bates and we hosted the Railfuture national autumn conference in Oxford Town Hall in November which means we did not have a separate branch meeting in the autumn as normal. This was widely regarded as a great success with thanks to Richard Stow for the speaker line up and to the rest of the committee for all their help on the day. For the same reason we only published two rather than the more normal three newsletters. For this year we are hoping to arrange meetings in Bicester in the summer and Reading in the autumn.

Membership: In Railfuture's Annual Report for 2013 ours was one of three branches singled out for larger than average membership growth, the others being West Midlands and Yorkshire. A year ago our membership stood at 106 and is now 115 which is an increase of 8% which is very satisfying. Most join from the website though we don't know what drew them there in the first place. 43% pay the reduced pensioner rate and only 2 pay the student rate even though we have six universities in our area. More younger members would be most welcome.

The Treasurer had previously distributed the branch accounts with the recent newsletter to members. These were accepted by the meeting.

The Media Officer reported that increasingly broadcasters and newspapers contact him about a news item rather than by him sending them a press release. During the past year he featured in the media a total of 26 times. Of these, 11 were the Oxford Mail/Times and 6 were BBC Oxford, 3 were BBC Berkshire and 2 were The Reading Post, the remainder

being others. Topics covered were many and included the Autumn conference, Crossrail to Reading, Oxford & Didcot station expansions, Chiltern to Oxford and level crossing safety. He pointed out that most of the coverage has been in Oxford with smaller amounts in Bicester, Reading and Newbury with none this year in Aylesbury, Banbury, Milton Keynes or High Wycombe. He regrets this imbalance but has yet to find a way to redress it. If any member is in touch with the news media in those places, please let the branch know, to improve the chances of securing local coverage.

The officers and committee members were all re-elected as follows:-

Chairman: Richard Stow	Proposed by Andrew McCallum, seconded by Chris Bates
Vice Chairman: David King	Proposed by Martin Smith, seconded by Andrew McCallum
Secretary: Andrew McCallum	Proposed by Richard Stow, seconded by David King
Treasurer: John Elvin	Proposed by Andrew McCallum, seconded by Chris Bates
Other committee members: Nigel Rose, Martin Smith, Chris Bates, Hugh Jaeger, David Eldridge, Nigel Phillips & Alan Francis.	Proposed by David King, Seconded by Chris Bates.

Nigel Phillips and Alan Francis are welcome as new members of the committee.

The formal business was concluded at 19.20.

Our guest speaker was Mike Hogg, Projects and Planning Director, First Great Western.

He is a career railwayman, an ex BR graduate trainee with 30 years experience across the country. He made it clear that though he is with FGW now he takes a holistic view and speaks for the industry as a whole and works closely with colleagues in Network Rail and elsewhere as “one railway”. He gave a fascinating and comprehensive presentation about developments in the Western Region but concentrating on our area and culminating with Oxford. The following is a brief summary of the main points he raised.

NR spend on the WR is about £1billion p.a.

Reading station area work will be completed by Easter 2015 when the new flyover and junctions to the west of the station are commissioned. Platform 3 will be back in use in December 2014. The tracks through platforms 9 & 10 will be passed for 95mph in August 2015. £800 million has been spent at Reading.

Western rail access to Heathrow should be introduced in the 2020 timetable.

Crossrail: At Stockley the new viaduct has been slid over the main lines with the new flyover connecting the airport line to the up relief line. During the 2020s it is possible that a 5th line will be opened between Slough East and Hanwell. More EMU stabling will be needed with space for 3x12 cars at Didcot and more at West Ealing identified.

Further west, the new double track service between Swindon and Kemble will open on 14th August this year.

Referring to the approach to engineering possessions he made clear that FGW’s approach is passenger focused with trains diverted rather than using bus replacements wherever possible. The use of the Paddington to the west via Banbury route again is an option including possibly the Penzance sleeper.

GW Electrification will incorporate passive provision for 140mph and for quadrupling Didcot – Oxford.

Turning to Oxford he started by observing that if it was on the continent Oxford would have had an 8 platform station with a bus station and prominent station building.

Amongst the improvements planned are:-

90mph running on the new down loop and over the junction (installed last Christmas) at Wolvercote and into the up loop at Wolvercote.

75mph connections at Oxford south, four upside north sidings extended for 12 car trains, 60mph at Oxford North Junction onto the Bicester line.

Platform 2 will be bi-directional thus allowing terminating trains from London to return directly. In December 2016 the electrification will be completed including the north sidings and ending on the main line level with them (until “electric spine” electrification to Bletchley & Coventry).

The new down platform on the west side will require removal of the youth hostel and nursery and plans include passive provision for a new through upside platform in the future which would be created by the easternmost of the new north facing bays being extended southwards.

Botley Road Bridge will be replaced and will be wider, longer and deeper. Works will avoid closures in December 2017 which is when the planned new Westgate shopping centre is due to open.

Turning to the new station building which is still subject to consultation and an architect’s competition and the wider area he stressed that the new station should make a “statement” to reflect Oxford’s status and to create a “sense of

arrival” as part of the new “urban realm”. It will not be a repeat of Reading station except in the concept of a high level “transfer deck” containing the station facilities which would likely be at the southern end with the escalators to the platforms north facing.

Locations for bus stops, bike and car parks etc are all still to be decided.

In years to come Oxford will be a major interchange with passengers to and from many directions all changing there (Birmingham, EWR, London, Heathrow & Gatwick, Reading and the south, the west and Cotswold lines). He floated the possibility of 8 car trains on the Marylebone – Oxford services in 20 years time and the concept of fewer trains terminating at Oxford with, for example trains from Marylebone, or Banbury continuing to Cowley.

AGM 2014 - Chairman’s review of the year.

Last year’s AGM was addressed by Richard Harper from Chiltern Railways at Bicester, setting out the operators aspirations for the future, however those present were well aware that a cloud hung over the proceedings in the form of the Judicial Review of the Oxford – Bicester scheme decision. Fortunately the procedures were found to have been correctly followed, and the scheme is now progressing rapidly.

The decision was a good springboard for the National Rail Users Autumn Conference in Oxford Town Hall, in early November. I would like to express my thanks to the speakers, and those who helped. We delivered what was the best rail conference of the year, and I am pleased to say it raised suitable transport’s profile in the county at political levels and we continue to exploit excellent contacts made at the event.

This spring we received formal confirmation of Control Period 5 investment and most of the branch’s objectives from 25 years ago were included, these being East – West Rail, Heathrow Western Access, Oxford Area Remodelling, Electrification and finally Branch Electrification which has been authorised in principle.

I have had the opportunity to attend various user groups AGMs, and took careful note of 2 speakers on the subject of community rail, at the Marlow – Maidenhead Passenger Association AGM; it seems that this may be a good option for boosting traffic, on these branches.

I am also very appreciative of the work done by members who sit on passenger boards of Great Western and Chiltern.

Our Summer Visit to First Great Westerns’ control centre in Swindon was an eye opener to the complexities of operating a railway with only just enough rolling stock, and booming passenger traffic. My thanks to First Group.

As a campaigning organisation and lobby group we must focus on the future and following feedback from my requests for priorities last year, the branch is focused on 3 core objectives and I would like to report on progress on each:-

1. Witney Oxford Transport. We helped set up this group and a public meeting was held on 14 January in Witney. I was worried no one would turn up, but in the event it was well supported with over 60 attendees and huge support for setting up the group and for its aims. The meeting gave full endorsement for the setting up of a study into the issues of sustainable transport on the A40 corridor, and I am grateful for the hard work of the group. The county council is now showing interest in trams (not to Witney) and the possible electrification of the Cowley Branch is a “foot in the door”.
2. Bourne End – High Wycombe. I am pleased Nigel Phillips has joined the branch committee and was pleased to see the LEP has recognised the potential of this no brainer of a scheme, although as we have learnt from East West Rail, Lewes-Uckfield and March-Wisbech the choice of consultants is crucial.
3. Grove – Wantage. This is a robust scheme, but progress here has been nil, despite county support. I don’t expect to report much here as it is understood GW funding is very, very tight. The bridge will be renewed to modern standards however.

New campaigns that have become apparent in the last few months include protection of the Network Card and its use on East West Rail and Chiltern’s Oxford services. Many in the rail industry do not share our enthusiasm for this valuable marketing tool. We shall form common cause with user groups on this one.

We have over the last year met with a good number of elected politicians and it is clear that this is where we must focus lobbying activity. I appreciate the time they have given to us and I hope we have helped them understand the issues and the branch must be aware of the moves of transport policy to the LEPS and the government’s commitment to the Regional Growth Fund. This will involve changes.

This year has also seen closer liaison with adjacent branches and a recent meeting in Reading was very productive. We retain close links with Bus Users UK (Oxford Branch).

The branch's media appearances were numerous, and I must thank our media officer for the hard work he has done; the lead up to and after the conference was a triumph and raised the profile of sustainable transport. Our Twitter account has been avidly followed.

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

WITNEY OXFORD TRANSPORT GROUP (WOT).

This Railfuture supported Group is continuing with its activities and publicity campaign. Fruitful discussions have been held with officers and members of Oxfordshire County Council. The latter has started a review of traffic statistics for the A40 corridor to feed into a new County traffic model. This will be used to study the potential impacts of the various options that might be adopted, taking into account the numbers of new houses and jobs that are predicted for the next 15 years. WOT also organised a walk along a section of the old Witney branch railway trackbed. Although very overgrown, it demonstrated the feasibility of using the route for part of a new fixed transport link. The walk was also very good publicity for the Group and was covered in the local press, including in pictures. It facilitated contact with a number of local opinion formers and election candidates who joined in the walk. Discussions will continue to be held with local politicians and it is hoped that there will be a joint workshop with OCC in the autumn. This work should lead to a more detailed engineering and economic study in the early part of 2015.

To contact WOT: Web: www.witneyoxfordtransport.org.uk Facebook: www.facebook.com/witneyoxfordtransport
Twitter: @witneyoxtransp Post: WOT Witney Oxford Transport, 25 Pockocks Close, Bampton, OX18 2JY

Chiltern News.

Good progress is being made at Bicester with new down line track and ballast laid between Bicester MoD and the Bicester perimeter road and a new footbridge bridge installed at Tubbs Lane to replace the existing pedestrian foot crossing. The new Gavray chord connecting the EWR route to the Chiltern main line is still under construction.

On 18 May the line through Bicester Town reopened for freight trains to the MoD* depot with the emphasis of the work then switching from the Bicester area to the section north east of Oxford. *Rail access to the MoD depot has to be available at all times and freight is now routed via Aylesbury & Claydon Junction while the section through Islip to Oxford is being upgraded. We are told the project is currently on programme and within budget.

Work is under way to lengthen platforms to accommodate 9-car trains at Bicester North – Beaconsfield (incl) except Saunderton.

The new multi-story car park at Banbury station opened at the end of May. Although for many drivers it is a longer drive it is, however, a much shorter walk from car to train and all under cover.

The branch will be represented at a meeting of the Chiltern Railways passenger user groups in September to discuss their initial proposals for the Oxford – Marylebone timetable.

The first three of the new Class 68s which will take over from Class 67s on the silver trains set sail from Valencia to Liverpool on 21st July. They should enter service from November, on lease from DRS.

Chairman's Comment.

The last 6 months have probably been the most active the branch has had for many years. However it is quite hard to keep members and user groups up to date with what is happening.

The Branch has been involved from the start of the LTP 4 process for Oxfordshire; we have met Officers and Members of various councils to put our case and with a remarkably positive response, something we could only have dreamed of 20 years ago. Rail is now a serious part of Transport Strategy in the Thames Valley.

In addition Witney – Oxford Transport has been engaging with elected officials and business at every opportunity.

The level of public support this campaign is receiving is well in excess of what I expected and I look forward to significant progress in due course.

It is increasingly important to be pro-active not reactive; I have personally been liaising with Railfuture and user group colleagues on the Eastern Section of East West rail and we are awaiting a Study imminently on the Cambridge Section.

On the media front the Branch has kept up a great flow of letters in various papers and done a number of interviews on TV and Radio, and I would like to thank Hugh for getting up early for Radio Berkshire and starting of the day for the coverage of the Royal opening at Reading Station on 17th July 2014.

A number of Thames Valley branch members went to the Summer Conference at Cambridge and it was a great success; I would urge everyone who is interested to go to the Autumn Conference, in London on 1st November.

Reading Green Park station.

The Growth Fund bid has been successful, so this shelved project is now back on the agenda.

High Wycombe – Bourne End

Unfortunately a bid by Buckinghamshire Thames Valley LEP for funding for a business case for both HW - BE (re-opening) and Aylesbury - HW (improvements) was unsuccessful but NR are being encouraged to start discussions with the LEP; a further meeting is planned at which the branch will be represented.

Cotswold Line News.

Worcestershire Parkway.

The £7.5 million bid was successful and work is expected to progress rapidly on Phase 1; this will give, after phase 2, better connections at the north of the Cotswold Line. The business case was boosted by the fact that there are 440 car spaces at stations Evesham – Hereford, as opposed to 1,000 plus at Warwick Parkway. So the station will provide the IEP trains more traffic at the west of the Line.

Kingham: Planning Permission has been applied for in respect of the footbridge.

Hanborough: The dynamic loop plan is making good progress.

Timetable: FGW had put out a 2015 timetable revision; it is available online and is probably the best that can be delivered till the IEPs come into service.

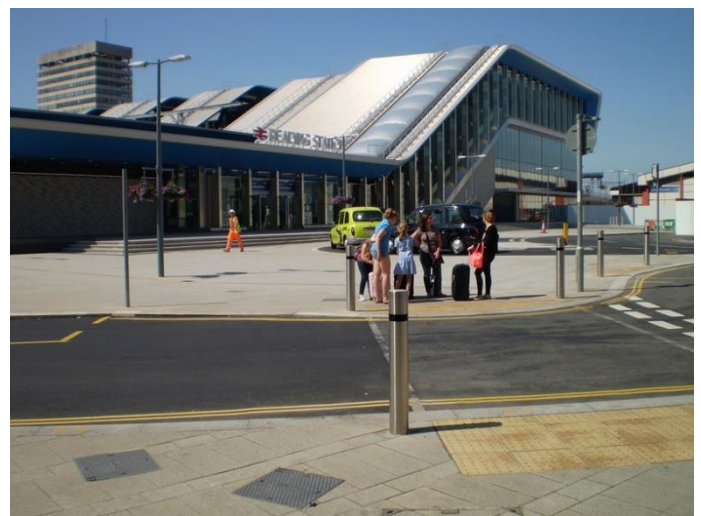
Electrification.

Masts are now appearing between Didcot & Reading including on the new Reading flyover (on which the first train is due to run on 4th January 2015) and on the Reading Oxford Road Junction – Reading West Junction curve.

Photos:



Andrew McCallum



Andrew McCallum

The transfer deck at Reading Station is now complete with shops and benches.

The north entrance to Reading Station, landscaped following the Queen's visit on 17th July. Both: 22nd July.



Nigel Phillips

The recently restored bridge over the River Thames at Bourne End which could see trains to High Wycombe.



Nigel Phillips

Track at Verney Junction, on EWR on 26th May 2014.



John Elvin

Looking west and east at London Road crossing, Bicester on 30th June. The track machine then traversed the crossing after the barriers had been activated.



John Elvin



John Elvin



John Elvin

Chiltern's new rail replacement buses for Oxford – Bicester have cycle/luggage spaces; the shape of things to come?

Edited by Andrew McCallum with contributions from Richard Stow, John Elvin, Nigel Phillips & Nigel Rose.