



THAMES VALLEY

campaigning by
The Railway Development Society Limited

THAMES VALLEY BRANCH
Newsletter 90 July 2016

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Next members' meeting: Tuesday 20th September 2016 at 6 for 6.30pm at The Chamber, Bicester Town Council, The Garth, Launton Road, Bicester, Oxfordshire, OX26 6PS
Our guest speaker will be Martin Tugwell, Director, who will address us on the activity and ambitions of the new Heartland Strategic Alliance Strategic Transport Forum.

For directions please see: <http://www.bicester.gov.uk/> It is a short walk from Bicester Village station (turn left into London Road then right into Launton Road and it is on the right). From Bicester North Station it is about a 15 minute walk via Buckingham Road, North Street and Sheep Street to Launton Road.

Railfuture Thames Valley Branch AGM 16th April 2016, 10.30
West Oxford Community Centre, Oxford.

21 members and supporters were present.

Apologies were received from: Alan Francis, Hugh Jaeger, Michael Caton, David King, Vic Angell, Robin Rees.

Chairman's Report – Thames Valley Branch

It goes without saying that despite Thames Valley being a smaller Railfuture Branch, we have probably seen more of our well thought through objectives come to fruition (or at least started) than ever before. Oxford Parkway and Bicester Village are a shining example of a "can do" attitude and, just like the Borders Railway in Scotland, are proving the critics, and we have found we have a lot in North Oxford, utterly wrong.

I, for one, will be pleased to go from Oxford City, from December and am pleased GRIP 3 level will be reached on the Bletchley Line at about the same time.

Last year's AGM was addressed by Adrian Shooter, the then Chairman of the Oxfordshire LEP, who gave a very good run through of what he had achieved and what we should seek to lobby for; interestingly he focused on 4 tracks from Wolvercote to Didcot, and it is clear that Witney, Hanborough, Cowley and East -West are totally dependent on this going ahead. It is good to be able to report, as I write this, that I have proposed track plans for this on the desk in front of me. It is in four stages, the fourth of which (covering the section with the Thames bridges) is aspirational so whilst electrification is delayed, by 2019 we should be able to campaign with confidence for expansion.

He also talked of Vivarail and the Class 230 he has been so involved in; this led to our very successful visit to Long Marston to see it.

As noted above the summer trip was to Vivarail at Long Marston and this was incredibly successful, firstly as everyone was impressed by the Class 230 but more importantly because we were able to get supportive comments into lots of media outlets.

We held a joint autumn meeting at Bicester, with OBRAC, and this well attended meeting was addressed by Stephen Barker of Chiltern Railways. It was just prior to the opening and it gave an idea of the scale of work required and the fanatical opposition to the project, made all the better by a couple of hecklers at the back.

Our other Branch public meeting was at Reading, where Tom Pierpoint gave a good run down of Great Western Railways' aspirations, all of which the branch endorses.

During the year I have had the opportunity to attend various meetings, twice with Railfuture committee members with the Oxfordshire Council member for Transport. I have also attended meetings at Buckinghamshire and have a meeting lined up next week at West Oxfordshire Council. As a branch we have attended most Network Rail consultations and I have been busy checking my planning knowledge in relation to Hanborough.

I am grateful to Committee members who have sat on various boards and attended various meetings. I do not think we have missed much in the last 12 months, but don't forget, our members do not always attend under the "Railfuture Banner", showing what a diverse range of members we have.

I continue to enjoy the Green Fair, as our stand enables us to meet people with no great knowledge of rail, our key audience; there is little point in talking to ourselves! It is very important that we get the "message out" and I am well aware our media presence is not as good as it could be. However, I would like to thank Hugh Jaeger, our local independent transport expert, who has done his best to curb sensationalism and inaccurate reporting.

It may be helpful if I go through our core objectives and progress this year.

- Witney Oxford Transport. The £35m bus lane along the A40 will go ahead. The Witney Oxford Transport Group's key demand, that this is phase 1, still stands and the objective is still for heavy rail, or light rail (this is dependent on the 4 tracking I mentioned above).

Interestingly the Cost Benefit Ratio after taking into account external benefits is over 2 for all options, other than the dual-carriageway scheme.

- Bourne End – High Wycombe. Nigel Phillips has continued to press this case. I have no doubt as Heathrow Western Access is built the benefits of this low cost connection will become as obvious to others as it is to us. It has at last found its way into the emerging High Wycombe Local Plan, albeit a rather sketchy reference, but perhaps the message is getting across. In the meantime, the remodelling of Bourne End to increase service to two trains per hour waits additional funds.

- Grove – Wantage. This is not a scheme backed by the rail industry; however Railfuture is independent and we can see 1m + journeys from a Parkway. Any Station will be west of the old site, and I am confident this is one we will win, although it may involve building a few extra houses.

- Cowley Branch. This was a Chiltern Scheme but is now back on the agenda, as a Hanborough - Cowley scheme and this idea was well supported at the GWR conference at Witney in February. Railfuture will directly support the provision of extra car parking at Hanborough and we will seek a Strategic Plan for the site involving car parking, housing etc; this is utterly key to getting the Cowley Scheme ahead.

- East West Rail. This is now moving from campaigning to delivery and there is little we need to do. However we shall seek to liaise with the NIC on all Oxford - Cambridge options; clearly we want to see the Railway before the expressway.

We retain close links with Bus Users UK (Oxford Branch) and see bus links and cycle parking as crucial to the success of Oxford Parkway.

On the downside our media appearances have been less this year. I am very keen to improve this, however we have continued to write letters and use any opportunity to promote rail where we can.

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. It continues to be very gratifying to see

so much investment in rail. I am mindful that members in Milton Keynes have difficulty getting to meetings etc; I hope in 2 or 3 years these issues will be a thing of the past.

Should anyone wish to become more actively involved in the group, we would welcome the help, as we find the Branch at the centre of a huge Rail Investment Programme.

Secretary's report.

Meetings: Since last year's AGM here in Oxford, where our guest speaker was Adrian Shooter, we have held two meetings for members and arranged one visit. Thanks to Adrian a group of us were able to visit Vivarail at Long Marston in September to view and ride on his D-Train prototype. That same evening we had a talk by Stephen Barker of Chiltern Railways in Bicester and in November in Reading we were addressed by Tom Pierpoint of GWR. We published three newsletters which is our usual number, all are now illustrated with our own member's photos showing the progress on schemes in our area. Please submit any photos especially if of worksites etc. For this year we are hoping to arrange meetings in the summer and in the autumn in different locations.

Membership: A year ago our membership stood at 110 and is now 118 which is an increase of 7% and includes 3 who joined last month. We have now more than made up the drop in membership the previous year. Most join from the website though we don't know what drew them there in the first place. 6.7% have academic titles; we have 6 universities in our area. I have been informed by Railfuture's Membership Secretary that the Scottish branch have been successful recruiting new members at model railway shows; perhaps something we might consider more.

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

John Elvin thanked the Secretary for the quality of the newsletters.

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 John Elvin, seconded by Nigel Rose
Secretary: Andrew McCallum	Proposed by Chris Bates, seconded by Nigel Philips
Treasurer: John Elvin	Proposed by Andrew McCallum, seconded by Martin Smith
Other committee members:	Nigel Rose, Martin Smith, Chris Bates, Hugh Jaeger, Nigel Phillips & Alan Francis were all unanimously re-elected.

New committee member Vic Angell was proposed by Andrew McCallum and seconded by Richard Stow and duly elected.

Our guest speaker was Chris Austin, OBE, FCILT, Head of Railfuture's Infrastructure & Networks Group, co-author of *Holding the line, how Britain's railways were saved*. His talk was titled: "*Disconnected! Broken Links in Britain's Rail Policy*"

Chris retired in 2009 from a railway career but is still heavily involved in heritage railways including the West Somerset Railway and the Heritage Railway Association. He co-wrote *Holding the Line* and *Disconnected!* with Lord Faulkener who speaks on railway matters in the House of Lords.

More stations had been closed before Beeching than by him but 2,563 stations were proposed for closure. Examples of lost lines in our area include Abingdon, Witney, Uxbridge – West Drayton.

Beeching did, however, introduce concepts like Freightliners, InterCity and the BR brand logo.

He highlighted the Great Central line as one which was well engineered and could have easily been converted for high speed and could even have become HS2.

As for EWR, it was closed in 1967, despite not being in Beeching's list, just as Milton Keynes was getting off the ground.

Didcot – Southampton could have been a useful through route for container trains if kept open but upgrading of the A34 began soon afterwards.

The route from Oxford to London via Thame was shorter than either via Bicester or Reading but did not survive.

Moving from our area Chris referred to some other lines mentioned in the book such as Dumfries-Stranraer, the Lincolnshire coast and the Clevedon branch. The latter was closed to realise the value of the land, not for operational cost savings. At nearby Portishead with a population due to rise to 30,000, the road remains congested despite expenditure and the railway is due to re-open in 2019.

He cited some cases where combining city centre stations to one such as Leeds Central/City was beneficial. Turning to Birmingham he pointed out that Snow Hill was re-opened 15 years after it was closed and Moor Street survived only because of an injunction against closure granted by Lord Denning. The total number of platforms in Birmingham is now 19 but will be 27 post-HS2 which is what it was in 1967, though it was only 14 in 1972. (Figures exclude tram stops.)

Referring to the Serpell Report, following the leak of the report by civil servant Reg Dawson to the Sunday Times, Ministers then rejected it and kept the network at roughly the size it was then.

Concluding his talk Chris said Ministers are now over-riding economic forecasts – which are always wrong! For network size a 5% increase in mileage is achievable. Borders Railway has already brought huge benefits (Abbotsford, home of Sir Walter Scott, has increased its opening hours since services started). Bicester Village is an example of the way forward. The lessons of the second half of the 20th century need to be learned not repeated. Enlightened local authorities, and Railfuture, can create the right atmosphere.

Tangled wires

According to the article in *RAIL 800*, Network Rail expects to complete electrification to Cardiff via Bristol Parkway by December 2018, to Bath by April 2019, and to Oxford by June 2019. How does this tie in with GWR's aspirations for Oxford and North Cotswold line services? At the AGM of the Cotswold Line Promotion Group on May 14 we were told that GWR plans to run two trains per hour between Worcester and London and a third train between Hanborough and Oxford, possibly extended to Cowley. This depends on redoubling between Worcester and Pershore and between Wolvercote Junction and Hanborough, construction of an island platform at Hanborough, rebuilding Oxford station and quadrupling between Oxford and Kennington Junction. Given the delays to main line electrification, it seems unlikely that these works in the Oxford area can be completed until well into Control Period 6 (2019-2024). Surely electrification to Oxford should be carried out in conjunction with rebuilding Oxford station. It would not make sense to electrify the present layout at Oxford and then re-do it all a few years later. Are Network Rail and GWR talking to each other?

Martin Smith

Witney-Oxford (WOT)

Following their consultation, Oxfordshire County Council have decided to adopt a medium term option of extending the existing A40 dual carriageway three miles further to the east to the already proposed Park & Ride at Eynsham, as well as bus lanes along the whole route from east Witney. OCC will now put this forward as a request for funding from government.

Although not a rail option, this scheme would not inhibit the longer term ambition of re-opening the Witney branch. In the shorter term there is a need to ensure better bus links from the A40 to an improved Hanborough station, providing more frequent fast rail connections to Oxford and beyond.

Railfuture held a meeting with officers of West Oxfordshire District Council, stressing the importance of these links but also that of protecting the line of the old railway in the WODC Local Plan. This Plan is currently having to be reviewed because of insufficient housing numbers. We pointed out the example of Stratford-upon-Avon Council's protection of the route between Stratford and Honeybourne, including land required for bridges necessary to replace old level crossings.

During this meeting, we also quoted the early successful experiences from the re-opening of the Borders Railway which has similar format to Witney – an ex-industrial town (Galashiels) some miles from a large university and tourism city (Edinburgh) with rural area between, and a P&R at the end of the route serving smaller settlements and tourist attractions.

An appeal relating to a housing developing to the west side of Long Hanborough has been allowed by the planning inspector. Along with the lack of a Local Plan, one of the grounds is that Long Hanborough is one of only two settlements in West Oxfordshire with a main line railway station, so making the proposal sustainable. This augurs well for the appeal relating to the site adjacent to Hanborough station which will be heard in December. This proposal will provide the land for more car parking and other associated improvements. Railfuture have submitted letters in support.

Lessons to be learned from the Borders campaign were set out at the recent highly successful Railfuture Scotland conference at Newtongrange. WOT have discussed these lessons. In the past the WOT group have been agnostic about modal choice but now recognise that it is time to concentrate on heavy rail and seriously question the inflated costs put forward by OCC's consultants when compared with the actual costs of the Borders scheme, which had many more engineering requirements than would be necessary to reach Witney.

As part of the campaign, WOT plan to hold a public mini-conference in Oxford Town Hall at 6pm on Thursday evening, 10th November. The keynote speaker will be Stephen Joseph, Director of the Campaign for Better Transport. It is planned to have other speakers to talk about Borders Railway and futuristic ideas for rail access to Witney associated with necessary housing developments in West Oxfordshire. It is hoped that local MPs and representatives from all levels of local government in Oxford and west Oxfordshire, the Local Enterprise Partnership and businesses will attend. Sufficient time will be allowed for a full round of discussions. Railfuture members are encouraged to join in.

Nigel Rose

Chiltern Update

Increasing Passenger Numbers

Passenger numbers are continuing to rise on all routes into Marylebone with certain car station parks being full by mid-morning. CR are exploring how to acquire additional carriages in addition to the four remaining 2-car DMUs being transferred from TPE from September for the extension of services through to Oxford on 12 December. Both Oxford Parkway and Bicester Village stations are continuing to outperform their commercial targets with both car parks at over 90% capacity on weekdays. Passenger numbers are forecast to increase still further during the 16 day Hinksey blockade at the end of July when the GWR main line from Oxford to Didcot is closed as part of the Hinksey Flood Alleviation works.

Banbury Blockade

All lines through Banbury will also be closed for nine days from 30 July while track and signalling is replaced and upgraded. A new bi-directional through platform 4 is being constructed at the north end (up side) but will only be long enough to accommodate 5-car trains and will mainly be used for terminating Marylebone & GWR services. The up goods loop is also being re-laid while the two adjacent stabling sidings have been decommissioned.

West Midlands and Chilterns Route Study

Members may wish to read the relevant sections and respond to Network Rail's current consultation covering their future proposed rail strategy (plans for addressing capacity issues etc) for the West Midlands and Chilterns route. Closing date for the receipt of responses is 22 September. <http://www.networkrail.co.uk/long-term-planning-process/West-Midlands-and-Chilterns-Route-Study/>

John Elvin

Cotswold Line News

Worcester Parkway

The Secretary of State has signed off the compulsory purchase order following the withdrawal of objections to the Worcester Parkway station. The objections were withdrawn when the council and landowners came to an agreement to transfer ownership of the land that the council required to build the station. This marks another step for the project, which is expected to open in the Spring of 2018. This scheme, whilst outside the Thames Valley, will offer good connectivity from the Cotswold Line to Birmingham and will offer a 1hr 5m time from Kingham to Birmingham, with one change.

Honeybourne- Stratford

Reopening this railway line has been backed by the planning inspector who oversaw Stratford District Council's Core Strategy. Peter Drew – who last month declared the town's future housing plan 'sound' – has said reinstating the missing section of line between Stratford and Long Marston could provide a long-term solution to the town's traffic congestion. The branch supported the scheme in the local plan. It also seems that there will be more houses at Long Marston, boosting the case for reinstatement. Land for a station there and for bridges to replace level crossings is also protected.

Heathrow Western Access

On 14th July, the Chairman attended an interesting presentation by Network Rail at Maidenhead on Heathrow Western Access. The project is progressing, the first round of consultation for the Development Consent Order has passed with 900 responses, including the branch, a new round of consultation will start in Feb 2017, late 2017 submission of DCO and work to start 2019 (CP6) and finish by 2024. The Scheme is NOT dependent on the extra runway.

The route is the most direct and offers timings of 7 mins to Slough and 14 mins to Maidenhead.

It was clear during the meeting; the big gap in the plans is access from High Wycombe and Aylesbury. During the presentation Robbie Burns, NR Infrastructure Director Western, went through Electrification plans. The main points were that reaching Maidenhead is first priority and then Reading. The project is

now progressing to revised plan, the total spend on Great Western will be £7bn, of which £2.3bn relates to Crossrail. Network Rail will then turn their attention to Old Oak Common Interchange.

Chairman's Comment

I am heartened to see that the Inspector has protected the Honeybourne - Stratford track bed. It is crucial that Local Plans protect track and as a campaign organisation I think it is key that the Bourne End -Marlow and Witney branches are protected. It's clear as an organisation we are 20 years ahead of the industry and some politicians in seeing the future. Wycombe and South Oxon plans are out for consultation now.

Having come back from the Railfuture Conference at Newtongrange on the Borders Railway, don't let anyone say lines can't be re-opened and at £10m per mile the Borders Line was incredible value for money and has proved more successful than could be have been imagined, even by its promoters.

Richard Stow

Warley Model Railway Show, NEC, Birmingham 26/27th November. www.thewarleyshow.co.uk/ Railfuture will have a stand at this event again this year and volunteers to help on it are welcome. It is a very large and busy show so if you fancy a visit and are willing to spend a couple of hours or so helping promote Railfuture, please contact the Secretary.

PHOTOS: with a focus on Banbury and Oxford.



The new up through platform and loop under construction at Banbury, July 2016.



Both: John Elvin

Looking north from the same point, the soon to be demolished Banbury North signalbox behind train.



John Elvin

Looking south from Banbury station car park, July. The South signalbox is also due to be demolished.



Andrew McCallum

A last look at the "new" semaphores (right) at Banbury. Note: Network Rail taking no chances with flood risk with the equipment cases on stilts (left).



Both: Andrew McCallum

Two views of the works for the new bay platforms at Oxford on 7th July 2016, on left taken from on a train arriving at the recently renumbered platform 2. The starting signal for the new platform is already in place.



Andrew McCallum

By contrast, the same view as above left, on 12th May 2016.



Andrew McCallum

Looking south from First Turn Lane, Wolvercote, 13th July 2016.

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