

Photo Credit Paul Blowfield at Templecombe.

### From The Chair.

I am delighted to be able to take on the Chair from David Brace who has served us so well over the last few years – thanks David, and also for your time with Chris Page in meeting with the two franchise bidders.

Now we have to hold our breath as the franchise machinery for the lines currently operated by South West Trains, grinds on – the

ITT (Invitation to Tender) is now with SWT and GWR (First Group), to work up their final bids. With only two bidders I wonder if the challenge for a new and invigorated service provision will follow.

Of course you will have read about the improvements to Waterloo, and the 10 car suburban services, with subsequent difficulties at that station in 2017/2018. With Network Rail's input and their present cash shortage, the new franchise incumbent will require a great deal of operating knowledge to ensure an efficient service level, and passenger care.

The new 30 Siemens 5 car 707's should be seen soon, and they will work Waterloo to Windsor and Eton Riverside service, although not entering full service until late 2017. The units released (the 458's) will be added to the Reading – Waterloo services to ensure 10 car trains.

So with change around us what of Railfuture Wessex Branch. Well we will be working hard to re structure around [service groups](#), ie 1) the Portsmouth Line, 2) Southampton/Bournemouth/Weymouth, 3) Waterloo/Salisbury/Exeter, 4) outer suburban and 5) Isle of Wight. The IOW position will require much thought and there is a good website for the steering group –

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/kilfcampaign/>

This restructure will work around knowledge of those lines and services to ensure we can speak with as many facts and opinions as possible. That will assist the process of campaigning for infrastructure and service, and capacity improvements. We do need all the help we can get so please let me or Tony Smale (our secretary) know as soon as you can. It will be an exciting time.

Speaking of campaigns, the above photo was included in the first newsletter for the **Salisbury to Exeter Rail User Group (SERUG)** which is affiliated to Railfuture. The 6 stations from Crewkerne to Tisbury (Yeovil Junction, Sherborne, Templecombe, and Gillingham are the others) and the Blackmore Vale Line CRP completes the stakeholder group for those stations. The priority is for double track at Dinton, with Tisbury to Wilton Junction the target, also permissive working at Yeovil Junction, more late night trains from Waterloo and long term replacement for the 158/159 DMU's – possibly AT300/800 series with the same specification as Devon/Cornwall variants as ordered for GWR.

The Weymouth main line services from Waterloo, are in need of improvement, but there seems a reluctance by NR to consider increasing the electric supply, and/or line improvement especially around Moreton.

Network Rail have been in trouble (July /August) with signal failures especially around Basingstoke in July, Honiton and Pinhoe in August etc and I hope they can work in the future with a pro active method of maintenance. The poor SWT services, were in the main caused by NR issues, and hope we can return to an efficient service level now.

**Bruce Duncan (Chair Wessex Branch, and Salisbury to Exeter Line RUG/Blackmore Vale Line CRP)**

### Improving Passenger Facilities

South West Trains have now installed 91 Video Ticket Machines at their station premises and claim to have the most extensive network of its kind in Britain. Passengers using the new VTM terminals can get face-to-face advice about ticket purchase from trained staff based in Basingstoke at the push of a button.

This is all part of the £50m investment being delivered across the South West Trains network to "improve passenger experience". The package includes: 100 Customer Ambassadors in stations, 1400 extra car parking spaces, and a new website and smartphone app.



Your committee has already submitted comments about Bus Link information on the new website, and the offending page has been updated as a result. We welcome your comments about using the new VTMs or any of the other "improved" facilities, and we will be taking up any further concerns with the Company.

### Sleeper Service for the South?

The Summer 2016 edition of the magazine, West Highland News, quotes the Production Director of Serco Caledonian Sleepers, David Simpson, as saying that, after their new sleeper fleet has been delivered in 2018, they would have to consider what should be done with the old fleet. One option being considered is a service between Southampton and Scotland!

### Ludgershall Branch Potential

Weyhill station on the Andover-Ludgershall freight branch was closed in 1961. The merits of reopening of the Ludgershall branch to passenger traffic have been kept under review by Wessex Branch. Now we hear that Weyhill has been suggested for housing development because of the potential of a rail link to the village.

### Improving Pokesdown Station

In the consultations on the SW Franchise renewal, the most prevalent single suggestion concerning station infrastructure was for the provision of lifts at Pokesdown station, just east of Bournemouth. Respondents had also called for the provision of step-free or improved access for Isleworth, Kingston, Ash Vale, Basingstoke, and Yeovil stations.

As part of the Dorset Local Transport Plan consultations in 2010, Wessex Branch argued for the defunct lifts at Pokesdown to be reinstated in view of the long staircases leading down to the platforms. Now the Dept. for Transport has decreed that the new SW franchisee will be required to install lifts for Pokesdown.

### Is the information at your station up to date?

Onward Travel posters at stations in our area show information about bus services which call nearby. Being aware that a number of bus service alterations were planned for south Dorset, our Secretary, Tony Smale, sent a list of changes to the "comments" email address shown on the poster. The service alterations didn't just affect his local station (Wool) – in fact they had repercussions all the way from Poole to Exeter. Later, Tony received feedback from a member of the poster team based in Brighton to the effect that amendments were in hand. Then, hey presto, a new poster appeared at Wool!

So, it's worth taking a close look at the details on the Onward Travel poster at your local station. If you spot anything wrong, you should report it via [comments@onwardtravelposters.com](mailto:comments@onwardtravelposters.com) and the guys in Brighton will be pleased to receive your feedback!

### Southern services.

Our Portsmouth based Treasurer John Holland has written to us about the appalling state of Southern services in the east of our region viz the emergency timetable which sees the axing of the Southampton-Brighton hourly service, plus some bus replacements on stopping services between Littlehampton and Portsmouth. He says "the timetable is designed to improve reliability but the practice is still that trains are running late and subject to cancellation. We've had several reports of trains from Victoria to Southampton and Portsmouth being terminated early and at short notice (even the guards don't know until the last minute). I had a conversation with a concerned passenger at Portsmouth Harbour who wanted to get to Gatwick Airport and saw that her train was cancelled (it was probably started further up the line). She asked if she should wait an hour for the next one and I said "no way – who's to say that will be running?" On the plus side the station staff were making announcements that Gatwick passengers should travel via Guildford instead. I said she should follow their advice".

### Network Rail and signalling issues.

There have been too many delays and cancellations recently due to signalling problems on SWT services. The worst at Basingstoke on 23 July (48 hours), and hopefully these will be a thing of the past, and those between Salisbury, Honiton and Pinhoe, are recent. Thanks for excellent work by the station staff at Basingstoke in July, their passenger help was appreciated.

\*\*\*\*\* YOUR HELP PLEASE - \*\*\*\*\*

The committee has been discussing the merits of allowing passengers to alight from a train before coupling it to another unit at stations where units are joined and separated. SWT make the coupling first but Southern open the doors then lock them again before joining the two units. The SWT method is quicker overall but may be annoying for passengers in a hurry to meet tight connections. If you have views one way or the other, please let the committee know.

**CONTACT - [bruce.duncan@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:bruce.duncan@railfuture.org.uk) or Secretary [tony.smale@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:tony.smale@railfuture.org.uk) tel 01929 462116**

**ALSO COULD YOU HELP US PROVIDE DATA AND INFORMATION BY JOINING ONE OF THE SERVICE GROUPS MENTIONED ABOVE TO ASSIST FUTURE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE RAIL SERVICES IN OUR AREA, WITH THE TOC TO THE BENEFIT OF THE PASSENGERS? PLEASE CONTACT CHAIRMAN OR SECRETARY AS ABOVE. THANKS.**