

railfuture

Sevenside Branch Newsletter No. 34 Summer 2017

Contributions to the Newsletter are welcome and should be sent to the Branch Secretary, Nigel Bray. Email: nigel.bray2@railfuture.org.uk (note the change of email address to include '2')

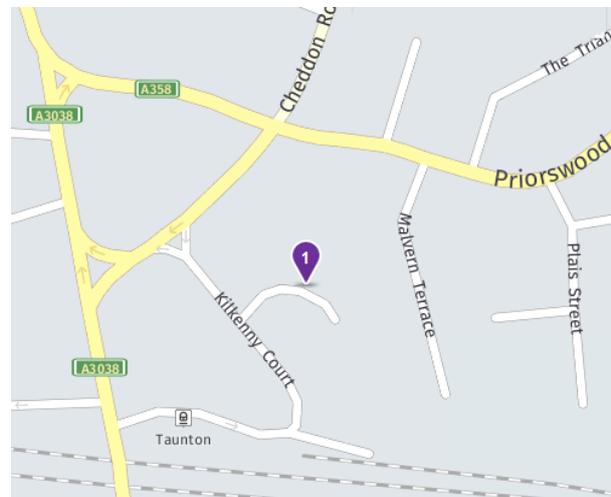
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More information about campaigns is available on the Railfuture national website.

Branch meeting at Taunton, 8 July 2017

The next Sevenside branch meeting is on **Saturday 8 July** at 2 pm in Kilkenny Court, 25 Kilkenny Avenue, Taunton TA2 7QL. The venue is very close to Taunton station and there is a paying car park nearby.

Our guest speaker is **Gideon Amos**, who worked on planning the upgrade of the Felixstowe line in Suffolk. The line carries heavy container traffic and there have been concerns about resolving the aspirations to accommodate more passenger and freight trains. Closer to home, there is a similar dilemma with the Henbury loop.



If coming to the meeting by train, leave Taunton station by the main exit (near the stairs from Platform 5) and turn immediately right alongside the station exterior. Walk up the slope and turn left, passing the GWR Staff Association Club. Then turn right into Kilkenny Court, which is a Victorian terrace of sheltered housing.

Other forthcoming meetings and events

The Minehead Rail Link Group (MRLG) meets on Thursday 15 June 2017, 7 for 7.30 pm at Marston Lodge Hotel, St. Michael's Road, Minehead. Further details from Alex de Mendoza on 01643 702510 or marstonlodge@aol.com

MRLG has publicised the shuttle service GWR operated on the weekend of 10 and 11 June. David Latimer of MRLG says, "If this becomes a regular daily service, as we hope it will in 2018, then it will be a valuable first step to getting a proper train service over our local line."

Swanage Railway

An encouraging development in our Wessex Branch area is the introduction by the Swanage Railway of the first public train service between Swanage, Corfe Castle and the national rail network at Wareham since 1972. Four trains in each direction will run on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays from 13 June to 3 September 2017. It is hoped this will lead to more days of operation in 2018.

Railfuture invites you to nominate your favourite station café

Chris Hyomes, Railfuture Communications Director, has invited members to nominate their favourite independent station café.

He asks, “Do you call in for a morning cuppa, bacon butty or afternoon tea before boarding your train? Your café might be so good that you even use it when you’re not travelling.”

The winner of the Best Independent Station Café 2017 will receive a framed certificate so it can proudly claim to be the best café in Britain, as voted by Railfuture, whilst a nominee (picked at random) of the winning contender will win lunch for two in their favourite station café.



The closing date for nominations is 1 July. Enter by logging on to <http://www.railfuture.org.uk/Nominate+your+favourite+station+cafe>

A new station in Gloucestershire

In my article in the January 2017 edition of the Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways (FOSBR) Newsletter, I suggested that, because of delays to MetroWest, the next station to open anywhere near the Greater Bristol area might be at Broadway, Worcestershire, on the Gloucestershire Warwickshire Railway, which is not (yet) connected to the national rail network. This station is expected to open in March 2018 following a successful share appeal which raised £1¼ m to extend the heritage railway.

On the same heritage railway, Hayles Abbey Halt has opened on 6 June 2017. Located between Winchcombe and Toddington, Gloucestershire, the new halt is on the site of the old one closed in 1960. It is a request stop served only by the railway’s heritage diesel multiple units but it fulfils a need for public transport to the nearby English Heritage site at Hailes Abbey (note the variation in spelling between location and station, thanks to the original GWR in 1928).

Welcome as these two stations are in supporting the local economy, it is a sobering thought that local and national Government has not delivered a new station in Greater Bristol for over 20 years. The Branch has asked the Railfuture Board to hold a mini-conference in Bristol in 2018, with a theme on the lines of “Get Rail Schemes Moving”. A Friday afternoon or early evening event is suggested with a view to attracting people who might not necessarily wish to attend an all day Saturday fixture.

Nigel Bray.

21st Century for Gloucestershire- The case for Swift Rail

Dr. Nicholas Falk Email: nicholas@urbed.com

As towns and cities such as Gloucester, Cheltenham and Stroud respond to the pressures of growth, having to accommodate a growing population without adding to congestion or pollution, increasing interest is being shown in the potential of local rail. New settlements

like Cranbrook outside Exeter are being built with stations, while in Bristol proposals for reinstating services on the line to Portishead as part of MetroWest are far advanced. Gloucestershire County Council is pursuing the idea of new stations south of Gloucester such as Hunts Grove, near Quedgeley, which could become Gloucester Parkway. However, the problem always arises of how to fund the capital costs, and justify an extra station stop.

In Stroud a group of planners in a report called Stroud Futures put forward an ambitious proposal to improve links with Bristol by developing a new interchange north of Stonehouse to connect up services on the Bristol line with services to Swindon. This would support a new settlement to the north of Stonehouse, which might have provided the necessary funding. While the proposals failed to secure political support (and are now invalidated by permission being given for a car-based settlement to the west of Stonehouse), all is not lost (and there is strong political support for reopening Stonehouse Bristol Road station- *Ed.*).

Pressure is growing to relocate flights from Gloucestershire Airport between Gloucester and Cheltenham. Development of housing on this site could provide a visionary development with a grand central park. This would not only help provide the housing numbers that the Government requires, but should also justify the reopening of Churchdown station, and provide the necessary funding. As the airfield is jointly owned by Gloucester City and Cheltenham Borough Councils, there is real scope to repeat what is happening in other parts of the country, as cash strapped local authorities look for other sources of funding.

Swift Rail benefits

Dr Nicholas Falk along with Reg Harman, who together developed the idea of Swift Rail from the experience in Germany of StadtSchnellbahnen, have shown how the principles could apply to the Cheltenham /Gloucester conurbation. The idea is also being taken up in South Wales, and could apply to a number of branches currently only used for freight, such as the line from Oxford to Cowley. The distinctive element is running services four times an hour at peak times using lightweight trains that accelerate and brake quickly. The stations then become the hubs of local communities as well as being used to ‘park and ride’.

Getting going

The Cheltenham/Gloucester/Stroud railway line is not just a means to cutting car traffic and congestion, but also a complementary asset for places like Churchdown that can be readily served by public transport. Cycling hubs and cafes could form part of a Swift Rail station’s facilities – making the overall experience a safe and attractive alternative to the car. Our studies have shown the line is ideal for Swift Rail – short, frequent services with modern stock so you can ‘turn up and ride’. Better services would add value to the adjoining land, which could be tapped to pay for new stations (assuming that the Councils take the lead and do not simply sell off land to the highest bidder).

Gloucestershire now has only nine railway stations, but rail is having a renaissance elsewhere, such as around Exeter, where Devon County Council took the initiative. So instead of focusing development in places only served by cars, such as motorway junctions, we need to see local authorities promoting the growth of better located strategic sites. The Government has given its backing for ‘garden settlements’ through its new Housing White Paper, *Fixing Our Broken Housing Market*. It would be tragic if Gloucester and the larger conurbation missed out.

Railfuture Report from Patchway Town Council

Severnside Branch recently invited its affiliated groups to report on their campaigns and aspirations. Here is a report from our longstanding member Patchway Town Council, composed by Mrs. Lucy Hamid, Clerk to the Council:

“Patchway Town Council is a great supporter of local rail services. Patchway station was originally in Patchway but when the second line was laid (in 1885, in readiness for the opening of the Severn tunnel - *Ed.*), the cutting was too narrow and the station was moved a mile south into Stoke Gifford, but we still regard it as our station!

There was a very good Severnside Community Rail Partnership which we were members of and this achieved improvements to the station with voluntary assistance. Patchway Conservation Group took part in various clearing days to clean up the car park and land beside the platform. Two murals were installed in the shelters in 2011 with the help of local schools and Brownies. Unfortunately, all this has fallen away, presumably because of cuts to funding. There was an excellent Partnership Officer, Sarah Collins, but after her departure it all went quiet. We were very disappointed about this.

This Council has been making the point for years to South Gloucestershire Council that Patchway station is ideally placed amongst the new developments of Bradley Stoke and Patchway to take commuters in and out of Bristol for work. It needs a reliable bus service running down Station Road connecting Patchway and Bradley Stoke residents to the station. People spend hours on the bus or waiting at the bus stop to get into Bristol and the First Bus website is full of complaints about the poor service. A lot of the problem is that the A38 is totally gridlocked in the rush hour and the bus does not have a chance to stick to its timetable. Of course, the railway does not have this problem.

Another improvement would be the Henbury Loop, which has been discussed but no funds have been identified by the developers of the huge new development on Filton Airfield. The plan to reopen Henbury station would enable the new residents of the site as well as existing residents of Henbury and Brentry to take a train into Bristol in minutes rather than being stuck in endless traffic on the A4018. Adjacent to this former station are two rugby grounds and they are keen to get their supporters to the grounds without cars too.

Both these proposals seem so sensible but no-one is willing to find the funds to implement them!”

Next Railfuture Severnside newsletter will be number 35 in autumn 2017.

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