

## Chairman's Message

Well here we go again with another newsletter, the big news being the winning of the South West franchise by First/MTR. To date we do not think the contract between them and Department for Transport has been completed and so we continue just with a watching brief. The Company's first public offering *\*Improving South Western Railway* looks at first sight to be good, but on closer study it seems to promise little. We will have to do much work to understand where these improvements can be delivered ... and how! Passengers will not be interested in a 10% journey time saving if intermediate stops are to be cut. No doubt this will be the subject of a consultation in due course. In the meantime, good luck to Andy Mellors who is the new MD of South Western Railway, previously having been GWR Engineering Director.

\*read it online here: <http://www.firstgroupplc.com/about-firstgroup/uk-rail/improving-south-western-railway.aspx>

On the West of England Line (Waterloo-Salisbury-Exeter), we can see no benefits from the new franchise: no new trains, and a journey time saving from Salisbury to Waterloo that can only be achieved by cutting out Woking and Clapham Junction stops. Railfuture is set against that and will mobilise passengers and members to say "no" when the consultation appears. Why the DfT specifies such matters which have no passenger benefit, we do not know ... but we will work with First/MTR, local MP's and rail authorities to ensure long term passenger benefits accrue.

Do be aware of the Waterloo engineering works over the period 5<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> August 2017 (more about this below). This scheme is highly complicated but, in our view, has been planned as well as possible. However, there may be issues that are unforeseen as engineers dig up track base and old signalling, as they just will not know what they may find! Do check your journeys, as there are fewer trains and some changes en route may be required.

David Brace, who represents our branch on Railfuture's Passenger Group, has agreed to produce a paper about the increased air pollution which will result from the cancellation of rail electrification projects. If you have any helpful thoughts on the subject, please get in touch with David via one of the contact addresses at the foot of this newsletter.

Finally, because of all these challenging developments, **we do want more help to do the lobbying work ... and more members!** Have a think about our Gift Membership card scheme (see below) and perhaps target one new member please.

*Best wishes*

Chair, Bruce Duncan.

## Major Campaign Success

We've just had some very welcome news for passengers using services in the Wessex Branch area: Railfuture's complaint to the Competition and Markets Authority has resulted in First/MTR proposing a fares cap on the two routes between London and Exeter so that travellers are not disadvantaged by the company's new monopoly position. As you know, First already run services between Exeter and Paddington via Westbury, so the award of the South Western franchise to the First/MTR consortium could have meant the end of cheaper fares for passengers using services from Exeter to Waterloo via Salisbury.

Railfuture’s letter to both the CMA and the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) expressed concerns that the lower fares enjoyed by passengers on services via Salisbury could be eroded once First has a foothold in both routes. To illustrate the problem, we gave examples of the cheapest advance fares currently available on the two routes. We also drew attention to fare differences on services from Bristol to either Paddington or Waterloo, and we mentioned that car parking charges are significantly lower on the network currently operated by Stagecoach South West Trains. Our chairman, Bruce Duncan, submitted a similar letter of complaint under the banner of his Salisbury-Exeter Rail Users’ Group.

The CMA agreed that the Railfuture/SERUG complaint justified investigation and, as widely reported in the media, First/MTR were given five days to propose a solution. This they have now done and the CMA has until 20<sup>th</sup> Sept to consider whether to accept the Company’s undertakings (this deadline does not affect franchise handover, scheduled for 20<sup>th</sup> Aug). As part of this deliberation, the CMA has launched a public consultation, so both Railfuture and SERUG will have the chance to say whether the First/MTR response adequately addresses their complaints.

**This represents a fine example of Railfuture taking practical steps to protect the interests of rail passengers!**

News from around our network

★ The picture shows a brand new 10-car Class 707 train passing through Fratton on a test run on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2017.

A total of 30 five-car units have been built by Siemens for use on the Windsor lines, but their future is uncertain: First/MTR South Western Railway has stated that it doesn’t want to lease the £210m Class 707 fleet after it takes over the franchise!



photo: Bruce Oliver

★ Thanks to the efforts of a magnificent army of volunteers, the Swanage Railway is once more linked to the national rail network again after a gap of 45 years. The popular Dorset heritage line is running trains on 60 days this year to and from the national network at Wareham on the main line between Bournemouth and Weymouth.



Photo: Martin Trott

Four trains/day each way along the Swanage branch will run every week until 3<sup>rd</sup> Sept, on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays.

It has not been possible to arrange for through ticketing from other stations on the national rail network during the 2017 trial period, but you can simply turn up at Wareham on the day and get your ticket from Swanage Railway’s ticket office in Wareham station car park. Alternatively, you can book in advance (and download the timetable) from SR’s website [www.swanagerailway.co.uk](http://www.swanagerailway.co.uk).

**Clearly it's important that as many people as possible use the service during the trial period to justify the funding and support from the local council and rail industry. So why not take the family and enjoy a terrific day out in Swanage?**

\* On 7<sup>th</sup> March, Rail Minister Paul Maynard travelled on a special train (with our Chairman, Bruce Duncan, on board) from Swindon to Salisbury to celebrate the role of community rail in Wiltshire and to visit the proposed site of a new station at Wilton. The TransWilts Community Rail Partnership hopes to extend the current service between Swindon and Westbury (via Melksham) through to Salisbury. The special train stopped at Trowbridge and Westbury before arriving at the proposed site of Wilton Parkway Station; it then continued to Salisbury.

Your branch committee has long campaigned for a new station at Wilton - we even did a house-to-house leaflet drop back in Network SouthEast days! The Rail Minister's visit suggests that the Dept. for Transport has at last recognised the potential of a new station for the town.

\* Then on 6<sup>th</sup> July, Transport Secretary Chris Grayling visited Bristol to welcome the refurbished Class 166 Turbo diesel train sets to routes around the city – these units were formerly used on suburban services out of Paddington. Eventually they will appear in 5-car formations on our Cardiff-Portsmouth services, giving much needed extra seating capacity and an enhanced on-board environment. 3-car sets have already been spotted trundling down to Weymouth via Yeovil.

\* The much-delayed plans to build a new station at Reading Green Park on the Reading-Basingstoke line received a boost with the announcement on 28<sup>th</sup> July that the project had been awarded £2.3m from the Dept. for Transport's *New Stations* fund. The DfT promises a completion date of March 2020, a mere 13 years after the station was originally proposed!

\* According to a recent report in Railway Gazette, Network Rail has identified seven weekday return train paths which Alliance's Grand Southern Railway could use to launch a proposed Southampton to London Waterloo open access service during the 2018 timetable. The operator would initially use Class 442 EMUs. ORR is expected to make a decision on this application later in the year.

\* Commuters using London's Waterloo station are being asked to work from home or take a holiday during engineering work from 5<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> Aug. The disruption will be more severe than expected, with 10 of its 22 platforms closing rather than the 9 previously announced, and the disruption will now extend right over the bank holiday weekend. You can find out more on \*SWT's website, or pick up a special timetable booklet covering the disruption period from your nearest staffed station.

\*see <https://www.southwesttrains.co.uk/plan-your-journey/planned-improvements/WSWUpgrade/>

Despite the huge disruption to services, First/MTR have confirmed that they will take over the South West Trains franchise on 20<sup>th</sup> Aug as planned. What could possibly go wrong!?!?

\* *And finally:* We confidently expect that one repercussion of the franchise slipping away from Stagecoach is that Megatrain fares will cease to be offered on the South Western network. Perhaps Stagecoach will enhance their Megabus offer to compete with First/MTR??

*Could you help produce a map of our rail network?*

If you're a dab hand at computer graphics or know someone in your family with the necessary skills, could you help Wessex Branch by producing a "tube style" map of the rail network in our region? In the coming months, the Branch will be updating its "wish list" detailing development plans for specific stations and lines. A favoured way to summarise this information is to label up a network map with "headline" information about the various service and infrastructure improvements. Your committee already has an outdated development map which cannot easily be altered, hence the need to start again from scratch with a newly-drawn map. **Offers of help would be greatly appreciated.**

## News from Southern

At the Govia Thameslink Railway annual stakeholder forum in June, we learnt that some of the delays on Southern were caused by signallers taking what were described as “sub-optimal decisions” when choices had to be made between two trains at a junction. We were also told that Southern had introduced remote monitoring of trains to pre-empt failures and had recruited standby teams who could get to problem spots more quickly; at the regular problem spots, tools were now stored on site. Another serious problem was trespassers and suicides - sometimes helicopters were employed to track trespassers. Much effort had gone into improving refunds for customers who had experienced delays, and GTR claims to be the only operator to offer refunds after a fifteen-minute delay. Station hosts are being trialled at several stations, including Chichester.

The Gibb report, recently released, blamed the Unions for the recent collapse of services, but not exclusively. In any event GTR’s timetable is too fragile to be robust – more thinking needed here! A particular concern for Wessex Branch is that the dispute about the role of guards could spread to the South Western franchise.

*From Private Eye: A disgruntled commuter tweeted Southern asking “Are you putting on replacement shuttles for the Rye service you’ve cancelled again?” and received the disarmingly honest reply “Hi. We are not sorry.” - Surely a comma missing!?!*

## News from the Isle of Wight

*Stuart George of the Isle of Wight Bus and Rail Users’ Group (and also a member of the Wessex Branch committee) sent us this report:*

First Group/MTR recently presented a vision document, imaginatively entitled “South Western Railway – Island Line” to various organisations on the IoW. In the document, the Company promises to investigate rolling stock replacement, the current stock being nearly 80 years old, and to work with Network Rail to ascertain the condition of assets. The line suffers from significant losses, as do many branch lines. However, unlike the rest of the network, it is leased from Network Rail with the lease expiring at the end of March 2019. They recognise that there are problems with rolling stock gauging, flooding in Ryde tunnel, bridge clearances, the electrical power supply and Ryde pier, and also with all the stations on the line.

The line connects with the Wightlink catamaran service to Portsmouth, the Hovercraft service to Southsea, and ultimately with mainland trains at Portsmouth. Its importance is in serving areas of high population and in reducing road congestion, the journey by road taking at least twice as long and, in the peak summer season, considerably longer.

First/MTR plans to appoint three Regional Development Managers, one of whom will include responsibility for the line in his/her remit, and to hold stakeholder meetings. The Company intends to partner with the ferry operators to include combined rail/sea tickets, and also to introduce a cross-Solent smartcard. They will launch a marketing campaign to encourage customers and tourists to make extra journeys to the Island; for example, on the Waterloo departures board, they will show through journeys to the Isle of Wight rather than a destination of Portsmouth Harbour as at present.

Also promised are free Wi-Fi at Island Line stations and the provision of £50k per annum for a Customer & Communities Improvement Fund for Island Line. For the remainder of 2017, they will consult with the Isle of Wight Council and other interested parties and finally, in early 2018, they will produce costed options for the future of the line which the DfT will then consider. Stuart comments: “Taken as a whole, we’ve been impressed by their plans for Island Line and look forward to working with them.”

Stuart also tells us that the long-awaited Garnett Report into the future of the Island Line has just been published, although he has little confidence that any of its recommendations to the cash-strapped IoW Council will ever be implemented.

### Waterside Line

As reported in Railwatch, your committee enjoyed a ride on the branch line to Fawley in May and took the opportunity of distributing Railfuture publicity material, including a reprint of our article about the line. Local Councillor David Harrison has made a short film of his trip down the line on the Fawley Forester diesel special; you can watch his video report on the \*Waterside Line Facebook page. \*see: <https://www.facebook.com/WatersideRailwayPassengerService>

*Robin Attwood represents our branch on Railfuture's Freight Group and sent us this report: "There was a rare freight working on Sunday 23 July from Fenny Compton MoD to Marchwood MoD, comprising a diesel loco with an 800-ton trailing load. Engineering possessions between Banbury and Didcot Parkway caused the working (332V) to take a rather unusual route to Marchwood, via Birmingham New Street, Cheltenham Spa, Stroud, Swindon to Didcot Parkway where it continued via Reading, Southcote Junction, Basingstoke and Winchester. The diesel loco later left Marchwood MoD as a light engine movement to Didcot T.C. as O53L by way of Winchester and Basingstoke."* Robin comments: "It is most unusual for freight to be carried to Marchwood MoD at the weekend."

*And finally:* Our Chairman would much appreciate offers of help with Railfuture's campaign for the re-introduction of passenger services on the Waterside Line from anyone living in south Hampshire. Could you be our "eyes and ears" reporting on any developments in the area and gauging local support for the project? Please do get in touch - see foot of newsletter for contact details.

### Gift Membership Cards

If you haven't already made use of the Gift Membership Card we sent you with the Autumn newsletter, there's still time to send it to a friend or family member. Do remember that, at the same time as sending the card, you need to post a cheque to our Treasurer (John Holland) to cover the cost of a year's membership: £14 for OAP/Student/Unwaged and £18 for others.

### Dates for your diary

**5 – 28 August 2017** Major engineering works at Waterloo affecting all services on the SWT network. Check before you travel.

**21 October 2017:** Branches & Groups Awayday in Birmingham. Our Chairman will attend.

**4 November 2017:** Railfuture Autumn Conference in Leicester. "Early bird" price to members is £25 (includes buffet lunch) if booked by 31<sup>st</sup> Aug.

We plan to hold our 2018 Branch AGM in Southampton on Sat 10<sup>th</sup> March: details nearer the date. If you received this newsletter by post and have since acquired an internet connection, please let us know your email address as this will help us to reduce the cost of sending out newsletters – *thanks*.

### Branch contacts

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