



campaigning for  
all Britain's rail users

## THAMES VALLEY BRANCH Newsletter 94 August 2018

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### **Next members' event**

We have arranged a visit to Chiltern Railway's Aylesbury Depot on 13th September at 5.00 pm. If you would like to attend please register your interest, without obligation, by contacting the Secretary, preferably by email – details above - and you will be sent further information in due course.

### **Summary of Branch Meeting in Oxford on 19<sup>th</sup> February 2018.**

The guest speaker was Rob Mashford of Network Rail. Here is a summary of his presentation on the Oxford corridor works.

Rob started by explaining that Carillion were the main contractor but the contingency plans that they had were implemented and Network Rail are running the show themselves with the former Carillion team in place and this is currently unique to Oxford in the UK.

Phase 0 works were completed including Castle Mill Stream and Aristotle Lane bridges and Phase 1 Oxford South, which covered all works south of the station, on time last summer.

Present works include the Down Carriage Sidings with new sidings, walkways etc and a new ladder off the down lines and similar works on the new up sidings, all with passive provision for electrification. The new canopies on platforms 1, 2 & 3 also have provision for electrification gantries to go across the tops.

Rob then ran through the forthcoming works which will conclude with completion of the project after a 23 day blockade starting on 29<sup>th</sup> June. The station won't be totally closed all that time, however though at certain times Oxford Parkway will be Oxford's only operational station. All signalling will transfer to the Thames Valley Signalling Centre at Didcot and the Oxford panel will close. There will be 50 stages to the works and over 80 signalling testers working per day. During some of the works trains from/to the south will use platform 4 while work takes place on the new northern ladders into platforms 1, 2 & 3 which will allow independent access into and out of platforms 1 & 2 without conflicting, as at present, with trains accessing platform 3. There will be a higher speed turnout into the up loop at Wolvercote.

To summarise, the main benefits will be: new track layout allowing increased parallel moves, four aspect signalling, bi-directional signalling providing greater capacity and operational flexibility.

The total cost of phases 0 & 1 is £200 million. As an example Rob said each sleeper costs £70. All the old track and ballast gets recycled.

In answer to various questions, Rob stated: work on the new down relief in the vicinity of Aristotle Lane is due for March/April; the brick relay room at Oxford North junction which is in the way of completing the Up Bletchley line is set to be demolished on 7<sup>th</sup> July; work on a new platform 5 on the down side (requiring demolition of the youth hostel) and re-building Botley Road bridge is still at the development

stage. Electrification between Didcot and Oxford would be relatively easy, as the plans have all been done, though a bridge at Appleford could be difficult.

Finally, Rob said that he thought quadrupling Didcot – Oxford was less likely to happen than adding more loops to increase capacity.

*Andrew McCallum*

**Railfuture Thames Valley Branch AGM 21<sup>st</sup> April 2018 10.30**  
**West Oxford Community Centre, Botley Road, Oxford.**

20 members and supporters were present. Apologies were received from: James Hutton, Edward Stansfield, John Green, David Richardson, Malcolm Hurdus, Alan Francis.

**Chairman's Report**

The 12 months of 2017/18, have seen the beginnings of delivery of the huge investment in the Thames Valley, the introduction of electric traction to Didcot and the Oxford - Marylebone service continues to exceed expectations in terms of passenger numbers. It has provided an alternative when the Paddington route has been closed.

On a smaller but local level, the Hanborough Station Car Park has been sorted and the land secured.

This year ahead will see the start of HS2 works and hopefully works at Calvert (to separate East West and HS2). The branch has had a busy year, as in previous years, lobbying where we can and assisting others with constructive advice on transport matters. It is very apparent many of those we lobby find our advice constructive because we are unbiased and have a good overview.

Our 2017 AGM was addressed by Stephen Barker who talked of his work on the Oxford - Bicester Scheme and lessons learned and how these could be taken forward to the main East - West Scheme. He explained his involvement in the East - West review and East West Rail Ltd and whilst he could not talk about it then, the results are to be seen in the cost reductions which has helped drive the BCR to over 12. He also mentioned Chiltern's aspiration to have Old Oak Common as an interchange with Crossrail, relieving Marylebone. The main conclusion is that the scheme needs to be fully developed before work starts.

We had a meeting at Reading in November addressed by Tom Pierpoint, Regional Development Manager, GWR. It is clear that a development manager is needed due the scale of improvements and investments being undertaken, these ranging from Hanborough Improvements, (new recycled booking office) to developing a cost effective turnback for IETs at Bedwyn. Once again the key to cutting costs and delivering on time involves having a plan, agreed by all stakeholders.

We held a winter meeting in Oxford with Rob Mashford of Network Rail in Jericho, following on from the success of last year's meeting. Work is proceeding to upgrade the layout to the north of the station and re-control from Didcot. Phase 1 was a great success in delivering everything on time and we look forward to phase 2, which will deliver two lines towards Oxford Parkway, being as successful.

During the year I have had the opportunity to attend various meetings. We have met with Oxfordshire County Council, Bucks County Council, with Matthew Barber, Leader of Vale of White Horse Council, and numerous other bodies. In addition we have liaised with Rail User Groups and affiliated transport bodies in the area.

It is at these meetings when we get the opportunity to lobby for rail and sustainable transport. We have also responded to various local plan and transport strategies.

I am grateful to Committee members who have sat on various boards and attended various meetings.

I continue to enjoy the Oxford Green Fair. It gives us the opportunity to talk to non-rail enthusiasts, i.e. our target audience. At the Green Fair it was clear the Oxford - Cambridge line continues to be the main issue but many were getting excited about a link to Cowley.

It is also clear rail is key to delivering a sustainable answer to the housing shortage as it is able to link people and jobs, something the £7bn expressway cannot do.

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

1. Witney Oxford Transport.

The campaign continues; there has been a lack of support from the Local MP Robert Courts but we are seeking to address this. The simple fact remains that a rail link is the only real solution and has a good Benefit/Cost Ratio but will take time.

2. Bourne End – High Wycombe. (Milton Keynes - Heathrow)

Work is ongoing with the feasibility study,

The study of the works at Bourne End is progressing to GRIP 3 (slowly).

3. Grove – Wantage.

We have met Matthew Barber, Leader of the VWHDC, and he is as enthusiastic as us. As a growth area, the scheme is a no brainer and it has a BCR of 3.7. SLC Rail have been advising the County.

There is an issue of capacity on the Main Line however.

4. Cowley Branch/Hanborough.

Railfuture supported the planning application which included the Car Park at Hanborough (this has now been resolved). The Cowley Branch remains live with more studies to be done.

5. East – West Rail. This is progressing to a Transport & Works Act Order.

6. HS2. We will look for opportunities as they arise.

7. Heathrow - part in the branch area, we will seek opportunities.

We continue retain close links with Bus Users UK (Oxford Branch).

Our media appearances have been fair and the odd radio interview helps raise the profile but we do need a Media Officer.

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.

I continue to be amazed at the scale of investment in rail in the Branch area; we need to keep lobbying to keep it up.

Should anyone wish to become more actively involved in the group, we would welcome the help.

*Richard Stow*

### **Secretary's Report.**

Members' Meetings: Since last year's AGM in High Wycombe we have held two meetings, one in Reading in November with Tom Pierpoint of GWR and one in February with Rob Mashford & Matthew Thompson of Network Rail in Oxford. The latter one was very well attended and we gained a new member at it.

We hope to arrange a visit in the summer, possibly to Aylesbury depot. As the branch is hosting Railfuture's autumn conference in Reading on 10th November there wont be a separate autumn meeting but we hope many branch members will support the conference.

We only published two newsletters; August and January. Please submit photos or news items. The next issue will cover this AGM.

Membership: A year ago it was 118 which was the same as the previous year. Today it is 126 (up 6%). We recruited 5 members at the Oxford Green Fair and gained several others during the year including some in High Wycombe who seem to have been recruited by our member David Kellard (thanks very much for your efforts) yet these new recruits only slightly exceed the lapsed/deceased members. Women are now 12%, slightly up from 10% before. Broadly static membership perhaps suggests difficulty recruiting when there are no serious threats to railways in our area. However the special offer of £5 for the first year if you join at an event is clearly worth keeping up and we know Railfuture's Board is seriously looking at the whole issue of membership, rates and recruitment, news of which we should hear after the national AGM next month. So if any of you can recruit new members for us (especially younger/women) please do so; they'll be very welcome!

*Andrew McCallum*

### **Treasurer's Report**

The branch accounts had previously been distributed to members and copies were available at the meeting. They were accepted by the meeting. John Elvin stood down after 15 years of service as Branch Treasurer.

## Elections

The officers and committee members were elected as follows: -

Chairman: Richard Stow

Proposed by Andrew McCallum and seconded by John Elvin

Vice Chairman: David King

Proposed by Chris Bates and seconded by Nigel Rose

Secretary: Andrew McCallum

Proposed by David Plato and seconded by Nigel Phillips

Treasurer: David Plato

Proposed by John Elvin and seconded by Andrew McCallum

Other committee members: Alan Francis, Vic Angell, Nigel Rose, Nigel Phillips, Martin Smith, Chris Bates, John Elvin were all unanimously re-elected.

### **Our guest speaker was Dr Robin Rees who gave us a talk: *Temporary Diversions:***

Though a train enthusiast from an early age, Robin never anticipated working for the railways. Yet, at various stages of his career, opportunities arose for him to do so in a wide range of roles. He reflects on what he did — and on what he discovered.

He started work at Paddington as a clerk but as a mature student he enrolled at Bedford Park College to take a degree in physics in the first year in which the college admitted men and found himself one of 46 men with 900 women. He later worked in IT in its infancy including at Oxford University and undertook a part time PhD; he had a student railcard in his 40s. Voluntary redundancy aged 50 led to running an electronic publishing company and becoming a member of the TUCC for the Western Region and then the RPC for 8 years. His term covered the privatisation era so he learnt all about the changes and the new bodies. He recalled at meetings 4 or 5 civil servants asking “awful questions” indicating a lack of understanding of railways. This involved resolving passenger complaints (he strongly believes a TOC’s performance can be judged on the quality of its station toilets) and inspecting refurbished stock and being consulted on new trains. The Voyagers, which do not have enough space, were all originally meant to be one coach longer. He was involved in the start of the Oxford-Bristol direct services and the Routing Guide which has become too complex. Subsequently he was asked by Chiltern to write a report on their services which included a proposal for a new Bicester curve and at a meeting in Bicester in 2000 an Anglian Railway representative referred to re-opening Bicester-Bletchley by 2002. He had been given a travel pass and asked to report whether there was “anything wrong” with their stations; his report concluded that they were “pretty good”.

He became the founding internet manager at ATOC and set up the National Rail Enquiries website and worked on the “live departures” site which involved creating 55,000 excel spreadsheets. Later he worked for Network Rail (the work environment he described as “challenging”) at Didcot, Reading then Bristol. In conclusion he advised us to “always complain” when appropriate.

*Andrew McCallum*

### **Railfuture TV Branch: Response to Round 3 of EWR Western Section stage 2 Consultation**

Railfuture Thames Valley branch continues to support the East West Rail reinstatement project and recognises the extensive work that has gone into the project plans. We welcome progress being made on this important East-West Rail scheme that is also a national priority for our organisation.

We endorse the creation of a company to carry the project forward quickly and seek to work with Rob Brighouse and his team.

We challenge the assumptions that this line is being provided for local traffic only and seek to secure that provision for future freight and inter-regional services is built in from the start. We endorse the creation of a separate company to carry the project forward quickly and seek to work with Rob Brighouse and his team.

In the long run, it would be cheaper to electrify the route during its construction, but accept that, if this is not deliverable at this stage, passive provision for future electrification should be made in its design.

Operational line capacity and speed should be dictated by the needs of a mixed traffic railway and not by an arbitrary upper speed limit.

*John Elvin*

### **TWA for EWR**

Several local newspapers have carried the public notice for the Network Rail Transport & Works Act Order required for EWR works. The draft order makes provision for the construction, operation and maintenance of a railway between Bicester and Bedford; Milton Keynes and Aylesbury to facilitate the operation of new passenger services between Oxford and Bedford and Milton Keynes and Aylesbury. Copies of the application and all plans & other documents are available between 27<sup>th</sup> July and 7<sup>th</sup> September, online

through Network Rail's website at: [www.networkrail.co.uk/our-railway-upgrade-plan/key-projects/east-west-rail/western-section](http://www.networkrail.co.uk/our-railway-upgrade-plan/key-projects/east-west-rail/western-section)

The schedule includes works at three stations which are "listed": Quainton Road; Woburn Sands and Ridgmont. Quainton Road is the home of the *Buckinghamshire Railway Centre*, so may not be re-opened for EWR services as such. At Ridgmont & Woburn Sands there are to be platform extension works with associated fencing & ancillary works. The Thames Valley Branch will be submitting Railfuture's formal response.

*Chris Wright*

### **Oxfordshire Cotswolds Garden Village at Eynsham**

West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) have published their Area Action Plan (AAP) for this proposed development of 2200 houses along with associated services and employment areas on a site to the north of the A40, west of Oxford and adjacent to a P&R already under development. Hanborough station on the North Cotswold Line is around 2 miles north of the site. The old trackbed of the Witney railway line runs to the south of Eynsham itself which lies on the other side of the A40 from the proposed new Garden Village.

There is scant reference in the AAP to the potential for the use and development of Hanborough station and it only mentions planned timetable changes from December this year, not GWR's strategy for the Cotswold line and the increased frequency of 3 trains per hour towards Oxford and London.

The Branch have written to WODC pointing out that it only takes 9 minutes to reach Oxford by train whereas, despite planned improvements to the A40, buses take considerably longer, being held up by congestion within Oxford City and in particular at pinch points like Wolvercote roundabout. We are urging WODC to insist on developer contributions towards improvements to Hanborough station and its services, the provision of bus and mini-bus links to the station and the necessary upgrading of local roads, although welcoming AAP's planned improvements to pedestrian and cycling infrastructure.

We have also urged WODC to safeguard the route of the old railway line to Witney, particularly in the light of a second major development of 1000 houses planned on the west side of Eynsham, the southern edge of which crosses the old trackbed. This will ensure that an inevitable fixed link in the longer term, whether train, tram-train, tram or guided bus is not blocked.

We have similarly urged Oxfordshire County Council, the responsible transport authority, to advise WODC accordingly.

*Nigel Rose*

### **Chairman's Comment**

Firstly, I would like to thank those who send the Branch suggestions and observations, mainly by email; these can be very helpful and I for one certainly appreciate membership involvement.

In recent weeks, committee colleagues and I have had meetings with MPs, Councillors and Officers, with enthusiasm, first to lobby for the Rail Agenda, and importantly to offer impartial advice, in what is a complex subject. We met the MP for Witney, Robert Courts, where the Cotswold Line and Hanborough were top of the agenda and the MP for Oxford West & Abingdon, Layla Moran, where Oxford station improvements and Cowley services topped the agenda. I have been struck by the positive responses we have received and am hopeful we can keep up the dialogue. If Railfuture can help get a more balanced transport message out that must be for the good.

Of interest, one theme I have noticed in every meeting is the admiration for Oxford Parkway; it is turning out to be a brilliant example of what can be achieved if rail is invested in. It combines parking, regular reliable services and a pleasant building. I keep thinking we could have an identical layout at Wantage Science Vale. Now that would be progress.

Regarding Bourne End station improvements, no land ownership issues have arisen and the scheme is potentially deliverable.

*Richard Stow*

### **Presentation to your committee by Sussex Community Rail Partnership**

Before the formal business at our recent meeting the committee welcomed David Daniels, who is the North Downs Line CRDO [Community Rail Development Officer], and Tim Sparrow who is a 'founding father' of Sussex CRP, a Director on their Board and Company Secretary, and also on the Board of the national ACoRP [Association of Community Rail Partnerships] <https://communityrail.org.uk/>

The meeting began with a presentation by two representatives from the Sussex Community Rail Partnership which, despite its title, is not restricted to Sussex, but extends its work into Kent, Surrey and Berkshire. David Daniels talked about work being done between Reigate and Guildford to involve local communities in promoting rail travel and improving stations. Information boards about the easily accessible Surrey Hills and signposts from each station to the North Downs Way are being installed. Pupils from local schools are providing art works to adorn the stations. Tim Sparrow talked about the general framework of the community rail partnerships which are supported by rail and bus companies, transport authorities, tourist bodies and local government. Schools are involved with courses to encourage safe travel by children. DfT policy now includes CRPs in rail franchises. There was a launch event on 5th July to extend the North Downs CRP west of Guildford.

*Martin Smith*



**Rail Users Conference – Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> November 2018, Novotel, Reading**

*Rail driving growth in the Thames Valley* 10.00-17.00 Friar Street 5-10 minutes walk from the station

Speakers include: Cllr Tony Page, Reading Council; Howard Smith, Crossrail, Ian Baxter, SLC Rail; Anna Holbrook, Network Rail – Western access to Heathrow, Howard Elliot, Network Rail – electrification; Graham Cross, Heathrow Southern Railway; *PLUS presentation of 2018 Rail User Group Awards*

£25 (until 31st August – members only) or £30 thereafter and non members; includes refreshments and buffet lunch. Book online at: <https://railfuture.org.uk/conferences/>

**Bits & Pieces**

An estate agent's advert in a national newspaper for a large detached house in north Oxford for £7 million had as its top selling point "Situated less than 3 miles from Oxford Parkway". Then it went into the property details; nothing else mattered. This is proof of the "Oxford Parkway effect" on property.

In a recent Transport Focus survey ranking passengers' satisfaction with the quality of stations nationally, Reading came 4<sup>th</sup>. Oxford came =3<sup>rd</sup> from bottom. In both cases, I'm not in the least bit surprised.

The works described by Rob Mashford (see top item) were done during the recently completed Oxford blockade (see photos below). Having used the rail replacement coaches a total of 7 times, it seems the operation was well managed, all but one were on time or early and all had effective air conditioning! On the busiest Oxford – Didcot services they were using double decker buses, albeit rather smart ones from Bristol, many of which were packed. Now that services are restored, the default operation for northbound passenger trains is to use the new Down Oxford Relief line to Wolvercote with freight using the down Main. Full double track operation is now in use from Oxford Parkway all the way to North Oxford Junction and trains using platforms 1 & 2 can now enter and leave the station without conflicting with trains approaching platform 3. Trains can leave platform 4 southbound. So what we need now is for the station to be rebuilt!

On the same day that the Oxford blockade ended another blockade began at Derby for track re-laying etc there. Cross Country Trains have a temporary timetable in operation for the duration, a consequence of which is that the Thames Valley has more though trains to/from Scotland than probably ever before. Many Newcastle trains are running to/from Edinburgh, Glasgow and even Dundee & Aberdeen. We may get used to them! Your branch committee is contributing to Raifuture's formal response to the XC franchise consultation, being managed by our West Midlands branch, our main points being: new, better, longer, bimode trains, no reduction of network or services apart from the daily Guildford train going to/from Southampton and earlier first trains, both ways, seven days a week. *Andrew McCallum*

Finally, the Chinnor & Princes Risborough Railway open their new platform 4 at Princes Risborough on 15<sup>th</sup> August with a special service to celebrate and weekend services from 18<sup>th</sup> August.

<https://www.chinnorrailway.co.uk/product.php/196/princes-risborough-platform-4-opens>

**PHOTOS: FOCUSING ON THE OXFORD BLOCKADE WORKS WHICH RAN FROM 7<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> JULY.**



A Special Train from Aylesbury to Bicester Village via Quainton Road and Claydon LNE Junction ran on 10<sup>th</sup> June pictured in the approximate position where HS2 should pass underneath. *John Elvin*



The Becket Street car park in use as a bus station at Oxford. *Richard Stow*



Platform 4 was open for 5 days, southbound only, while the others were resurfaced and track through the station was re-laid.



An old signal is removed between Walton Well Road and Aristotle Lane.



The new Down Oxford Relief line at Aristotle Lane.



The new up line from Oxford Parkway is connected to the Up Oxford Relief line seen from Aristotle Lane. *All: Richard Stow*



Looking south from Walton Well Road bridge towards the station and north as new track panels arrive.

Both: Richard Stow



One of the new information boards, this showing a line speed of 90mph on all four lines at Wolvercote.



An Oxford bound Chiltern train comes off the new line, seen from Aristotle Road with the new Down Oxford Relief line on the left.



A GWR Class 800 for the Cotswold Line passes Port Meadow on the Down Oxford Relief line, seen from Godstow Road bridge.



A Manchester bound Cross Country Voyager comes off the Down Oxford Relief line just north of Godstow Road bridge. The start of the Up Oxford Relief line has been moved slightly south and can be seen on the right. All: Andrew McCallum on 24<sup>th</sup> July 2018

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

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