

railfuture

Sevenside Branch Newsletter No. 37 Spring 2018

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

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

Branch Annual General Meeting at Bridgwater, 14 April 2018

The Sevenside branch Annual General Meeting is on **Saturday 14 April** at 2 pm in Bridgwater Railway Club, Wellington Road, Bridgwater TA6 5HA, on Saturday 14 April at 2 pm.

The venue is very close to Bridgwater station. There will be a raffle in aid of Branch funds with prizes of railway books. A buffet lunch will be available at 3.15 pm, kindly arranged by Friends of Bridgwater Station. Please note there will be a modest charge for the lunch..



If arriving by train, leave the station via the booking hall and immediately turn right outside the doorway, passing Byron Autos on your right. The Club is the next building round the corner on the right and has car parking. The best route by road from the town centre is via St. John Street, turning left into the station forecourt.

At the time of writing, a guest speaker had yet to be arranged but we shall no doubt hear from Friends of Bridgwater Station about its campaigns and learn of progress on the Bridgwater Station Forecourt Enhancement.

Also of interest is the recent motion passed by Sedgemoor District Council to develop a transport strategy by building an evidence portfolio with the County Council, MPs and LEP; lobbying Cross Country Trains; and working with GWR to seek service changes that will benefit Sedgemoor.

The Agenda for the formal part of the meeting is as follows:

1. Apologies for absence.
2. Minutes of 2017 AGM and matters arising.
3. Chairman's Report.
4. Secretary's Report.
5. Treasurer's Report.
6. Election of Officers and Committee.
7. Any Other Business.

Special note concerning item 6

Any member wishing to stand for any position on the Branch Committee should notify the Branch Secretary before the date of the meeting. This applies also to existing Officers and Committee members wishing to seek re-election. The aim is to speed up the business of the AGM, particularly if the member is unable to attend.

Minutes of Branch AGM at GL1 Leisure Centre, Gloucester, 8 April 2017

13 members present. David Redgewell was in the Chair. 10 apologies were received. Nigel Bray gave a digital slide presentation on rail developments in the West of England.

The Minutes of the previous AGM at Bristol on 9 April 2016 were accepted. Julie Boston asked whether the Branch received emails from Bus Users UK. Nigel Bray replied that it did and agreed to forward them to Committee members. David Redgewell added that John Hassall was very active in BUUK.

Chairman's Report

Nigel Bray read John Hassall's summary of Branch activities under the headings of Contact with the rail industry; Lobbying; Responding to Consultations; Raising Public Awareness; and Involving our members. It was noted that our nine affiliated groups have been amongst the most active participants. A key point in our response to the West of England Transport Study was that rail schemes needed to be fast tracked so that road building did not take priority.

During a discussion on the role of local authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships, Nicholas Falk said that we needed to point out that railways ought to play a major role in planning. Alan Hayday said we needed to persuade people that car travel was often slower than rail.

Secretary's Report

Nigel said recent news coverage of rail in our region had been dominated by the deferral of electrification to Bath and Bristol Temple Meads; and the dramatic rise in cost estimates for MetroWest Phase 1. The electrification decision was understandable in view of the scale of associated infrastructure work being carried out in the Bristol area but it was important to get a commitment from the Government as to when the scheme would be completed.

The latest MetroWest cost estimates were difficult to believe when compared with the cost per route mile of more challenging projects such as the Borders Railway. At least the West of England Partnership remained committed to a staged implementation of Phase 1, although the longer the delay to Portishead reopening, the more difficult it would be to persuade motorists to use the trains.

In recent years it had become difficult to arrange meeting dates which suited the Branch Officers and potential speakers, who all had many commitments. He invited members to say what they wanted from Branch meetings. Dave Chapple (Friends of Bridgwater Station) said that our affiliated groups were better placed to invite speakers. David Smith (Cam & Dursley Transportation Group) suggested listing group meetings on the Severnside Branch calendar.

Nicholas Falk suggested holding a Conference on how to reduce the costs of rail infrastructure projects (*post-meeting note*: Wendy Thorne has asked the Railfuture Board to hold a mini-Conference in Bristol in Summer 2018).

Treasurer's Report

Tony Lloyd said that the Branch Accounts for 2016 showed income of £ 688, of which £ 580 was subvention from the Railfuture Board. Expenditure totalled £ 716, of which the two largest items were the Newsletter (£ 344) and grants to local campaigns (£ 257).

The Board had approved the Branch's Budget bid of £ 615 for 2017. £ 360 of this had been paid for Administration but we would not receive the element for grants to campaigns (£ 250) until after the Branch had paid the recipient groups.

David Redgewell said MetroWest should be our most important campaign. It was agreed to renew our affiliation to Bus Users UK.

Election of Officers.

The following were elected unopposed:

Chair: John Hassall. Political Chair: David Redgewell. Vice-Chair: Julie Boston. Secretary: Nigel Bray. Treasurer: Tony Lloyd. Media Spokesman: Bruce Williamson.

Committee members:

Glen Burrows (Friends of Bridgwater Station). John Dixon (Portishead Railway Group). Gerard Duddridge (representing Somerset). Graham Ellis (TransWilts Community Interest Company). John Stretton (Ashchurch, Tewkesbury & District Rail Promotion Group).

7. A.O.B. and Chair's Summary

David Redgewell referred to FOSBR's success in getting a direct bus service between Weston-super-Mare station and Bristol Airport. Despite the deferral of electrification, rebuilding of Bath Spa station had started and work at Keynsham station was ongoing. He expressed concern that the Government might not be committed to enhancing the rail network in the West of England.

Great Western Franchise Consultation

Our Branch meeting at Bristol on 10 February discussed the draft Railfuture response to the Department for Transport's Consultation into the future of the GW rail franchise. Nigel Bray summarised the draft he had produced from comments made by representatives of the seven Railfuture Branches in the GW franchise area. Many of the points made at our Branch meeting were included in the final version, which was submitted on 18 February and can be viewed on the Railfuture website by going to the Home page, then "our cause", then "Consultation Responses".

Railfuture responds to Sustrans on future rail use of Bristol- Bath Railway Path

Also discussed at our February 2018 meeting was the opposition by Sustrans to a possible light-rail scheme on the formation of the former Bristol- Mangotsfield- Bath line. A cycleway developed by Sustrans occupies most of the route, although the trackbed is shared with the Avon Valley Railway for 2 ½ miles between Oldland Common and Avon Riverside. In December 2016 Railfuture's response to the West of England Joint Transport Plan Consultation asked for the formation to be safeguarded for reinstatement as a railway.

On 12 February 2018 Bruce Williamson wrote an open letter to James Cleeton of Sustrans, who had sent one opposing the rail proposals to local politicians.

"When the railway path was first established, it was done on the clear understanding that it would be returned to rail use should the need arise. Are you trying to renege on that commitment?"

Your claims that the route is too narrow simply do not stand up. The original railway was double track through its entire length and the current tarmacked section uses only approximately half the width of the trackbed, so what's the problem? Experience around the Bitton area has shown that it is possible for the cycle track to be shared with rail, and other examples such as the reopened Borders Railway and the Cambridgeshire busway also demonstrate that it is possible to accommodate cyclists alongside public transport routes with little difficulty. There may be some places where the track-bed has been narrowed by modern development but these are relatively few and it's always possible to find a solution, usually by a small diversion for the cycle route.

You claim that reusing the route for rail would 'require significant engineering and reconstruction.' Of course, it would, but the amount of work pales into insignificance compared to the alternatives. How much cost and local opposition do you suppose there would be to bulldozing a completely new route out of the city? How many billions would it cost to put it in tunnel? If, as you claim, 'the route under consideration is the wrong one' then what is the right one? It's pretty obvious that the answer is, in fact, the Bristol and Bath railway path.

(You say), 'Enabling business as usual to persist on our road network whilst displacing foot and bike traffic from a green corridor is not a solution.' Of course it's not, but that's not what is being suggested here, is it? Providing a new public transport route as an alternative to road transport is not 'business as usual' and foot and bike traffic can be accommodated along the green corridor too. As someone who works in the transport sector, you must know that the only way to achieve significant modal shift is to use the railway path for what it was originally built for - rail.

Railfuture and Sustrans share many objectives. If you succeed in blocking this scheme you will be perpetuating the pollution and gridlock of our current road-based transport system. I urge you to drop your opposition."

On 21 February Bruce received good publicity in *The Week In*, a free newspaper circulated in the Keynsham, Kingswood and Mangotsfield areas.

Next Railfuture Severnside newsletter will be number 38 in summer 2018.

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