

railfuture

Sevenside Branch Newsletter No. 39 Late Summer 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 meeting at Gloucester, 8 September 2018

The next Branch meeting will be on Saturday 8 September at 2 pm in the Bowls Room, GL1 Leisure Centre, Bruton Way, Gloucester GL1 1DT. The venue is about five minutes' walk from Gloucester station. There is a café in the Leisure Centre and others in nearby Eastgate Street.

Nigel Bray will give a digital slide presentation on rail developments in Great Britain and Ireland since 2016. Robert Crockford has offered to give a presentation entitled, "A Plain Man's guide to Trip Generation".



There will also be discussion of Railfuture's plans for reaching a wider audience, following the talk given at Trowbridge by Railfuture Business Transformation Director, Peter Travis. Your ideas for increasing our membership and profile will be most welcome.

If arriving by train, the easiest route from the station exit is to walk down the station approach and cross Bruton Way using the left hand pedestrian crossing (ie the one next to the B.R. double arrows sign). Once across the dual carriageway, turn left and continue for about 200 yards until Langley Wellingtons (a red brick building) appears on your right. GL1 is then diagonally to your right. Go up the stairs or in the lift from reception and walk along the gallery past an indoor bowling green to the Bowls Room.

Parking at GL1 is limited, although there is a pay and display car park at the corner of Station Road and Nettleton Road nearby.

Report from the Railfuture stand at WSRA Steam & Vintage Rally, 4 and 5 August

Our stand at the West Somerset Railway Association's Steam & Vintage Rally at Norton Fitzwarren, near Taunton, on the first weekend in August attracted much interest, most of our literature being taken by the close of play. It also collected over 100 signatures on a petition organised by Councillor Benet Allen of West Somerset District Council, calling on the Government to provide funding for a regular train service between Minehead and Taunton.

Thanks are due to John Hassall, Humphrey Hardy, David Redgewell, Bill Reynolds, David Smith, Benet Allen and Nigel Bray for manning the stand. The gazebo enclosing the stand was assembled and dismantled by John, Bill and Nigel. If any members have suggestions as to other public events where a Railfuture presence might be worthwhile, please let a Railfuture Severnside Committee member know.

Report of GWR Community Rail Conference, Swindon, 15 June 2018

At least five Severnside Branch members attended GWR's Community Rail Conference at the STEAM Museum, Swindon on 15 June. GWR's Managing Director Mark Hopwood said 2018 had been a difficult year because Engineering and fleet changes originally planned for 2015-19 had had to be compressed into a shorter period. There had been a 300 % increase in the number of Engineering possessions compared to 2017. The Company now had 1,369 drivers, as against 1,100 before the current fleet changes began but compression of driver training had affected operating performance. He admitted that some Community Rail routes such as Severn Beach and Bristol- Weymouth had experienced a drop in passenger numbers since 2017.

I found The GWR Surgery, in which delegates could mingle with GWR managers during a break, was a useful way to get answers if one's hand had not been noticed by the MD during his Q & A session. I asked Dan Okey about rolling stock plans for Cardiff- Portsmouth and was told the most likely formation would be a three-car Class 166 coupled to a two-car Class 165, with the latter running between Cardiff and Westbury only. Seat reservations would be concentrated in the Class 166 set because of its better ambience. Tom Pierpoint, GWR Integration Manager, said that opportunities to improve bus / rail interchange would arise with upgrades of station frontages, as promised for Bridgwater.

Tony Roche from Cornwall Council described its *One Public Transport* strategy including upgrades to rail and bus services. Since 2000 the Council had invested £ 36.5m in the county's rail network. He said that most urban stations in Cornwall were interchanges (with branch lines and / or bus routes). The Penzance overnight sleeper service would be upgraded later this year. Long Rock maintenance depot, Penzance, had been rebuilt to accommodate the sleeper trains hitherto maintained at Old Oak Common, London.

Connecting West Somerset was the title of a presentation produced by Paul Conibeare, West Somerset Railway General Manager and Chris Austin, Head of Railfuture Networks & Infrastructure Group and himself a former WSR Chairman. Chris said WSR had identified three markets for a regular service linking it with the main line: seasonal traffic; changeover days at Butlins, Minehead; and park & ride for housing developments at the Taunton end. He said WSR needed to work out the likely gap between costs and fares of a connecting service with the national network.

Making the case for the Okehampton line was highly topical in view of Chris Grayling's instruction to GWR to prepare plans for a regular daily service from Exeter. Dr. Michael Ireland said there was a definite link between rural poverty and distance from rail services. Oke Rail envisaged Okehampton becoming the railhead for a large area of North West Devon and North Cornwall to reduce their isolation from the network. Kevin Ball, a County Councillor for Okehampton, said earnings per head in the West Devon and Torridge Districts were amongst the lowest in Britain. He said there was clear evidence that reopened railways had improved local economies.

Nigel Bray.

Railfuture response to Cross Country Franchise Consultation

A public Consultation launched by the Department for Transport into the future of the Cross Country rail franchise closes on 30 August. Railfuture is submitting a unified response, incorporating comments from all its Branches. Following a discussion at our recent Branch meeting at Trowbridge, comments from Severnside Branch were presented by Nigel Bray to Dr. Steve Wright, Railfuture Cross Country TOC Liaison. Severnside's priorities, listed under DfT's headings and numbered questions in the Consultation, are as follows:

Reduction of crowding on current XC train services

1. The routes on which crowding needs to be addressed most urgently are Bristol- Birmingham; Birmingham- Reading; and Cardiff- Nottingham in the Birmingham evening peak.
2. None of the alternatives suggested by DfT to overcome crowding caused by short-distance commuters using long-distance XC trains is desirable. Removing calls from towns closest to the conurbation centre at peak times is the least terrible. XC has already removed Bromsgrove stops when Birmingham Cross City electric services were extended to Bromsgrove on 30 July. Ashchurch, Tewkesbury & District Rail Promotion Group has opposed withdrawal of Bromsgrove stops by XC because this would prevent Ashchurch passengers from splitting fares at Bromsgrove for journeys to the West Midlands conurbation.

Restricting calls to pick up / set down only is unworkable.

Improving the service pattern / network to offer journeys that better meet needs.

4. The Birmingham- Nottingham leg of Cardiff- Nottingham should be transferred to the West Midlands franchise because Railfuture proposes to convert the existing service to Cardiff- Manchester / York.
6. Bidders should be given flexibility to make changes to the extremities of the network but only if attractive alternatives are provided, not just short local trains.
7. We agree that the current level of services on the following XC routes are the minimum that should be specified: Plymouth- Penzance; Exeter / Newton Abbot- Paignton; Edinburgh- Aberdeen; Southampton- Bournemouth.

A similar or improved service should be introduced by GWR in place of the existing 06.09 Bath Spa-Bristol leg and the Cardiff- Bristol- Manchester service. Any XC services from South Wales to the Midlands and North should run via Gloucester.

The Guildford- Reading leg, a remnant of former XC services to Brighton and Portsmouth, should be extended to Gatwick Airport or Brighton.

8. We oppose the suggestion that DfT's minimum specification should preserve exactly today's pattern of services and station calls. There should instead be a revision to improve inter-regional connectivity, eg South Wales- North East England, and provide more services from towns and cities served poorly, eg Cardiff, Newport, Gloucester; or currently not at all, eg Bridgwater.

11. The XC network should be extended to serve Liverpool and Swansea.

12. Bridgwater (pop. 36,000) is the largest town on the XC network without any XC trains calling. It will become a more important destination when Hinkley C power station opens and already has a large rural hinterland. Ian Liddell-Grainger, MP for Bridgwater & West Somerset, has supported calls from Bridgwater Town Council for XC to serve the only main line station in his constituency.

Gloucester (pop. 127,000) is a major centre but only three of the 62 North-South XC services call there. Some small towns in Cornwall have more XC trains on this route than does Gloucester. The city needs more direct trains to Somerset, Devon and Cornwall.

Fares and ticketing

14. XC should no longer price fares on routes over which it does not operate, eg Gloucester/ Cheltenham/ Ashchurch to Worcester / Great Malvern. There are currently no Off- Peak Day Returns for these journeys. XC should offer Off-Peak Day Returns on all its routes. This particular example will be complicated by the expected opening of Worcestershire Parkway in December but the principle remains. Some through journeys, eg Cheltenham- Kidderminster, would still involve using GWR to Worcester Shrub Hill or Foregate Street.

Improving access, information and making connections.

16. Passengers need more information on where to change trains instead of Birmingham, eg Cheltenham, Derby, Stafford, Wolverhampton. Labelling of carriages needs to be much clearer. The fuzzy electronic displays are difficult to read when a train runs into a platform; a simple paper label with black lettering on a white background would suffice.

18. Priority seats with extra legroom need to be provided and clearly visible in each carriage.

19. When trains are crowded and /or delayed, the Train Manager needs to walk through the train and clear seats of any luggage.

Improving the On-Board experience.

21. Priorities for carriage layouts for regional XC trains: 1. More seats. 2. Extra luggage space. 3. Seats aligning with windows. 4. More leg room. 5. More table seats. 6. Cycle storage. 7. More comfortable room for short-distance standing.

22. Priorities for carriage layouts for long-distance XC trains: 1. More seats. 2. Extra luggage space. 3. More leg room. 4. Seats aligning with windows. 5. More table seats. 6. More comfortable room for short-distance standing. 7. Cycle storage.

24. To reduce the disturbance caused by the "churn" of passengers alighting and boarding, station dwell times should be increased where necessary. On core routes, more use of HSTs and 4+4 or 4+5 Voyager formations would help.

Stakeholder engagement and Community Rail Partnerships.

25. XC needs to follow GWR's approach by holding Stakeholder meetings at main locations, with a view to explaining its difficulties and encouraging ideas from participants.

27. XC needs to listen to concerns about connections between XC and stations it does not normally serve, eg Swindon. It should liaise with GWR to provide robust connections into last trains of the day, eg from 13.00 Glasgow- Plymouth, due into Bristol T.M. at 20.42, into 20.48 Bristol- Weymouth. The latter should be retimed by GWR if necessary.

Next Railfuture Severnside newsletter will be number 40 in New Year 2019.

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