

Wessex Branch : Annual General Meeting 2020

Our AGM will be held at the **Mayflower Village pub**, Commercial Road, **Southampton** on **Saturday 18 April 2020**. We will be starting the meeting soon after **11am**.

The pub, a 5 min walk from Southampton Central station, doesn't open until 11 o/c, so there's no point in arriving before then. There are shops, cafes and the theatre foyer nearby where you could while away some time, if early. We have the downstairs function room to ourselves from 11:00 to 13:30.

You will be able to help yourself to complimentary teas and coffees on arrival at the venue. Feel free to stay on for a pub lunch after the meeting, although you will need to pay for your own lunchtime food and drinks. Our guest speaker will be Railfuture's Infrastructure Director, Roger Blake. Roger lives in east London and is a former transport officer with Hackney Council. He currently chairs Railfuture's Infrastructure and Networks Group – *more about this below*.

Directions to the venue: From Southampton Central station (north side), turn right then left into Wyndham Place (where all the bus stops are). At the top end of Wyndham Place, turn right and walk towards the Mayflower Theatre. The Mayflower Village pub is on your right just before you get to the theatre. Go in the main entrance and turn left – you will see the staircase on your left leading down to the function room.

Please note: **there is no step free access to the function room, although there is an emergency exit at the back with just a few steps. The room has its own toilet.**

After the AGM, why not make a day of it with by taking in a show at the Mayflower Theatre or visiting the amazing Sea City Museum near Southampton Guildhall? Maybe even take a train to Fawley!! – *see page 2*.

If you would like to play a more active part in Wessex Branch, you're welcome to put your name forwards for a place on our committee. In addition to the roles of Chair, Secretary and Treasurer, it's helpful to have additional members that can represent their own particular areas and report back on any problems. For further information or to put your name forwards, please get in touch – contact details on page 4.

Chairman's Message

SWR passengers suffered a month of reduced and disrupted services in the lead up to Christmas due to the ongoing SWR/RMT dispute. We made representations to SWR about the complete lack of rail or bus replacement services on the line via Chandler's Ford, and the omission of stops at other stations.

Then came the freight train derailment at Eastleigh on the 28th January which caused severe disruption to SWR and Cross Country services, with a knock on effect on Southern, GWR and freight traffic. Network Rail has now confirmed the incident was due to an 'infrastructure fault'. As a result, all lines through Eastleigh had to be closed to allow removal of wagons, and track repair to be carried out in a safe environment.

We feel operators were far too slow getting their emergency timetables in place, and then telling their customers what these arrangements were. After the service collapsed, information screens and the National Rail website continued to show multiple cancellations – it would have been more helpful to wipe the screens blank and show only those trains that were running. Also staff should be instructed to keep passengers informed via the PA system when the electronic systems can't be relied on.

Eventually a shuttle service between Winchester and Basingstoke was put in place, but why not all the way to Waterloo? This meant all London-bound passengers were forced to use the very crowded West of England services. And was it really necessary to completely cancel the Waterloo-Poole and Waterloo-Portsmouth Harbour (via Basingstoke) services, with the result that both Fleet and Farnborough lost their fast link to the capital?

While all lines through Eastleigh were closed, it should have been possible to terminate some trains at Hedge End or Southampton Parkway. If one or two lines remained open but power to the third rail needed to be cut off, then surely the Cross Country and Chandlers Ford diesel services could have operated. It seems there's no incentive to keep trains running, rather: "let's just lay on buses" ... well, just the one bus judging by the long queues I saw at Winchester! Anyway, these are all points we'll be raising with relevant managers.

The recent press speculation about Flybe and its survival made me reflect again about how terrible the Cross Country service has become for regional connectivity. A simple comparison chart tells the story:

| <i>Southampton-Manchester by Air</i> | <i>Southampton-Manchester by Rail</i> |
|--|---|
| Journey time less than an hour; cost around £144; guaranteed seat; inter-city service quality. More polluting than electric trains (but modern turbo-prop planes are more eco-friendly than jet airliners). | Over four hours; standard class fare of around £265 (£472 via London). Often overcrowded; could be ejected from seat by someone with a last-minute reservation. Rather poor trolley service (or none at all). Less polluting than air, but still using 20-yr-old diesel trains (should be bi-mode since much of route is electrified). |

It was clear many years ago that, to encourage business and leisure passengers, Cross Country needed to improve. If new trains can't be justified right away, an additional coach or two could be added to the Voyager units to provide extra capacity plus the ability to run off third-rail and overhead electric supplies. Also the heavy (but never used) tilt mechanisms could now be removed from the 5-car sets. Whilst I fully support HS2, I'm worried that other vital improvements such as this will no longer happen as the rail purse at the treasury is now focussed on HS2 and the North!

The new timetable from GWR promised more carriages on the Portsmouth to Cardiff route. Sadly, my observation so far is that many services are still running as only three coaches. I hope this is temporary! Conversely, GWR's introduction of extra peak time services between Basingstoke and Reading seems to have gone smoothly.

I look forward to seeing you at our AGM in April. We've had some useful informal meetings at the Mayflower over the past year - this could become a regular fixture with a general invitation to all branch members.

Chair, Mike Southgate.

Waterside Line Charter Train

Nick Farthing of the Three Rivers Community Rail Partnership (and former Chair of Wessex Branch) is planning another running day on the Waterside Line, with a special charter train shuttling all day between Southampton and Fawley. Some of you will remember the Fawley Forester diesel special chartered by Three Rivers CRP in May 2017 using the "Hastings Diesel" heritage set.

Happily, this year's charter coincides with our AGM on Saturday 18th April. At the time of writing, details have yet to be finalised, but we're hoping that it will be possible for AGM attendees to decant to Southampton Central and enjoy an afternoon trip down the freight branch to Fawley and back.

For those of you with email, we will let you know whether the service is running, with times and fares, etc. For others, either watch the local press for details or give our Secretary a ring a few days beforehand.

Follow the **Waterside Railway Passenger Service** campaign on Facebook.

New Stations & Lines and Pinch Points

Railfuture's **Infrastructure and Networks Group** is updating its database of infrastructure schemes being promoted around Britain by Railfuture branches. David Brace represented Wessex Branch at their meeting in November and is in the process of collating our branch aspirations which need to be fed back to the national group by March 2020.

We've compiled our shortlist of new or reopened stations and routes in the Wessex area that we think are sensible and affordable if the Government is serious about expanding the network. We've also identified pinch points on the network (such as the single line section between Fareham and Botley) which need addressing to achieve better service frequency and reliability, and possibly new journey opportunities.

The Infrastructure & Networks Group intends to use the database to make better use of Railfuture's campaign resources. Part of the group's remit is to offer advice and possibly funding to branches such as ours, so we're particularly pleased that the group's chair, Roger Blake, will be coming to talk to us at our 2020 AGM. Roger is very familiar with our Welborne Station campaign and was one of the Railfuture representatives at Fareham Borough Council's planning meeting last year.

Island Line

At meetings on the Isle of Wight about the plans for a complete overhaul of Island Line infrastructure, our



representative Stuart George consistently warned that the proposed half-hourly timetable would not work due to an impossibly tight turn-round time at Ryde Pierhead. It seems the scheme manager has now woken up to the problem and is looking to reduce the overall running time by increasing the line speed at strategic locations.

Achieving the half-hourly timetable involves reinstating double track through Brading and bringing the southbound platform at Brading Station back into use. Robin Attwood took this photo for us from the northbound platform at Brading.

At the IW Bus & Rail Users' Group public meeting in January, we were told that negotiations are taking place between SWR and the IW Steam Railway for a connection at Smallbrook Junction. This would enable engineering trains to remove some 7000 tonnes of spoil during the Island Line upgrade thereby reducing the need for lorry movements. A representative from the Steam Railway said that some of these trains would be hauled by steam locomotives, which would make them the first steam-hauled engineering trains on the national network for over 50 years!

Those of us attending SWR's Community Rail conference in February heard promises from the company that a "holistic approach" will be taken to the Island Line upgrade, meaning that the stations will be "the best they've ever been". *The prospect of the national media coming across to the island for a launch event has obviously focussed minds on presenting the line in the best possible light!*

News from Dorset

Parliament has a new champion for transport reform in Chris Loder, the newly elected MP for West Dorset. A 20-year railway career saw him progress from station assistant at Salisbury to Head of New Trains at South Western Railway, with spells at c2c, Chiltern Railways and Deutsche Bahn.

Jeff Yeoman, a Railfuture member residing in Hamworthy, has taken SWR to task over the lack of late evening trains to Weymouth during engineering works. On successive Saturdays last autumn, when trains were diverted via Havant, the last down train to Weymouth left Waterloo at 19:20 despite trains running as far as Bournemouth up until midnight. Jeff checked with NR that there were no engineering works west of Bournemouth on the three evenings in question. Eventually he received an acknowledgement from SWR that the last departure at 19:20 was indeed far too early and that in future they would endeavour to run at least one further Weymouth service, timed one hour later.

It was reported in the autumn that Dorset Council has been holding discussions with Network Rail about line upgrades needed west of Poole. Top of the list is the need to improve the power supply along the main line to Weymouth. Track remodelling at the throat to Weymouth station is also seen as a priority - currently the layout is very restrictive leading to delays (it's on our list of pinch points! – Ed). The Council thought that the cost of reinstating double track between Dorchester and Moreton would be difficult to justify, and that electrification of the line towards Bristol was completely off the table. NR hinted that the Poole-Weymouth route could be included the next round of Continuous Modular Strategic Planning (CMSP) studies in 2020.

Welborne Campaign

Our campaign for a new station to serve the Welborne development just north of Fareham warranted a short piece in January's edition of Modern Railways magazine under the heading "Welborne Halt Promoted by Railfuture". *Recognition indeed!*

The list of reasons for a new station at Welborne keeps on growing, according to our Fareham representative, Alan Mayes. Alan argues that...

- The safety concerns with all-lane-running "smart" motorways, which attempt to squeeze more road capacity into the existing land, shows that it's not possible to accommodate continued growth in travel through expanding road capacity. Running trains on a railway is a much more efficient use of land to transport large numbers of people. The growth in travel including new journeys to and from Welborne can only be accommodated by investment in rail including a new station at Welborne.
- A bus rapid transit system is proposed to transport people from Welborne to Fareham Railway Station for rail travel but this makes the journey much longer and needs a bus ticket as well as a train ticket so many people would choose to travel by car whereas a new station at Welborne would persuade them to travel by train. Fareham Station's ticket gateline (comprising just three gates) already struggles to cope with the passenger surge from a peak-hour train. Welborne residents would add to this congestion unless the new station is built for their use.

Robin's Freight Update

Over the last month or so, there have been some unusual workings to/from Marchwood, namely a couple of workings to Pengam Reception Sidings and Donnington. This is in addition to regular freights between Marchwood and the MoD yards at Bicester and Kineton.

There have been movements of flats from Southampton Maritime to Marchwood on Saturdays, with return workings on Mondays. In general, freight to/from the Southampton area remains busy.

There has been at least one 800 ton load from Ludgershall to Dollands Moor freight yard near Folkestone.

The Eastleigh derailment saw car trains, especially from Cowley, routed via Reading, Earley, Guildford, Havant and St. Denys to/from Southampton Eastern Docks.

Templecombe has won Best Small Station of the Year category in the National Rail Awards 2019. Templecombe is a regular entrant and has risen from being highly commended last year to being deemed the best in its category. Said by the judges to be the "jewel of the small stations", it has enjoyed huge amounts of local support since reopening in 1983. *Well done them!!*

Dates for your Diary

ACoRP's annual Community Rail Awards ceremony comes to the South of England for the first time – it's due to be held at the Guildhall, Southampton on 1st October 2020. *Let's hope several of the station adoption groups and community rail partnerships from our branch area make it to the winners' podium!*

Railfuture's National AGM is on Sat 27th June 2020 at the Quaker Meeting House, Birmingham ... *close enough for us to get there and back in a day!*

TravelWatch SouthWest spring conference will be on Mon 2nd March 2020 at the Cricket Ground, Taunton.

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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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