

railfuture

Sevenside Branch Newsletter No. 46 Late Summer 2021

Contributions to the Newsletter are welcome and should be sent to the Branch Secretary, Nigel Bray.
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More information about campaigns is available on the Railfuture national website.

Sevenside Branch meeting at Yatton, 18th September 2021

The next Branch meeting will be on Saturday 18th September at 2 pm in the Strawberry Line Café, Yatton station, outside if good weather. The café is located on the down (westbound) platform. The meeting will be an informal one to discuss future campaigns and activities. We look forward to seeing you there.

Photo from Wikipedia.



Possible future meetings, subject to confirmation

Regrettably the West Somerset Railway Association Steam Fayre, at which Railfuture hoped to have a stand on 8th and 9th August, was cancelled.

At the time of writing, I have been negotiating with Cirencester Community Railway and Saltford Parish Council to arrange meetings at Kemble (provisionally 27th October) and Bath (provisionally 20th November). The Kemble meeting would be on a Wednesday afternoon because the Tavern Inn is no longer able to host a meeting on a Saturday.

If and when these meetings are confirmed, they will be notified first on the Railfuture website and then in the next Newsletter. We would welcome the offer of a venue in Wiltshire to maintain geographical balance. The White Horse meeting room at Westbury station has been considered but with a capacity of 10 persons it would be better suited to a Branch Committee meeting. We also hope to arrange a joint meeting with West Midlands Branch to discuss connectivity between the West Midlands and the South West. There will be no Branch AGM before Spring 2022.

Nigel Bray.

FOSBR plans to have a stall at Severn Beach on 4th September

Our affiliated group Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways is holding a stand at Severn Beach station on Saturday 4th September. Further details from Julie Boston, email address jboston@jboston.plus.com

Rob Dixon, FOSBR Chairman, has alerted us to the Bristol Corporate Strategy Consultation, which closes on 26th September. Railfuture will be responding to it in due course. Rob notes that the Consultation document specifically mentions “pressing for mainline electrification.” However, there is no mention of improving integration between rail and other modes, so both FOSBR and Railfuture have work to do.

Special Local Transport Forum on Bristol Rail Regeneration, 24th June 2021

About 40 people took part in a joint GWR / Network Rail Zoom meeting, hosted by Stacey Lewis and chaired by Jane Jones, GWR Head of Public Affairs. The meeting discussed not only the remodelling of Bristol East Junction but also the ongoing work to enhance Temple Meads station. The latter work involves strengthening the station roof and renewal of wiring to extend information systems. The work to upgrade the junction began on 10th July and is due to end on 3rd September.

GWR and Network Rail subsequently produced a leaflet summarising train alterations for each stage of the work. Some of these alterations have involved using Bedminster and Lawrence Hill for starting or terminating trains. Both GWR and Network Rail appreciate that these are not ideal stations for the mass transfer of passengers between trains and buses. A special problem at Lawrence Hill is the lack of step-free access between the platforms and the main road. Montpelier station has been offered as an alternative to Lawrence Hill. Local rail tickets will also be accepted on relevant local bus routes.

During the Zoom meeting GWR said pre-booked assistance for persons with reduced mobility would be available at Bedminster, where a taxi would also be on standby. Severnside Community Rail Partnership would provide additional signage and artwork to improve the ambience of the station. A temporary car park would be provided in Dalby Avenue for the replacement buses.

GWR was due to arrange 'Meet the Manager' sessions from 28th June and provide exhibition stands at Bath Spa, Bristol Parkway and Taunton. Some local publicity has been circulated to houses in the Bedminster and Totterdown areas near to the site of the works.

Following the intervention of Councillor Neil Butters, cabinet member for Bath & North East Somerset Council, some Cardiff- Portsmouth trains have been calling additionally at Keynsham and Oldfield Park for the duration of the work.

But not everything went as planned...

The overrunning of Engineering work on Monday 9th August was a disaster for train operations, particularly GWR regional services, in the Bristol area and beyond. GWR explained that all signalling at Temple Meads station had been shut down the previous day so that Network Rail could update signalling data. Extensive tests were required before lines could reopen but these identified a number of faults on the system early in the morning of the 9th. GWR said some lines did not reopen until 10 am. In fact, delays and cancellations were evident for much longer.

For example, 08.42 Gloucester- Weymouth was cancelled because the inward train could not get through Bristol. Staff at Gloucester station advised passengers to catch the next Transport for Wales train and connect at Severn Tunnel Junction into a Cardiff- Portsmouth service. On paper, there was a six-minute connection, but passengers were still waiting from 09.41 to at least 12.15, when five of us were able to get a taxi to Bristol Parkway.

Severn Tunnel Junction is a peculiarly unsuitable location in which to be stranded. The station has no Help Point, unlike many small GWR stations and no posters displaying contact numbers for local taxis or Transport for Wales Customer Services. TfW made no effort either to send staff to the station or override the unhelpful taped announcements with live ones. A short walk into Rogiet revealed that the village had no café, pub or shop which might have been able to

provide taxi numbers. The station is nominally staffed from 06.30 to 10.30 but the ticket office was shut by 09.45 if indeed it had been open at all that day. The isolated position of Severn Tunnel Junction and the absence of live train information is something that many people would find intimidating at night.

I have asked Railfuture Wales to urge Transport for Wales to make four major improvements to customer care at the station, i.e. a Help Point on at least one of the four platforms; posters with taxi and TfW numbers outside the ticket office; live announcements during disruption; and deployment of staff to assist passengers when disruption is severe.

On the day in question, my girlfriend and I should have reached Torquay at 12.42 but arrived at 17.33. The return journey on the 16th was slightly delayed but we experienced excellent customer care from GWR including live announcements and good deployment of staff. One of the lifts at Exeter St. Davids was out of action but a member of staff was positioned to carry luggage. Although the 09.25 Penzance- Newcastle train ran (12 minutes late) into the down instead of the up island platform at Bristol Parkway, our connection to Gloucester was held.

Nigel Bray

South Western Railway December 2022 Timetable Consultation

The main specific proposal affecting Severnside Branch is to withdraw the Bristol-Waterloo service on the grounds that GWR can somehow absorb the displaced passengers. Apart from aggravating overcrowding on GWR regional services, particularly between Bristol and Trowbridge, the proposal removes choice because SWR's fares into London from the Bristol direction are lower than GWR's and many people find Waterloo a more convenient terminus than Paddington for central London. The service provides an essential link for people wishing to avoid cross-London journeys from Paddington, particularly if they have heavy luggage or use wheelchairs. The Waterloo trains also give Keynsham, Bradford-on-Avon, Trowbridge and Warminster direct trains to the capital.



The Consultation document is long on platitudes like “maximising use of resources” but short on detail such as connections between routes. It also excludes Sunday services, despite their importance for the expected growth in leisure travel.

A robust unified Railfuture response to the Consultation is being produced by our Wessex Branch and is likely to be submitted by the end of August. Railfuture sees no logic in withdrawing Waterloo trains serving GWR stations while retaining Salisbury- Westbury- Yeovil Junction services, whose intermediate stations are also served by GWR. SWR has justified retaining this service (which Railfuture supports) on the grounds of diversionary route knowledge for Waterloo-Exeter. Yet withdrawing the Bristol trains would result in Salisbury traincrews losing 23 miles of diversionary route knowledge between Salisbury and Westbury.

Railfuture wants Waterloo-Exeter trains to be formed of six cars west of Salisbury. The document's assertion that proposed Devon Metro services could absorb some of the demand between Exeter and Honiton is unrealistic because the Metro requires additional infrastructure which is most unlikely to be ready by December 2022.

Bus Service Improvement Plan Consultations

Railfuture has responded to BSIP Consultations for Gloucestershire, Somerset, Wiltshire and WECA & North Somerset. We have not commented on the details of any particular bus route but have concentrated on the need for better integration between bus and rail services. We said that improvements to bus services should not be planned in isolation from the rail network. It is the totality of public transport that needs to be more attractive, not merely tinkering with bus times. The risk of missing a train because buses have been caught in traffic may be more of a deterrent to leaving the car at home than the levels of bus fares or frequencies.

We have quoted examples of best and worst practice for bus / rail interchange. Those in the former category include Bath Spa, Bristol Parkway and Chippenham. In the latter category are Filton Abbey Wood and Yatton, although a bus service from Yatton to Clevedon was reinstated a few years ago and subsequently withdrawn for lack of support. In cases such as this, a demand responsive bus or shared taxi service should be considered if a regular bus service is not considered viable. This might also be a way of providing onward transport in the evenings and on Sundays from stations such as Cam & Dursley and Westbury. Copies of our responses have been forwarded to Bus Users UK, which has pointed out that in East Anglia there is an electric taxi service from Wickham Market station on the East Suffolk line.

Additionally, David Redgewell has emailed Gloucestershire County, Stroud District and South Gloucestershire Councils with suggestions for specific improvements including:

- A later journey from Gloucester Transport Hub to Charfield via Cam & Dursley station and Wotton-under-Edge.
- A Stonehouse-Stroud-Wotton-under-Edge bus service to maximise connectivity from a reopened Stonehouse Bristol Road station.
- Buses from Wotton-under-Edge to Chipping Sodbury and Yate need to extend to Yate station.
- Extension of the Cheltenham-Evesham bus route from Cheltenham station.
- Revision of the Bourton-on-the-Water to Kingham service to meet trains at Kingham station.
- Bus information needed at Lydney station.
- More bus services from Kemble station to Tetbury.

Portishead Reopening Progress

Wendy Thorne writes “I have been sent this link featuring drone footage of Portishead to Pill railway, which you may find interesting – one day soon hopefully it will have a train on it!”

https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=CutQrj_5vWI

Next Railfuture Severnside newsletter will be number 47 in autumn 2021.

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