

Chairman's Message

My best wishes to our members and others reading this branch newsletter. I hope it gives you some insight into the hard work the team have been undertaking to achieve improvements to our rail network in this area.

Our success is driven by the number of people who can get involved, in particular writing to their local MPs and Councillors. Our work has currently switched from growing our railway to getting it back into a pre-Pandemic state from which we can then grow. The recent increase in fuel price and concerns about the environment should be driving some real commercial opportunities for our rail operators. Regrettably we see little evidence of that, the new contracts seem to provide little incentive to innovate.

We remain disappointed with both SWR and Cross Country's timetables for 2022. With SWR we are particularly concerned with the proposed timetable for Island Line, the Poole stopper continuing to terminate at Winchester, overall connectivity, and late night services. With Cross Country our concern is a return to an hourly timetable and the reinstatement of all stops at Winchester and Brockenhurst. We are continuing to raise our concerns with both operators, appropriate politicians and are now in dialogue with the independent passenger body Transport Focus. I am also engaging with local environmental groups about the benefits of rail.

We ran a successful campaign against the emergency Covid timetable notably concerning the interruption of through trains to Weymouth and Exeter. We drew up a press release with help from RF's press officer and as a result Stewart Palmer became our TV and radio star. We also mounted a political campaign and we were delighted to see Chris Loder MP asking a question of the Prime Minister in the House. The emergency timetable was modified and then abandoned soon after.

On general policy I completely echo and support Stewart Palmer's piece (below) that we need to engage more with other forms of public transport. Passengers want a good end to end journey to compete with the car, we need to make that happen. I also support the view that we need to do more with cycle storage and signage to and from stations.

We continue to push and support our two W expansion projects: a railway station at Welborne and the re-opening of the Waterside line. Unfortunately, the latter has hit a few hiccups due to local issues, but we are working with Nick Farthing and his team to make progress. We continue to be part of the consultation group for Hampshire's Local Transport Plan 4 who acknowledge our contribution although there hasn't been much progress.

Finally, whilst we all regret not holding face to face gatherings there is no doubt Zoom committee meetings have made a real difference to our ability to discuss, prioritise and tackle issues. We aim to meet every two months normally on a Thursday starting at 19.00. Members are always welcome to join us by emailing wessex@railfuture.org.uk to request a link. Currently we do not have the resources to pursue a physical general meeting. This is very time consuming to organise due to the geographical spread of our area for the number who turn up. Your views on this or any other matter are welcome particularly if you can join the committee to help out with the workload. Questions and thoughts for the committee can always be submitted to the chair or secretary.

- *Mike Southgate*

More “Smoke and Mirrors” - Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIP)

Buses play an important part in extending the reach of public transport beyond the rail network. As a resident of Dorset I recognise that the rail coverage in the county is limited, with the centre of the county being a “rail desert”. Buses therefore play a vital role in making towns like Wimborne, Bridport, Lyme Regis, Blandford, Sturminster Newton and Portland accessible to people without access to cars. Over the last 10 years bus services in Dorset have seen major losses of routes, frequency of service and duration of operation. Many journeys to work, hospital appointments, leisure activities or education are now simply impossible by bus even from the larger towns in the County.

Last year the Government heralded in a blaze of publicity that some £4 billion would be available to improve bus services across England under the banner of a “Bus Service Improvement Plan”. This was announced as part of the delivery of carbon reduction targets and the “levelling up” agenda.

Sadly, like so many things in today’s world, the rhetoric is not being matched by action. County and unitary authorities with transport responsibilities were invited to bid for money from central Government. Dorset, who have hollowed out their internal transport planning capability, engaged consultants to prepare a bid. There was extensive consultation with users, Transport Action Groups (TAG’s), local councils etc. A bid was submitted by the deadline of October 2021 which looked to address the long-term decline of bus use in Dorset and to improve rail/bus coordination. It was said that the results of the bidding would be announced by the end of February 2022 by Department for Transport. On 4th April Department for Transport finally announced that Dorset would get no additional funding as part of BSIP. Existing support for post Covid operating subsidy will end in October, as previously announced. The DfT press release says that the package is worth £7 bn. In truth most of this is not new money, it is simply a re-announcement of previous interventions. Dorset is yet again getting a raw deal and we can only look forward to even fewer buses and no improvement in bus/rail integration. The overwhelming majority of the funds are going to conurbations outside of the Shire Counties. This is blatant “pork barrel” politics.

I am not making a special plea for Dorset, but this situation appears to be mirrored across England (remember transport is a devolved matter in Scotland and Wales). Railfuture and its members must keep pushing for proper integration of public transport in the Shire Counties of England or the dominance of the private car, which has been exacerbated by the pandemic, will lead to a spiral of continued decline, both on our railways and the vital feeder bus services that help provide access to people who either do not have, or choose not to use, private cars.

- *Stewart Palmer, Dorchester*

BSIP grants in the Wessex Branch area

Portsmouth has been awarded £48m to improve bus services in the City. The money will be used to reduce fares, make buses more reliable, improve service frequencies and introduce a London-style smartcard.

Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole Council has been awarded £8.9m which will be used on bus priority measures (Bournemouth regularly appears in the top 10 list of worst congested towns and cities in England) and on improvements to bus information and facilities.

News from around the Wessex Area

Island Line

Island resident and Wessex Branch committee member, Stuart George, keeps us up to date about developments. He says that the new trains on Island Line are much appreciated and the ride quality is vastly improved. However, the service frequency throughout the day is now worse than at any time for at least 56 years and will continue to be unsatisfactory through the summer period, according to the newly-published timetable beginning mid May. Connections off the FastCat ferry are no longer held in the event of late running, and changing onto the Ventnor bus at Shanklin now involves a 24-minute wait.

Train service reliability has been appalling of late, and it’s now apparent that the new loop at Brading cannot support a regular half-hourly frequency when only two trains are in service. We’re convinced that three

trains should be operating for a reliable half-hourly service (with longer layovers at Ryde Pier Head and Shanklin), at least until issues such as excessive station dwell times can be addressed.

Just to compound woes for anyone travelling to and from the Island, Wightlink's FastCat now has two hour gaps in the service and the last one leaves Portsmouth at 20.20. Also a surcharge of 50p each way on the FastCat was introduced in November as a result of the road pier toll being transferred to Island Line passengers.

Finally, some good news: a train and bus departure indicator has been installed with SWR funding in the bus shelter at Shanklin station (although initially there was a glitch with bus times showing as 9 mins later than scheduled!)

For those on the Isle of Wight, there will be a public meeting to question the operators about all aspects of public transport on the Island on Saturday 23rd July at 11.00 at the Methodist Church Hall, Quay Street, Newport. All are welcome.

West of England Line

Wessex Branch committee member, Bruce Duncan, begins his report with a quotation from Claire Mann...

“Looking ahead we are very close to finalising our Year 2 business plan, which will give us the direction for the next year and beyond. From what we know so far there will be a strong focus on efficiency, collaboration and delivering the basics first time and every time, this is especially important as the railway continues to receive support from the taxpayer under the new contracts. I know that sometimes it won't be easy, but if we all play our part in delivering our plans, we can move forward together as one team”

- from a statement by Managing Director, Claire Mann, in a recent newsletter from SWR

Bruce continues: on the Salisbury-Exeter line, we have had many serious issues, and Claire's statement about delivering the basics first and every time has had some of our Rail User Group members express rather strong language to the effect: “like ... why is this not being done now!?!”

On Friday 25 March there were 10 services cancelled (many cut short at Salisbury) with Covid given as a reason. Yet the next day, Saturday, all services ran as normal!

Passenger numbers have recovered well, with overall about 70% plus on pre-Covid levels. However that seems to be driven by the huge passenger return on local Exeter services, and also a higher return for leisure travel.

During the abysmal 17 January 2022 timetable, when no through services between Waterloo and Exeter ran, trains were nearly all 6 cars. Now many are back to 3-car, especially around midday, so we are hearing reports of overcrowding again.

There is a concern that the hourly Waterloo to Salisbury (was xx.50), which currently runs only between Basingstoke and Salisbury, may not be reinstated. Without this service, there is bound to be overcrowding of the hourly Waterloo to Exeter trains.

Finally, the interim report from the Railway Accident Investigation Branch on the train crash at Salisbury Tunnel Junction (31 Oct 21) has been published, and Network Rail has been served with an improvement notice by Office of Rail and Road. NR has appealed the ORR notice; in the meantime there is the final RAIB report to come. Outcomes may affect the re-signalling work for Salisbury and the WoE line, planned for control period CP8 (with further re-signalling work in the Exeter area), so we await developments with interest.

Southampton's Vision

In March, the City Council signalled the start of a three-year Implementation Plan as part of their Local Transport Plan which they've named “Connected Southampton 2040”. The Council has “significant ambitions” for developing a world-class Mass Transit System in Southampton that could, subject to funding, include a roll out of electric buses and an enhanced water taxi service. It could also “support improvements in services that start a move to a higher frequency ‘metro’ level of rail services from our local train stations”.

The Mass Transit System is likely to comprise express bus services with some on-street priority and multi-modal ticketing - it's unlikely to be the comprehensive Light Rail network proposed by Solent LEP back in 2016. But what about the ambition of 'metro' train services for all eight stations in the City?

Southampton's railway carries a mix of local trains and long distance services as well as increasing levels of freight. In places, such as through the city tunnels, there is just one pair of tracks, and the system is already operating at full capacity. An additional east-facing bay platform at Southampton Central would enable Southern services to layover without blocking through platforms – this might allow some hourly services to become half-hourly, but for a 'metro' level of service we should be looking at trains every 15 mins.

Southampton's vision of high-frequency local services would be impossible to accommodate without massive infrastructure works: four tracking, flyovers at junctions and additional platform faces at key stations. Maybe not something we shall live to see!

- Tony Smale

Hampshire County Council's consultation on their Local Transport Plan (LTP4) for the period up to 2050 was launched on 4th April, with an end date for comments of 26th June 2022.

Other News in Brief

Welborne New Town: Councillor Sean Woodward, leader of Fareham Borough Council, was delighted to reveal on his Facebook page in March that the major improvements to Junction 10 of the M27 motorway were now fully funded. He claimed this fulfilled his promise that "not a brick will be laid of Welborne until all of the necessary infrastructure is identified and funding sources confirmed". Commenting on the statement, Railfuture said: "We trust that the new railway station for Welborne is part of the 'necessary infrastructure' that's been identified, and that the funding source for the station has also been confirmed. New residents will want to know there's an alternative to motorway driving when they need to access work, education or leisure facilities". The Councillor subsequently replied to Railfuture: "No it is not" adding "The initial public transport will be bus rapid transit."

SWR's franchise commitment five years ago to reinstate the lifts at **Pokesdown station** has been beset with problems. The project has been widened so that it now includes refurbishment of the pedestrian bridge over the railway and a general modernisation of station facilities; meanwhile the cost has grown to a whopping £5.7m, with SWR and Network Rail contributing £3.1m. In January, Bournemouth Christchurch & Poole (BCP) Council approved the scheme and unlocked funding for the £2.6m shortfall, but there's still no start date ...so weary station users will have to negotiate the 42 steps down to platform level for a little longer.

Wiltshire Council has embarked on a public consultation over its plans to redevelop **Salisbury station** forecourt. Proposed works include enhancing the forecourt area with improved landscaping, street furniture, lighting and wayfinding to encourage tourists and visitors into the city centre, along with more sustainable travel facilities such as bus stops, better access for pedestrians and cyclists and bicycle parking. Improvements would also be made along Fisherton Street which links the station with the City Centre. The overall scheme is being funded by the Council following an award of £9.4m from the Government's Future High Streets Fund.

The £1m upgrade of **Weymouth station** forecourt is now entering its final stages. The resurfaced car park, pedestrian areas and bus stopping bay are taking shape, and work has begun to transform the station end of the former harbour tramway into a linear "railway heritage" park. An attractive foot and cycle path will run through the park, giving easy access to the Jubilee shopping area which lies alongside the railway approaches to the station.

Transformation of the forecourt at **Ryde Esplanade** station is scheduled to start very soon and will provide better travel connectivity as well as a much-improved public space. The transport hub will be reorganised to provide more landscaped pedestrian space and an easier route for buses. There will be a new dedicated cycle route and walkway, plus new seating areas. In addition, a boardwalk will be built on the tramway pier by Wightlink.

The scope of the **Waterside Line** reopening has been scaled back so that it's now planned to reintroduce a passenger service half-hourly between Southampton and Hythe only, instead of all the way to a new park and ride station at Hardley (just short of the refinery gates). But at least this shows the design team is forging ahead with the project and that they are keen not to incur cost overruns. Our Branch view is that we need to get a basic service up and running as soon as possible, so that improvements can then follow on the basis of the initial success.

Sadly, Swanage Railway's trial railway service between **Wareham and Swanage** using their heritage diesel unit will not, after all, run in 2022. This is due to financial uncertainties and delays in obtaining an Operator's Licence caused by the Covid pandemic. Also SWR has ruled out any further trips to Corfe Castle using Class 159 diesel units because these journeys were effectively extensions of their Salisbury-Yeovil-Weymouth service which no longer operates.

The Swanage Railway has still had no feedback from the Department for Transport following the submission last year of their long-term proposals for operating a regular passenger service under the Government's *Restoring Your Railways* process.

Access for All

In February, Railfuture's Infrastructure and Networks Group asked branches to submit their top ten candidates for Access for All funding to achieve step-free access to platforms. The Wessex Branch committee put their thinking caps on and came up with a shortlist based on station patronage, but which also took into account local factors and ensured a wide geographical spread. We decided on:

Dorchester South, Portchester, St Denys, Totton, Branksome, Yeovil Junction,
Shawford, Whitchurch, Hedge End and Ryde St John's Road.

Hopefully Pokesdown is now fully funded (see above) and Swanwick will get lifts as part of a much-discussed park & ride scheme. *Are there other stations we should have included? – please let us know what you think.*

Robin's Freight Roundup

Committee member Robin Attwood keeps abreast of freight movements in our area and reports that...

- Hamworthy Goods is still out of use, although there is talk of a possible recommencement of freight traffic.
- Ludgershall MoD base sees very occasional freight traffic; there has been some rationalisation of track at the Andover end of the branch.
- Marchwood sees some traffic, and on the 23rd March there was a civil engineer's freight working from Llanwern Exchange GBRF to Marchwood MoD GBRF consisting of a 600 tonne trailing load hauled by Class 66 (66781). This loco later ran light engine to Eastleigh East Yard.
- Southampton Eastern docks still sees regular car exports, mainly from BMW Cowley and Jaguar Halewood, with return workings.
- Southampton Western docks and Millbrook remain busy. Eastleigh Eastern yard also remains busy and there are regular movements to/from Arlington (Eastleigh works). Raxstar continues to scrap rolling stock on the site.
- Finally, the former Micheldever oil sidings are regularly used by civil engineer's trains.

Railway Recycling: could do better!

Have you ever wondered what happens to your paper cup and food packaging after dropping it into a litter bag at one of SWR's stations or on the train? Well, despite the contents being a horrible mix of paper, food waste, plastic, glass and aluminium, the whole lot gets collected for sorting at a materials recycling facility by contractors SWR-newstar (the "SWR" in this case stands for Specialist Waste Recycling).

After sorting, a large proportion still ends up in an incinerator, although we would improve the amount recycled if the travelling public could be persuaded to put their waste into separately-labelled bins. It only takes a few misplaced items to render the whole bin-full as "dirty waste". It seems to be a Catch 22 situation: if the public were better educated about the use of separate bins for recyclables, then recycling bins would be provided across the railway network. Until then, we'll keep jumbling it up and they'll keep sorting it out!

Summer Days Out

Why not take the kids for an exciting day out by train, bus and ferry? The new **Waterside Wanderer Day Ranger** ticket is now on sale and means that destinations such as Winchester, Romsey, Southampton, Hamble, Hythe and the New Forest are all accessible for a day trip for only £13.50. This new multi-modal ticket is valid on SWR trains, relevant bus services and the Hythe ferry complete with its vintage pier railway. Buy the ticket from staffed ticket offices at stations in south Hampshire, from the train guard, or in advance from the Rover Ticket menu on SWR's website. For details, pick up a Waterside Wanderer leaflet at stations or see <https://communityrail.org.uk/waterside-wanderer/>

New this summer is a minibus shuttle service connecting Wareham station with the **RSPB's nature reserve at Arne**, which has soared in popularity after being used as a location for BBC's Springwatch programme. Look for "how to get here" details on the RSPB's website under "Arne".

Forthcoming Events

Sat 16 July 2022 Railfuture national Annual General Meeting from 11:00 at St Michael's Church Centre, Stoke Gifford, Bristol (5 mins walk from Bristol Parkway – an easy day trip for most Wessex Branch members).

Thu 21 July 2022 (TBC) Tri-Branch meeting (LSE, Thames Valley and Wessex) with Transport for South East speaker on draft Strategic Investment Plan, launched for consultation on 5 July.

Sat 23 July 2022 IoW Public Transport meeting at the Methodist Church Hall, Quay Street, Newport from 11:00.

Sat 15 Sept 2022 Railfuture Annual Conference at St George's Centre, Leeds. Details: <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/conferences>

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

Chairman mike.southgate@railfuture.org.uk or **Secretary** tony.smale@railfuture.org.uk

Secretary's address: 63 Church Lane, Wool, Wareham BH20 6DD tel 01929 462116

Follow Railfuture Wessex on Facebook. We're also on Twitter [@RailfutureWessx](https://twitter.com/RailfutureWessx)

Railfuture Ltd is a (not for profit) Company Limited by Guarantee. Registered in England and Wales No. 05011634.
Registered Office: Edinburgh House, 1-5 Bellevue Road, Clevedon, North Somerset, BS21 7NP (for legal correspondence only).