

Chairman's Message



I hope you are well in these interesting and challenging times.

At one stage I thought this may be my last Newsletter as Chair after three years and second time around. However, as no one has come forward (and after a very enjoyable social get together with some members of the committee) I have agreed to carry on a bit longer, as have other members of the committee who would also like to stand back a bit more.

All organisations benefit from refresh and we are always on the lookout for members to join the committee or at least to give us your input. We are going to try for more social gatherings normally in the afternoon at Southampton close to the station so if you fancy joining us at one of these to find out more, just let one of the committee know. These would complement occasional zoom meetings which may be more convenient for some members.

One of the issues which has become clear in all my discussions with Rail Operators, Transport Focus and industry commentators is that the DfT and of course the Treasury is very much in control of the rail network. They take the revenue, pay the costs and therefore they have to agree or specify the level of service provided. The level of flexibility given to each TOC seems to vary but it is very minor. As you will read in Stewart Palmer's piece, pleas to increase services to improve rail's attractiveness and encourage passengers back to rail are largely unanswered. The committee is very familiar with my 'does it pass the Mrs S test': i.e. will it get her out of the car and back on trains. To do so requires reliable service, minimal connections and a good quality of comfort - not ironing board seats, non-functioning air conditioning and standing. My regular journeys to Clapham Junction used to take just over an hour with a direct service, it now takes up to an extra 30 minutes and involves three trains. As a result I have now cut back on the number of visits. For Cross Country routes I apologise but I have reverted to the car. I can't cope with a two-hour service which if cancelled means even more hassle. To make change needs more lobbying by Railfuture Wessex members with their MPs. Only they can make the change we need to provide an attractive railway good for the economy and the environment. This is where your committee needs your engagement to write to your MP or local councillors to advocate change. So please join us for our deliberations and actions.

However, before we get too full of doom and gloom there has been small progress on a few fronts following pressure from us with the operators and via Transport Focus. Following a concerted campaign by us supported by other Rf branches, Cross Country Trains (XC) have agreed to reinstate stops on all their trains passing through Winchester. Stops had been omitted from most evening services and one early morning service. Brockenhurst reinstatement is next on our list. Regrettably, whilst we will continue to push, I cannot see the hourly service being reinstated any time soon. The most we can try to achieve is ensuring the every-two-hour service is at least a double unit. I believe Rf nationally should run a UK-wide campaign supporting cross-Britain rail services. I have also suggested that Rf nationally should take a position over rail franchising. This is not a political comment just an observation that, with direct control, what is the benefit of franchising? It is just adding additional cost and complexity to the railways.

On SWR, I had a face-to-face meeting with Phil Dominey, SWR's Senior Regional Development Manager. I have also had a one-to-one Zoom update meeting with the Transport Focus Stakeholder Manager for SWR. I have recorded our irritation and disappointment with the time we, as unpaid volunteers, have spent on the December 2022 timetable consultation which has now been largely abandoned ... although I suspect this is driven by DfT/Treasury constraints. It's heartening that some of the points we raised have been introduced, and others are being looked into. The principal items being pursued are:

- Increasing the number of services peak and off -peak, and that peak-time services should run with the maximum number of coaches.
- Changing Winchester as the terminating/start point for the Bournemouth stopping service to provide better connections to Basingstoke, Reading, Woking, Clapham Junction and London.
- Speeding up Alton Line services.
- Re-instating the second service from Portsmouth Harbour at xx15 which will also ease connection problems with the Isle of Wight.
- Pursuing a number of issues relating to Island Line which Transport Focus are particularly interested in.
- A request for SWR to consider more services to Reading to improve connectivity following Cross Country's reduction.
- The ticket gate issue at Waterloo (see article below).
- Confirmation that ordinarily all daytime and peak trains west of Salisbury will be a minimum of six coaches.
- An update on the roll out programme for the new class 701's on suburban services which does have knock consequences for our area.

Mike Southgate

Jeff Yeoman RIP

We learnt in September that Jeff had passed away after a protracted illness. A Poole resident, Jeff was a huge rail supporter from an early age, and recently shared a video of the former Hamworthy Park miniature railway that he started to drive at the age of 12 in 1968! He had many stories to share and facts to help with our campaigns. Sadly we were unable to meet in person following lockdown, so our last memories of him were on Zoom calls. A card was sent on behalf of Railfuture expressing our condolences to his widow, Helen.

Ticket gate problems at London terminals

Wessex Branch members have had trouble recently trying to get through ticket gates at Waterloo using the return portion of an off-peak ticket.

An off-peak return is only subject to morning peak restrictions for journeys to and from London Waterloo; as there are no equivalent evening peak restrictions, the ticket should open the barrier. Instead, passengers are forced to seek out a member of staff and have their ticket checked manually.



This requirement for a manual inspection may be a consequence of SWR introducing different types of off-peak tickets such as “evening out”, each with different times of validity. Anyone who bought their ticket from a vending machine would be perplexed by the rejection of their return portion at the barrier and perhaps conclude that they need the more-expensive “anytime” return in future. Or they may seek advice from a staffed booking office when buying, which is ironic when the policy seems to be to dispense with sales from ticket windows.

The secretary of Railfuture East Anglia reported similar problems at Paddington ticket barriers when travelling via London on a Cambridge-Reading ticket ... except, in his case, GWR staff both manning the barriers and in the nearby ticket office all wrongly asserted that his ticket was invalid for travel in the evening peak. He took up his case with ticket expert, Barry Doe, who then wrote about it in his column in Rail magazine, deploring the fact that GWR staff are so poorly acquainted with the rules.

Of course the underlying issue here is that fares and tickets types in Britain have become hugely complex, and are quite beyond the understanding of those of us with average intelligence. The long-promised review of fares and ticketing cannot come too soon!

What do we do about Britain's Railways?

A personal view by Stewart Palmer

The rail industry is in a mess. Revenue has collapsed as result of Covid, strikes, poor service and lack of leadership. I know from personal experience and talking to friends that many users have lost faith in the industry to deliver a reliable, consistent, quality product and unless revenue comes in, all the good things that Railfuture wants to see are simply not going to happen. The gap between costs and revenue is not going to be bridged by a government that is desperately looking for savings to balance the UK public finances and who, with some justification, do not believe that rail offers a value for money solution to the transport issues facing the Country.

In the last 7 days as I write this, DfT have abandoned the Rail Carbon Reduction Strategy and it looks increasingly likely that many major rail projects will be cancelled or descoped. There are for example rumours that HS2 will terminate at Old Oak Common instead of Euston and any rolling programme of electrification is probably now dead. The mantra that Great British Railways would solve the leadership issue in the industry is now history. There will be no legislation on a new rail industry structure before 2024, so we are now stuck in a "limbo land" with no strategic direction. By the time you read this article who knows what will have been announced and how many more rail ministers and Secretaries of State for Transport we will have had. Things seem to be moving at a breakneck speed.

It is my personal view that the Government has lost patience with the rail industry and now regards rail as a problem, rather than an opportunity to solve the issues of climate change and road congestion. If one is objective, this is hardly surprising. The economic crisis is forcing government to make hard choices about spending priorities and politicians and the Treasury are asking what value the £14 billion of taxpayer's money that supported the railway through covid has delivered? I fear we are on the verge of recreating a 1970's scenario where cost cutting reduced the attractiveness of rail compared to other modes, which led to lower income, more cost reductions etc. and a spiral of decline. We have been here before!

So, what can Railfuture members do about this? As individuals the answer is honestly probably "not a lot", but as a movement we can influence the debate and make sure that the voice of users is heard, remember we have 20,000 members and affiliated members via Rail User Groups. What we must not do in my view is to simply moan about the changes the Government are making. That will achieve nothing and simply lose what little influence we have. So, my call to all members is get informed about what is going on, get involved in your local RUG, your Railfuture Branch, your CRP and get active in engaging with your local rail managers, local councillors and MP's. We must not argue "that trains are good and cars are bad", we have to show that we are serious players who understand the economic issues and can offer practical value for money solutions to the problems the industry faces. These must put the rail user at the heart of decision making. We can all see things that would make a real difference that actually cost little or nothing. Ultimately rail has to be seen to provide good value for both users and taxpayers. If it does not, it will go the way of canals, airships and coal mines. None of this is easy and it requires effort, but if we sit idly by, my fear is that other more strident voices will drown out the good reasons why rail matters and we will witness a period of stagnation and managed decline of our railway in Britain as we saw in the latter decades of the last century.

Stewart Palmer is a Vice President and Director of Railfuture and spent 38 years working in the rail industry.

Island Line

Stuart George, a resident of Ventnor IoW, has good news and bad news ...

“With the new Island Line timetable from November, the good news is that the first bus from Ventnor now has a 31 min connection onto the train (was previously 1 min); the bad news is that it's the next train so connects with the FastCat an hour later arriving at Waterloo at 09.55 instead of 08.54, also that the last train to Shanklin now has no bus connection shown to Ventnor as it runs 25 mins later (those in the know can walk 1 min to the Atherley Road stop for a very good connection, but Island Line don't bother to tell you that).”

In a line closure between Ryde Esplanade and Ryde Pier Head, which began on Sunday 30 October and ends in Spring 2023, Network Rail engineers will strengthen the 686m-long pier and extend its life by up to 60 years. SWR will also be carrying out work at the same time, making efficient use of the closure.

West of England Line

Our representative on the WoE line, Bruce Duncan, reports that the excessively hot weather in the summer left the embankment between Gillingham (Dorset) and Tisbury shrinking and cracking. This made the track uneven with trains unable to travel at full speed. A temporary speed restriction ensued which led to an emergency timetable restricting through services to Exeter to 2-hourly. For the duration of the emergency timetable, the overall journey time between Waterloo and Exeter increased to 4h 22m – an average speed of about 34 mph! Rail users found that they were unable to print out timetables in advance as SWR could only finalise the weekday timetable (after consulting Network Rail) on the Friday of the preceding week.

Well, now we've had plenty of rain putting an end to the shrinking of embankments, and Network Rail has at last been able to level and re-ballast the track and lift the severe speed restrictions. This has enabled the full timetable to be restored for 14th November – hooray! Despite all the disruption caused by rail strikes and speed restrictions, passenger loadings have been much higher than anticipated; clearly our passengers love this line! During the emergency, it was particularly helpful that SWR boosted almost all services as far as Exeter to 6-car length throughout the day.



Bruce also tells us that the work to get Devon Metro enhancements funded has continued positively, with Devon County Council funding the Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC). The proposed improvements involve building new passing loops at Cranbrook and Whimple as well as extending Honiton's passing loop (all recommended in Network Rail's "CMSP" study). The SOBC should be concluded by December 2022, then on to the next stages: the Outline Business Case, the full Business Case and finally inclusion in the Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline (RNEP). What a lot of paperwork!!

Further up the line, Network Rail is also making progress with plans for a passing loop and additional westbound platform at Tisbury (on the left in the picture). Again, a long way to go, but the requirement for this was another outcome of Network Rail's CMSP study.

SWR have published their decarbonisation plan which includes ideas for replacing the life-expired Class 158/159 diesel units on the West of England line. Options under consideration range from full electrification to battery/electric units with lineside charging points, or possibly hydrogen power. The Salisbury-Exeter Rail Users' Group responded (see website www.serug.co.uk), questioning many aspects of the decarbonisation plan and regretting that high-level studies of this nature are unlikely to lead to the delivery of much-needed replacements for the 158/9 units any time soon.

Waterside Line progress

Nick Farthing, Chair of the Three Rivers Community Rail Partnership, informs us that “the proposed reopening of the Waterside Line as part of the Government Restoring your Railway programme, has moved a little further to hoped-for fruition.

“The recent Network Rail public consultation received a high number of online and handed-in replies, with a large percentage supporting the reopening of the branch to passenger services. Network Rail will present their findings by the end of November, with a hopeful urgency to take the scheme forwards. Details to follow soon.

“There will undoubtedly be a few more delays on the way, especially with the projected funding cuts likely from Government. We will need to be aware as matters emerge. However, with the Freeport status for the Solent region, the new jobs this will create that cannot cope without the railway, and other developments already underway and in the pipeline, now is the time for this railway renaissance to be fulfilled.

“As part of the latest moves towards reopening, we hope to run “Fawley Forester II” in the near future, utilising SWR rolling stock - watch this space for updates.” Website: <https://threeriversrail.com/>

You can read the Wessex Branch response to Network Rail’s consultation here:
https://www.railfuture.org.uk/Consultation-responses#Network_Rail

TfSE Strategic Investment Plan

Transport for the South East published their draft Strategic Investment Plan in the summer, and Wessex Branch contributed views and observations to Railfuture London & South East, who in turn responded to the online questionnaire. Most of the area cover by the “TfSE” sub-national transport body lies in Railfuture’s L&SE area, but it also includes Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, and stretches up to Berkshire in Railfuture’s Thames Valley area.

In reviewing TfSE’s document, we compiled a table of all the proposed rail improvements for the Wessex Branch area, adding our comments alongside. We were able to write “strongly support” against most of the rail proposals, but in some cases such as “Cosham station relocation” we questioned the rationale for the scheme as no explanation was given.

TfSE’s most radical proposal was for a new city-centre station in Southampton and a rail tunnel beneath the River Itchen linking it to Woolston. The local press had gleefully picked up on this, saying it would be “akin to London’s tube network” – Whoa, steady on guys! We can see that this innovation would solve congestion in the city and speed Portsmouth-Southampton journey times. But there is not the slightest chance that central government would fund such a scheme without a major revision of the nation’s spending priorities.

Another instructive exercise was to identify rail development schemes that had been proposed elsewhere in living memory, but which were absent from TfSE’s document. Possibly TfSE planners were coming to the table with fresh eyes ... but Railfuture members have been around the block a few times! We can recall John Prescott’s Multi Modal Studies and a plethora of Local Transport Plans from our county councils and unitary authorities stretching back over three or four decades. We think the TfSE sub-national transport body should revisit perfectly sensible proposals from these past studies. For example, new stations had once been mooted for Farlington and West Leigh, and a new rail connection to either Alton or Liss was to be a planning requirement for the Whitehill-Bordon “green village” development. Where are they now?

For some transport corridors lacking rail connections or regular bus services, the TfSE planners resorted to proposing “Bus Mass Transit” as a preferred solution. Well, fair enough where there’s a road network with the capacity for bus lanes and junction improvements. But “Bus Mass Transit” was also proposed for the Isle of Wight, which as we all know comprises small communities interconnected by narrow, winding country lanes. The planners need to come over and ride the Island buses for a few days, then tell us where they propose to build their rapid transit corridors!

Other News in brief

In the Conservative Government's latest re-incarnation, Forest of Dean MP **Mark Harper** has succeeded Anne-Marie Trevelyan as Secretary of State for Transport, and Bexhill MP **Huw Merriman** has been appointed as Minister of State with specific responsibility for rail.

A year has passed since the funding package of £5.7m was put together for the accessibility improvements at **Pokesdown station**, but work has yet to begin. There's concern that, after the administration change at Bournemouth Christchurch & Poole Council, and in view of the Council's unstable finances, their share of the funding would be syphoned off into other projects – but the Council have given an assurance that they remain committed to the project, adding “our partners are busy progressing with detailed design”.

At the 2022 Community Rail Awards in Manchester (6 Oct), Hampshire Community Rail Partnership and Winchester *Go LD* were awarded second place in the “Involving Diverse Groups” category for their “Winchester *Go LD* - Try the Train” initiative. (LD = Learning Disabilities)



Third prize in the “Most Enhanced Railway Spaces” category at the Manchester event went to Solent Remade for their “Havant’s Community Space Promoting Repair, Reuse and Active Travel” project, set up in an empty room at Havant Station (pictured).

Railfuture Wessex Branch was instrumental in finding an enthusiastic contractor to carry out renovation of the former taxi office at Havant station for Solent Remade (and for other Hampshire Community Rail Partnership projects at Petersfield, Woolston and Sholing stations).

We also need to congratulate staff and volunteers at **Shanklin Station**, winner of the Small Station of the Year Award at the National Rail Awards held in London on 10th October 2022.

Southampton City Council's £18.5m investment plan for transport improvements at various places around the city has, at last, been given the go-ahead. It includes a remodelling of the transport interchange outside Southampton Central Station with new bus stops, taxi facilities and bicycle parking spaces.

The **Port of Southampton** is investing £17.5m in a major upgrade of its rail terminal. A further 150 metres will be added to the rail loading pad, and a new track layout will enable trains to arrive and depart independently on any of the three lines.

Although there was tracklaying activity on the **Hamworthy freight branch** earlier this year, the branch remains out of use. There are rumours of clay imports from France making use of the line.

Great Western Railway customers delayed by 15 minutes will now be automatically informed of their right to claim compensation. The train operator's new Automatic Delay Repay service covers all Advance tickets bought online from GWR and used on GWR services, and automatically calculates and notifies customers who are due compensation. Advance ticket holders will be notified by email and simply need to log into their Delay Repay account to accept the claim.

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.

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