

## **THAMES VALLEY BRANCH Newsletter 86 February 2015**

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### **Annual General Meeting at Oxford on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> April 2015**

The Branch AGM will be held at the West Oxford Community Centre, Botley Road, Oxford, OX2 0BT at 10.30am on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> April 2015.

Our guest speaker will be Adrian Shooter CBE, Chairman of Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership. Adrian's long and successful railway career culminated with the Chairmanship of Chiltern Railways which he took over in 1996. He will give us a wide ranging talk based on his experiences at Chiltern and give us his views of how we go forward from here in the Thames Valley area particularly in view of the growth of LEPS and devolved power structures and how Railfuture and pressure groups can influence these outcomes.

Details of the venue and how to get there can be found here:- <http://www.woca.org.uk/> The Centre is just a few minutes walk from the station on the north side of the Botley Road opposite St Frideswide Church.

We look forward to seeing many of you there.

### **Summary of Branch Meeting in Reading on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2014. Speaker: George Bathurst MD of the Windsor Link Railway Company.**

Introducing the proposal he pointed out that Windsor is poorly served by rail and over 90% of visitors arrive by road. Slough has 39 destinations that can be reached by rail without a change, compared to Windsor's 14 and Slough has 18tph compared to Windsor's 6tph.

Phase One of the scheme would be to connect the two stations by tunnel with Waterloo trains running to Slough (3<sup>rd</sup> rail) with a park & ride station at Chalvey with about 1000 spaces which is a very short distance from an M4 junction. The Benefit to Cost Ratio is greater than 2. The two stations are about 300 yards apart and 40ft in height difference. The tunnel would be under roads and car parks only with a 250yd station box open to the air above. There would be no damage to listed buildings or green spaces and it would regenerate the riverside area of the town which is neglected at present compared to for example Richmond. Flood resilience at the Riverside end would be improved. The bay platform at Slough could be extended for 12 car trains.

The bridge over the Thames on the Slough line is Grade 2\* listed and the oldest iron bridge still in regular use. The disused section of raised line approaching Central station would become a green linear park.

The line would allow for many new journey opportunities avoiding London such as Slough – Guildford. As well as 2 tph Slough – Waterloo there could also be 2tph Slough – Staines.

Proposed timescale: planning permission 2016, Transport & Works Act Order 2018, "shovel ready" 2020, open 2022.

Phase two would be a branch from the Staines – Windsor line near Wraysbury to Heathrow. Mr Bathurst claims this would be cheaper than WRATH or Airtrack with a better business case and a BCR of 4.5. During the subsequent discussion it was felt that we would concentrate our support on phase one. See <http://windsorlink.co.uk/> for more.

## **Chairman's Comment**

My first thoughts are to urge members, if they can, to come to the AGM. Adrian Shooter, a Railfuture Vice-President and former Chairman of Chiltern Railways, will talk to us and I have no doubt it will be informative and will offer a good chance to ask any questions. Please feel free to bring anyone else who is interested along. We must not forget it was the "can do" attitude of Chiltern in re-doubling to Bicester that has in part led to the renewed confidence in rail investment in recent times. It gave the Rail Lobby *credibility*.

I attended a "consultation" session in Wolvercote this month, into a bridge renewal, and it became very clear that anti-rail misinformation continues to cloud perceptions with all except a handful worrying about vibration and noise. Railfuture has a big job to do in getting the truth across. In contrast I would say that the Network Rail consultation at Stoke Mandeville barely caused a ripple.

Media coverage of the Harbury landslip has featured the benefits of a re-opened Avon Link (the line between Honeybourne and Stratford) as a diversionary route; I noticed *Rail* magazine put it on a map in the latest issue.

## **Railfuture Awayday**

The branch was represented by our Chairman at an awayday in Birmingham on 11<sup>th</sup> October. This brought together key members of Railfuture to identify ways of increasing membership and increasing the effectiveness of how Railfuture operates. Details will appear in *Railwatch* and on the Railfuture website. One of the key subjects raised was the interaction between the Branches and the National Committee and the Groups and the Branches. Another was how to increase membership and be more demographically representative. Also covered were how to raise our media profile and publicise our campaigning as well as how to achieve greater involvement such as attending meetings etc and maintaining effective engagement with our stakeholders.

## **Railfuture Freight Group meeting**

The Freight Group will have a meeting of their committee at the West Oxford Community Centre (same venue as our AGM – see above) on Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> April from 1300-1630 and would welcome any of our members to attend. This would be of interest to anyone wishing to gain an insight into the workings of a Railfuture Group and/or our freight campaigning.

## **Witney Oxford Transport Group (WOT)**

Members of the Group had a meeting with OCC's consultants (URS) late last year. URS gave presentations about the possibilities for re-instating heavy rail along the old trackbed and the technical complexities of putting in bus lanes or a guided bus system alongside the A40 itself. These include the need to put in new drainage and issues relating to clearances (e.g. for wing mirrors) alongside a road with the national speed limit (60mph).

In view of this feedback, WOT decided to proactively lobby for heavy rail solutions, starting in the short term with development and extension of car parking adjacent to Hanborough station, associated with the planned local track re-doubling and a better direct road link from the A40, to create a P&R, potentially offering a cross-city rail shuttle if the Cowley branch can be re-opened for passengers.

In the longer term, the proposal would be for a new Parkway station on the north Cotswold line, near to the site of the old Yarnton Junction station. Initially the old Witney branch trackbed could be used for road access to the Parkway but then rail track could be progressively laid along the route west via new P&R sites (e.g. at Eynsham, east Witney, etc.). This incremental approach follows that which has enabled extensions of the Manchester and other metro systems. By the time this approach along the old route gets under way, it could well be that tram-train technology will be better established in the UK and could be used to create access from Witney/Carterton to other parts of the city region (e.g. JR hospital and science campuses to the east, as well as Oxford Parkway station on the Chiltern line). As well as relief for the A40, a Yarnton Parkway station would also provide direct access to the rail network for residents of Yarnton itself, a village experiencing significant housing growth.

The next review meeting with Oxfordshire County Council is now awaited.

To contact WOT: Web: [www.witneyoxfordtransport.org.uk](http://www.witneyoxfordtransport.org.uk) Facebook: [www.facebook.com/witneyoxfordtransport](http://www.facebook.com/witneyoxfordtransport)  
Twitter: @witneyoxtransp Post: WOT Witney Oxford Transport, 25 Pockocks Close, Bampton, OX18 2JY

## **Chiltern – EWR Update**

The Oxford – Bicester – London project remains within budget and it is still likely it will achieve the 6<sup>th</sup> September 2015 public opening date. Progress on the ground is good and momentum was maintained during January. With Oxford Parkway station building now water tight, construction of the lift shafts has begun. Islip station foundations have been poured while at Bicester Town the new station building steelwork is taking shape. More details of the service are available: there will be no ticket offices at new stations but there will be brand new technology for purchasing tickets. Oxford Parkway will have ticket gates but not Islip or Bicester Town. Ticket easement will be in place enabling Islip tickets to be used to Oxford Parkway if train is not stopping at Islip. Oxford Parkway & Bicester Town platforms will accommodate a maximum length of 9-car trains with 8-cars at Islip although initial services will start with 3 - 4 cars. Works are planned to be completed by this August to allow driver-training trips to operate before opening as planned in September. Before Chiltern can extend services from Oxford Parkway to Oxford in March 2016, they need Oxford re-signaling Phase 1 to have been completed and Network Rail originally programmed it for commissioning in February 2016, but have recently confirmed it will be delayed.

Negotiations are ongoing with Network Rail to give Chiltern access to Oxford station from March 2016 despite the Oxford re-signaling scheme not now having been completed by this date. A viable proposal has been tabled that would be a blend of new and old track layouts, changes to the timetable planning rules, and a lot of detailed train planning and performance mitigation work.

Chiltern would ideally like to start EWR phase 2 services to Milton Keynes from 2017 as originally planned, but NR want to do all the electrification work first, therefore delaying the reopening to 2019. There is also a Transport and Works Act Order needed to cover places where the Claydon - Bletchley trackbed deviates from that authorised in the original Act of Parliament.

Five class 170 units from Trans Pennine Express will arrive with Chiltern in May 2015 for conversion to class 168/3 'clubmans' with tables etc. in time for services commencing to Oxford Parkway in September. The remaining four class 170 units will stay with TPE until being transferred south in time for modification work prior to Chiltern services reaching Oxford.

Lengthening of the down platform at High Wycombe should commence soon.

Railfuture's East Anglia Branch has published a report into options for the Bedford – Cambridge EWR route which is available here: <http://www.railfuture.org.uk/ox-cam/docs/Railfuture-OxCam-Cambridge-Bedford-Route-Options-2nd-Ed.pdf>

### **Cowley**

On 5th November a special Chiltern train was operated over the branch line to Cowley. This was designed to demonstrate to stakeholders the potential for services to extend beyond Oxford to prospective new stations at Oxford Science Park and Oxford Business Park. The coverage and feedback has been positive. To maintain momentum Chiltern are convening a Project Board comprising key individuals with access to the powers required to make the prospect a reality. Meanwhile Chiltern's research into the potential demand for the proposed new service is nearing a conclusion. Services could start in 2020 and the branch promoted this at the Oxford Green Fair in December.

### **High Wycombe - Bourne End**

A planning application to build 22 houses in the formation at Bourne End has been refused. This is good news for any future re-opening but of course could still be overturned at appeal.

### **Maidenhead - Marlow**

First Great Western and Network Rail are actively pursuing installing an additional crossover at Bourne End so the service can expand to 2tph and the Buckinghamshire Thames Valley LEP have agreed a £1.6 million contribution to achieve this aim. At the moment the 2tph trains in the morning peak involve two shuttles: one Maidenhead to Bourne End and one Marlow to Bourne End, with a change at Bourne End. This crossover would be a great step forward in improving the branch line service and FGW may follow this with investigation into extending the service to High Wycombe.

### **Harbury landslip**

Following the landslip at Harbury, closing the line between Banbury and Leamington Spa on 31<sup>st</sup> January, on 17<sup>th</sup> February Network Rail announced that it would reopen by 2<sup>nd</sup> April, just in time for Easter. Chiltern, perhaps

predictably, making a virtue of necessity have gone to great lengths to retain traffic with the road service branded “step straight on”, running almost the full service either side of Banbury/Leamington and extra coaches to/from Warwick Parkway in the peaks and offering the Banbury fare to London for passengers from north of the blockage. Cross Country seem less proactive and are running only hourly south of Banbury. Local media coverage has reflected on the inconvenience of the reduction in Banbury – Oxford frequencies and inevitably has made no reference to the potentially more serious consequences of the disruption on freight, especially the time sensitive Southampton container traffic.

### Cotswold Line

It now seems likely the doubling of the whole line will be put forward for the next control period (CP6). It is clear that slab tracking Campden Tunnel for greater clearance should now be lobbied for following Harbury.

**Hanborough**- First Group have asked the local Planning Department to protect the field to the west of the Station in a submission for village development; this we welcome. Hanborough is one of the fastest growing stations on the Great Western. Slowly a plan is emerging for a major transport interchange. Vegetation clearance gives an idea of the space available at the station; the issue of a dynamic loop is a matter for the GW franchise extension.

**Kingham** - Work has recently involved trial bores for the bridge; parking remains an issue.

**Worcester Parkway** - Work is to commence in the spring, and the new station will have platforms on the NE-SW lines below from day one. Local politicians have expressed support for limited stop services to Oxford; this branch has pointed out that the core revenue drivers on the Cotswold Line are to its southern end.

### Bay Platforms at Oxford

Our Secretary was extensively quoted in a front page spread in the Oxford Mail welcoming the new platforms; the branch has now written to the planners in support (it is permitted development so cannot be refused). The plans can be seen on Oxford City Council’s Planning Site.

Clearly resignalling and new platforms will be very challenging to get completed by 2016.

### Banbury Resignalling

Work has now started on the 22 month Banbury resignalling scheme at a cost of £40m by Siemens Rail Automation. A major benefit is a new through up platform 4. The new maintenance depot will be built on the site of the former steam shed. There will be improved headways to Aynho Junction and re-control of Leamington Spa; other work includes faster turnouts to the north of the station, and a new crossover for the stone depot.

### Photos



Richard Stow

Our stand at the Oxford Green Fair, 6<sup>th</sup> December 2014.



Andrew McCallum

Harbury landslip work under way, 17<sup>th</sup> February 2015.



Both: John Elvin

Bridge survey work between Claydon & Bletchley. Bicester Town station showing new platform construction.



Both: John Elvin

View west at Bicester Town showing new MOD junction. Islip station site showing new platform foundations.



Both: Andrew McCallum

Oxford Parkway station site on 5<sup>th</sup> Feb. New south – east chord works viewed from on the 0855 Banbury – Bournemouth Cross Country train on 18<sup>th</sup> February on the new flyover at Reading.

Edited by Andrew McCallum with contributions from Richard Stow, John Elvin, Nigel Rose & Nigel Phillips.