

### **AUTUMN CONFERENCE 2015**

### **BRISTOL - MERCURE HOTEL**

*Railfuture* holds two national conferences a year for pro-rail campaigners, rail users and the public. This report gives a summary of the information presented by the seven guest speakers.



Notes taken by Nigel Bray. Formatting by Jerry Alderson.

This conference also saw the awarding of prizes to Rail User Groups at the fourth annual RUG Awards that are organised by Railfuture and judged by its Vice Presidents, who are some of the leading figures in the rail industry. The awards are open to all groups in Britain who must be nominated by someone. In addition there is a special judges' award for any individual or group that has achieved great success.



Details of Railfuture's future and past conferences can be found at [www.railfuture.org.uk/conferences](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/conferences)

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## **COUNCILLOR SIMON COOK - ASSISTANT MAYOR OF BRISTOL**

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The 125 delegates to Railfuture's autumn conference were welcomed to Bristol by **Councillor Simon Cook, Assistant Mayor**, whose portfolio included transport. He said he was encouraged by the enthusiasm and knowledge of transport campaigners. Referring to disappointed aspirations for the Henbury loop, he said he wanted to see the scheme happen. "I wish the Department for Transport's methodology was more flexible but we have to abide by it and see what we can deliver. It's important to have constructive criticism which will help make this city's transport better. We politicians and the Joint Transport Executive Board (JTEB) are seen as the enemy but we are your friends and want to see these schemes delivered."



## **MATTHEW GOLTON, COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR GREAT WESTERN RAILWAY**

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Matthew Golton, who was speaking only a few weeks after the company's change of name (from First Great Western), said that the rebranding back to the historical name had been First Group's own decision. The Direct Award of the GW Franchise would last until 1 April 2019, with the possibility of a one-year extension, because GW route modernisation was ongoing.

Electrification of the Great Western Mainline (and linked routes) would be a challenge for GWR because nearly all its train crews would need to train in new traction. Train services would be enhanced in three phases during the Direct Award. In the first phase, the North Cotswold line would see improvements from December 2015 and GWR would operate its first EMUs between Paddington and Hayes from May 2016.

The second phase (Service Level Commitment 1) from May 2017, subject to delivery of promised enhancements by Network Rail, would see full deployment of the EMU fleet in the Thames Valley; more trains on the North Downs line; and EMUs displacing HSTs on services from Paddington to Oxford and Newbury. At the same time most of the Class 16x fleet would be redeployed to the Bristol area, with most Cardiff-Portsmouth services becoming 5-car formations. There would also be a major expansion of GWR's Exeter depot.

The final phase (SLC2) would take effect in December 2018, when all the Super Express Trains (SETs) would be in service, with all their peak workings formed of 9 or 10 cars. The bi-modal AT300 trains serving non-electrified main lines would enter service in May 2018 "and can cope with the Devon banks."

Matthew Golton outlined some of GWR's programmes to enhance services in partnership with local authorities. It was recruiting more staff to deal with these projects. GWR's Customer & Community Involvement Fund was designed to increase the outreach of the railway. It was currently considering a TransWilts Community Rail

Partnership proposal for more walking routes to Melksham station.

The Devon Strategy involved working with Devon County Council to deliver Devon Metro and Tavistock reopening. The latter might well become Phase 1 of the Northern Route between Exeter and Plymouth and should also transform local travel into Plymouth. The Cornwall Rail Package, which would result in resignalling and half-hourly services on the Cornish main line, was being developed thanks to a very enlightened Council and Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). With 13 of the 39 LEPs on the GWR network, there were many opportunities in prospect, among them Metro West Phase 3 and beyond.

## **JAMES FREEMAN, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, FIRST WEST OF ENGLAND**

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James Freeman gave an entertaining talk entitled “Bus and rail integration - the busman’s perspective.” He explained that FWE served the four unitary authorities of Greater Bristol and also West Wiltshire, which together represented the Bristol- Bath economic region. The territory had a very strong employment base, with a higher proportion of its population in work than London, and was a net exporter of wealth to the rest of the UK.



“Bus and rail are complementary but not everyone sees it that way”, he said. After discussing the strengths and limitations of the two modes, he considered that integration needed to be tackled through three angles: geographical, informational and psychological.

The geographical approach involved improving interchange between trains and buses at or near railway stations. He gave examples of good interchanges at Bath, Bristol Parkway and Clifton Down, describing the last-mentioned as “a good way to the top end of the city.” Bristol Temple Meads was not so good, although the Mendip Explorer service linking Bristol with Wells, Glastonbury and Street went past the station approach and now ran half-hourly.

In his previous post as General Manager of Reading Buses, James Freeman had developed the informational approach by giving each route its own distinctive livery. This helped people to realise that their local bus route also went to Reading station. He was trying a similar tactic with the brightly liveried FWE services 70 and 71, which link Temple Meads with the University of the West of England. Route 70 was now a 24-hour service.

The psychological approach included development of ticketing to improve the travelling experience. An Area Freedom ticket covering both bus and rail had been introduced and the next step would be to create a Bristol Urban Area ticket. In Reading, buses displayed current train information on nearing the station.

He summed up by saying that passengers were looking for an improvement in their end to end mobility, not just to one part or mode of a journey.

## **JAMES WHITE, TRANSPORT & RAIL CO-ORDINATOR, WEST OF ENGLAND LEP**

James White explained that the JTEB was the decision making body which would prioritise devolved DfT funding. All transport projects had to satisfy an Assurance Framework of criteria including affordability and deliverability.

Metro West Phase 1 would provide half-hourly train services to Portishead, Severn Beach, Keynsham and Oldfield Park. The capital cost would be £58.2 m, of which £57.7 m was in place. It was anticipated that Stage 4 of Network Rail's GRIP (Governance for Rail Infrastructure) process would be reached in 2016. The Benefit / Cost Ratio (BCR) was estimated at between 2.28 and 5.99, well above the threshold for DfT funding but an annual subsidy of £1.14 m to £1.77 m was predicted to be required. He did not believe the services would break even, at least not in the first three years.

The Development Consent Order process for Phase 1 is currently underway. This process is intended to demonstrate that objectors' concerns have been met.

WEP would like Portishead station to be an iconic building at the meeting point of roads from the three main housing areas in the town. At Pill the currently trackless platform would be restored to use, the aim being to segregate freight and passenger trains as much as possible. For the same reason, Pill viaduct would be widened and the junction at Parson Street would be doubled. The down relief line at Bedminster might be reinstated for freight traffic.

Phase 2 of Metro West would include a half-hourly services to Henbury and Yate from Temple Meads plus a station at Ashley Down. The capital cost would be £43.1 m. Extension to Gloucester was still an option because it would save pointwork at Yate. Gloucestershire County Council was providing funding to support the case. The project has reached GRIP 3 stage with an estimated BCR of 3.21. A subsidy requirement of £3.7 m was predicted for the first three years but the service was predicted to break even in 10 years, with 600,000 journeys forecast for 2031.

Two possible sites for Henbury station would be consulted on in late November 2015. Nothing in the scheme would prejudice extension of the Henbury spur service to a loop.

The WEP New Stations Package, which could allow stations to open at Ashton Gate, Portway and Saltford as and when funding became available and subject to a business case, was not part of either Phase 1 or 2 but Portway might open before 2019. Two key points guiding WEP's plans were: how would any rail scheme serve housing and employment growth ?; and how would it tackle existing transport challenges ?

### ***Morning Question and Answer session***

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Asked whether the Bristol-Weymouth route would be getting more frequent services and more rolling stock, Matthew Golton replied that GWR hoped to increase services on the route and was considering its future rolling stock.

One frequent traveller referred to the reduced space for cycles on the new Hitachi

trains and to the claim in *Railnews* that the cost of GW electrification would be “unbelievable”. Matthew Golton agreed that the new IC trains would have less space for cycles but said GWR was promoting rail / cycle integration at stations, eg 300 additional cycle spaces at Cheltenham. It was now clear that electrification schedules may be delayed, because Reading- Didcot was originally to have been energised in late 2015. Progress would depend on Network Rail and the decision of the Secretary of State.

A member of ASLEF’s Bristol branch expressed concern about the removal of guards and buffet counters from the new IEP trains. He also asked why 25 buses per hour using Filton Avenue did not call at Filton Abbey Wood station. Matthew Golton replied that the new IC trains to work on GWR would not have buffets because the body shells had already been built without them. GWR’s research had shown that passengers preferred to be served at their seats. There would be no reduction in the roles or competencies of Train Managers on GWR “but we want them to serve customers instead of just controlling doors.” James Freeman said the problem at places like Filton Abbey Wood was that diverting buses to serve stations risked losing passengers who didn’t want to go there.

In reply to a question about the timescale for implementing Metro West, James White said WEP would like progress to be faster but Phase 1 GRIP Stage 3 alone involved over 200 technical drawings. He had hoped Portway station could have avoided all the GRIP processes but at least it was now at GRIP Stage 2.

## **RAILFUTURE’S ANNUAL RAIL USER GROUP AWARDS**

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Before lunch, the Railfuture Annual Rail User Group Awards were presented by the Railfuture President, **Christian Wolmar**, who is a well-known transport commentator and prolific author.

Details of the winners can be found at [www.railfuture.org.uk/RUG+Awards](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/RUG+Awards).

## **CHRISTINA BIGGS SECRETARY, FRIENDS OF SUBURBAN BRISTOL RAILWAYS (FoSBR)**

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Christina Briggs explained that the rail user’s campaign group had been founded in 1995 by Julie Boston. Pointing out that FoSBR had conceived the idea of a Greater Bristol Metro, Christina said, “We are fully behind Metro West and not heckling from the sidelines. You need dreams to drive developments. We are the cheerleaders offering encouragement and constructive criticism.”

After arguing for the retention of guards on trains, she said it was important to criticise the business cases put forward by consultants and not just accept their conclusions.

Metro West would provide much faster and more convenient cross-city travel than by bus. She believed the problem with the Henbury loop to be that the journey time for the complete circuit would be just over an hour and this would require an additional train to achieve a half-hourly service.

FosBR was planning an outing to Newcourt station, which had opened this summer on the Exmouth branch, and which had been built because of a Government stipulation that a station was required to serve a critical amount of new housing.

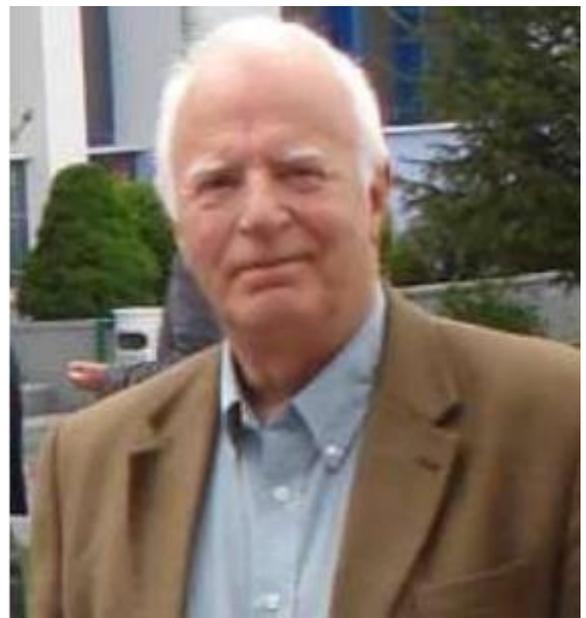
FoSBR was keen to see Ashton Gate station reopened and would like to see work done on the likely usage from football matches and stadium Conferences; how the station might be funded and what special trains could be run for special events.

The group also wanted to forge closer links with other RUGs in the South West. It had recently visited Pilning, currently served by just one train each way on Saturdays only. The party used the train in both directions to help understand the case for a meaningful train service.

### **JOHN PARRY, CHAIRMAN, PARRY PEOPLE MOVERS LTD**

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Making a welcome return to a Railfuture conference, John Parry said tram systems had achieved spectacular local success "but have also consumed spectacular amounts of money." He did not expect a return to the 200 or so networks which once existed in the UK. "We would be doing well to reach double figures."



In a parody of the phrase sometimes used to justify bus-only solutions to transport problems, he said, "A bus that thinks it's a tram is a bit like trying to teach a hen to quack." He added that "bendy buses have not lasted long. They have clogged up streets and could gridlock a whole city. They cost 50 % more per passenger capacity than a conventional bus."

He believed that "the intermediate mode between heavy rail, bus and super tram draws on the best of all three." He said the success of rail transport was its predictability. "Youngsters like it because they can use hand held devices while travelling. Trains in the West Midlands are packed. A platform full of people might be waiting to join a packed train. This is not Tokyo, it's Rowley Regis." The crisis of suburban rail travel was of trying to find ways of building more capacity. Some corridors could be found utilising lanes of three-lane roads.

John Parry said that in rural areas, roads and buses worked well in winter but not in the tourist season. He considered that many former railways in the South West could be reinstated but without the heavily engineered infrastructure or the same regulatory requirements as the national system.

The Class 139 60-seat PPM vehicles had now carried 6 million passengers on the Stourbridge Town branch in six years. "They use a quarter of the energy of an equivalent bus service."

After showing TV clips of an earlier 32-seat PPM vehicle running on the Bristol

Harbour Railway in 1999, he said he believed there had been “a conspiracy of slowness in which so-called experts compete to string out the processes for building anything.” He blamed the Coalition Government for instigating studies such as the McNulty Report and a Light Rail report instead of doing anything radical.

“What we don’t want is Supertram costs but (rail vehicles with) the informality and low construction costs of a bus. We must reopen lines by whatever means we can.”

### **PETER WAKEFIELD, CHAIRMAN, RAILFUTURE EAST ANGLIA BRANCH**

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Very experienced rail campaigner, Peter Wakefield, who has been active in Railfuture for several decades, began by commenting on the title his talk had been given, “East Anglia shows the way”. Despite Railfuture East Anglia being very active in all forms of rail campaigning, he thought that the branch (which dates back to 1972) had as much to learn from the West of England as vice-versa.



His advice on campaigning discussed working with the various decision-making bodies which could affect the outcome. “Don’t waste your time unless the scheme is in the Local Transport Plan (LTP) in some form but these can be updated or changed. Write to Councillors to get additions to the LTP. Get to know the Councillors and officers with transport influence. LEPs by and large are very positive.” He added that petitions were not a waste of time, pointing out that Railfuture East Anglia had collected thousands of signatures online and on paper from residents in Wisbech – a medium-sized but poor town in Cambridgeshire – and this had dramatically raised the profile of the campaign to reopen the town’s railway, which is now supported by the Prime Minister.

Massive growth of employment and housing was planned for Cambridge, Colchester, Ipswich and Norwich. 10 million journeys per year were being made at Cambridge station and all routes leading to it were very busy. Cambridgeshire County Council’s initial response to forecast growth in population and industry had been “endless plans for guided busways” but Railfuture had managed to get rail schemes into the Greater Cambridge City Deal. Another Railfuture campaign success had been the Bacon Factory curve, recently opened to enable freight trains from Felixstowe to reach the Midlands without the need to reverse at Ipswich.

Demographic changes were raising the importance of regional centres such as Cambridge, Ipswich, Norwich, Bristol and Exeter. This in turn was creating a need for better transport links from market towns, which in the Cambridge area included Ely, Haverhill and Newmarket. “We need to factor this into our campaigning.”

Wisbech had a current population of 33,000 but an average life expectancy seven years lower than in Cambridge, where the overheated economy had resulted in very high house prices. There was virtually no commuting from Wisbech to Cambridge because the town lacked a railway and the journey took two hours by car in the peak. Studies had estimated that two trains per hour from Wisbech would produce a BCR of 4. Social media had promoted the reopening plan because young people trapped in Wisbech wanted to escape.

The County Council would be funding the proposed Cambridge North station, which

would serve the Science Park. There were now plans for a Cambridge South station serving another science park and Addenbrooke's Hospital. Rail was an ideal way to get people to Cambridge's dispersed workplaces. The Wisbech scheme had now reached GRIP Stage 3 and the LEPs had paid for the brochure, *Wisbech 2020 Vision*, which was circulated at the Conference.

Haverhill had been designated a New Town in the 1960s at the time when its railway was closed. Its current population of 25,000 lay on the border of three counties. A campaign leaflet had been distributed to every home in the town.

Railfuture produced *A Rail Prospectus for East Anglia* in 2014. It called for more comfortable rolling stock and faster InterCity journeys, such as Norwich- London in 90 minutes. The Prospectus, which regarded Cambridge as the region's economic powerhouse, was submitted to DfT by the LEP with a view to influencing the next franchise. Noting that more people were travelling from Ely to Cambridge by train than by car because of the frequent service, Railfuture had proposed a Greater Cambridge Metro.

### **GERARD DUDDRIDGE, CHAIRMAN, RAILFUTURE DEVON & CORNWALL**

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Gerrard Duddridge said that the South West had always had an aspiration for faster train services to other regions but he queried whether the South West Peninsula Rail Task Force's ambition of Plymouth to London in 2 hr 15 min was realistic. The Task Force had suggested this in its interim report, *On Track*, which also included some more readily achievable enhancements such as more loops between Exeter and Salisbury.

Rail journey times from the South West to London were slow compared with those from Northern cities to the capital, eg Preston- Euston (209 miles) in 2 hr 8 mins. In France, TGVs offered a 4 hr 9 min journey between Quimper and Paris (380 miles). However, he emphasised that speed improvements would be wasted without good onward travel.

Noting that the curves at Cullompton were canted to achieve higher speeds alongside the M5, he considered that Reading- Taunton could be upgraded to 115 mph by measures such as replacing Crofton curve by a cut-off.

Asking, "What would I do if I had £1 bn to spend on rail improvements?", he discussed extension of electrification from Newbury via Westbury to Bathampton Junction; and additional routes between Exeter and Plymouth.

### **Afternoon Question and Answer session**

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David Latimer of the Minehead Rail Link asked whether any of the panel would like to elaborate on schemes for Somerset. Matthew Barnes (GWR) replied that the proposed new Hinkley Point power station was driving the County Council's aspirations for Taunton and Bridgwater. He was aware of aspirations from Minehead and the West Somerset Railway to improve links. The initial focus from SCC was station improvements, while GWR's was the rolling stock cascade.

Asked about the luggage space and weather resilience of SETs and AT300s, Matthew Golton replied that Hitachi had assured GWR that the trains could cope with extreme weather. IEP trains were currently subject to a luggage capacity study. He noted that Amtrak was much stricter than UK train operators in enforcing passenger luggage limits.

Asked about the need for more double track between Exeter and Salisbury, Gerard Duddridge said the Railfuture Devon & Cornwall perspective was to ensure that local authorities proceeded with plans for two trains per hour between Exeter and Axminster, with some extended to Yeovil Pen Mill. Redoubling was needed west of Yeovil Junction and between Honiton and Pinhoe; "we may get it on the diversionary route / resilience card."

Chris Maltin (Somerset Circle Line) said his group favoured using D78 ex London Underground stock powered by renewable gas (biomethane) and asked why GWR preferred to continue with diesels on non-electrified lines. Matthew Golton replied that GWR had done a report on independently powered multiple units. Bi-modal trains would be superior to HSTs. "We could use electricity from a sub-station near to a GW main line to give more power on some of the banks."

A member with knowledge of regional government structures asked what a devolution deal for the South West would look like. James White replied that WEP had put forward a devolution bid but one model did not necessarily fit all regions.

## **RAILFUTURE PRESIDENT'S CLOSING REMARKS**

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Commenting on the success of the Campaign for Borders Rail, Christian Wolmar said the line had not featured high on the list of proposed reopenings back in the 1990s but its recent success showed just what could be achieved. He warned that the Hendy Report might suggest postponement of schemes; there might also be cuts to franchises, concealing service reductions. "There are some rocky times ahead."

# **RAILFUTURE SUMMER 2016 CONFERENCE**

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