

railfuture

Sevenside Branch Newsletter No. 35 Autumn 2017

Contributions to the Newsletter are welcome and should be sent to the Branch Secretary, Nigel Bray. Email: nigel.bray2@railfuture.org.uk (note the change of email address to include '2')

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More information about campaigns is available on the Railfuture national website.

Branch meeting at Bath, 18 November 2017

The next Sevenside branch meeting is on **Saturday 18 November** at 2 pm at Manvers Street Baptist Church, Bath. The venue is a few minutes' walk from Bath Spa station and has a cafe. There will be a raffle in aid of Branch funds with prizes of railway books.

Our guest speaker is Graham Ellis, founder of the **TransWilts Community Rail Partnership**. He will give an update on its progress and aspirations. The CRP has published a local rail Timetable effective from 16 October, when the bi-modal InterCity Express trains were due to begin running in service on the Paddington- Bristol and Paddington- Swansea routes. The leaflet, which reproduces GWR's Famous Five advertising, also highlights improvements to the TransWilts Swindon-Westbury service.

The Railfuture meeting will also decide the allocation of grants to local campaigns because this money has to be spent in 2017. Another subject to be discussed is a proposed mini-Conference for a Friday afternoon and evening in the early summer of 2018.

If coming by train, leave the station by the main exit and walk past the taxi rank into Manvers Street straight ahead, passing a hotel on your right. The Church is on the right side of the road, just before the Police Station.

There is an NCP car park nearby but please note there is no parking on the Church premises except for Church members.



Report of Railfuture Severnside meeting at Taunton, 8 July 2017

John Hassall opened the meeting with a raffle, which raised £12.50 for Branch funds, six times the amount from donations for magazines.

Alex de Mendoza, Chairman of **Minehead Rail Link Group** (MRLG), which aims to introduce a commuter rail service linking Minehead with Taunton via the West Somerset Railway, said the West Somerset District was measured as bottom of 354 local authorities in terms of economic wellbeing. “The metals must work harder for the community,” he said. A BBC Points West programme was due to feature MRLG on 18 July, including an interview with John Craven (of Countryfile), who remembered the line closing in 1971.

MRLG was opposing calls from Bridgwater & West Somerset MP Ian Liddell-Grainger for more road widening as the answer to the area’s transport problems. “Enlarging the A358 would require massive land acquisition,” said Alex, who is also Chairman of Minehead Chamber of Commerce. The Group was aiming at getting Somerset County Council to take an interest in its proposals and make a business case study.

David Latimer would be asking a question at the full meeting of the County Council on 19 July (see report in October *Railwatch*- Ed.). Alex concluded his report by saying that, with about £ 6-7 m due to be spent on upgrading Taunton station, some joined up thinking was needed to expand the local rail network.

Asked about the proposed extension of some GWR Cardiff- Taunton trains to Bishops Lydeard in 2018, Alex said MRLG was not expecting GWR to run seven days a week service. He added that Professor John Irven, WSR plc Chairman, had asked him what effect a regular train service would have on existing bus routes in the area. Alex had replied, “Let the train take the strain and get the buses servicing the rural hinterland.”

Anyone wishing to get involved in the campaign to get a Taunton- Minehead rail service, or anyone from other Somerset rail campaigns who would like to form an alliance with MRLG, should contact it at one of the following email addresses:

- david.latimer@btinternet.com
- marstonlodge@aol.com

Gideon Amos calls for a national infrastructure policy

Guest speaker Gideon Amos OBE, a Vice-President of the Town & Country Planning Association, described his involvement with the Felixstowe- Nuneaton upgrade, which has been partly completed with the construction of the Bacon Factory curve enabling container trains to run directly from the port towards the Midlands without having to reverse at Ipswich or travel via London. He is Liberal Democrat prospective parliamentary candidate for Taunton Deane, the seat he fought at the General Election

Gideon said he was a National Infrastructure Planning Commissioner from 2009 to 2014. He recalled that in 2007 the Confederation of British Industry had expressed concern at the lack of an infrastructure plan for the UK. It had taken 10 years for Heathrow Terminal 5 to complete the planning process. The 2008 Planning Act had introduced Development Consent Orders (DCO) and the first stage of the Felixstowe upgrade was the first DCO to be issued.

The DCO application for the Bacon Factory curve took only four months in 2011. The next phase of work anticipated to start in 2018 would include doubling of part of the Felixstowe branch to increase its capacity and reduce conflict with passenger trains. The Felixstowe Dock & Railway Company, which is the port authority, has statutory powers and owned a number of paths for freight services on the branch.

A further phase of the Felixstowe- Nuneaton upgrade to increase capacity at Ely North Junction had been deferred in 2015 but would hopefully be implemented in Control Period 6 (2019-24). When completed, the project would clear the route for high-cube (9'6") containers and remove an estimated 750,000 lorry journeys per year from the roads.

He deplored the time taken for rail schemes to get through Network Rail's GRIP processes. "It can't be right that a project that everyone agrees on takes so long and may get stalled by a change of Government." He also noted that a planned upgrade of the West Cumbria line was dropped because NR had quoted £ 436 million to improve capacity and modernise signalling.

After Gideon's talk, Dave Chapple gave a report from **Friends of Bridgwater Station**. He said FOBS worked well with Bridgwater Town Council. GWR, First Bus and Somerset County Council had been represented at the most recent FOBS meeting. It was hoped to have improvements to the station forecourt by August 2018, although these would not include a footpath to Bridgwater College. However, NR might be prepared to consider a footpath along the road on the down side of the station. Car parking was insufficient, causing congestion in nearby streets. "We want buses to run into the station and will continue to lobby Cross Country Trains (XC) to stop at Bridgwater."

David Northey, Senior Strategic Planner, NR Western Route, said he believed there might be capacity for XC Manchester- Exeter services to call at Weston-super-Mare and Bridgwater, which both had potential for passenger growth. After referring to the pro-rail attitude of Cornwall and Devon County Councils, he was asked what progress was being made with Bere Alston- Tavistock reopening. He admitted that the profile of the project had dropped and said that more money and pressure needed to be applied. Alex de Mendoza commented, "The squeaky wheel gets the oil."

Pilning station gets its first Sunday service for decades.....for one day only.

Pilning Station Group, issued the following press release on 10 August:

"Situated on the South Wales main line just east of the Severn tunnel, Pilning has been a poorly served and neglected 'Cinderella' station for decades and since 2006 has only had a train service on Saturdays. Moreover, since last November, that service has been in one direction only, following the controversial demolition of its footbridge to make way for main line electrification.

However, the station enjoys a red-letter day on Sunday 20 August 2017, when the first Sunday train for decades will call there at 10.43. This follows a request to GWR from the station's User Group to provide a special call to pick up overnight campers from the Plough Inn Music Festival just down the road, which is being held on Saturday 19th. Festival-goers can arrive on the scheduled 13.34 train on Saturday and- thanks to GWR's kind gesture- they can now catch the train home the following day.

We are absolutely thrilled and very grateful to GWR. Thanks to the recent publicity, more and more people are discovering Pilning station. So despite the station's poor service, its usage is actually going up. 'We hope that the special Sunday service on August 20th will pave the way for future service improvements all year round,' said Olga Taylor, Chair of the Pilning Station user group."

Why consultants sometimes get the forecasts wrong for new stations

Robert Crockford, who was a British Rail. Manager, mainly with the Southern Region, for 35 years and now lives in Stonehouse, wrote to the Branch Secretary with his thoughts on how Stonehouse Bristol Road station might be reopened.

"When I became aware of the local efforts to reopen the former Bristol Road station, I found that browsing the Railfuture website gave me a lot of comparative information as to what was happening around the country with reopening of stations.

I was invited to join a small working group set up by Neil Carmichael (MP for Stroud, 2010-17) and which included David Drew (the current MP for Stroud) and representatives of Gloucestershire County Council, Stroud District Council, Stonehouse Town Council, the Local Enterprise Partnership and a career railwayman like myself. It started well but I was alarmed to read the Gloucestershire Rail Study Report produced by Amey Rail (*and which was criticised by Railfuture at the time- Ed.*).

I was dismayed to find that Stonehouse Bristol Road was in a 'beauty contest' with Hunts Grove and Charfield stations. They were put through a computer model, subcontracted to Southampton University. I found it used a Gov.UK trip end model (TemPro), which uses extremely coarse scale data over a wide area, not of much use for relatively small local stations. I had detailed technical questions but could not get answers. These concerns were somewhat vindicated when the study was taken over by consultants CH2M in their MetroWest studies.

This time the Southampton 'author' stated quite clearly that the results were 'a quick check.....and did not take into account trip destination, the destinations served by train services or atypical local factors.....The results should be considered alongside expert knowledge regarding the local conditions.' Like many computer models it was a case of garbage in, garbage out, that requires careful interpretation.

Halcrow (now part of CH2M) produced a sound survey-based case for the station 16 years ago. Since then, rail journeys have soared and the Stonehouse catchment area has grown in population and employment, with a lot more to come within a mile of the station. Many people perceive Stonehouse as just a small town of under 10,000, not realising that it is the economic dynamo of what I call the Stroudwater Valley, of which Stroud is the major partner in terms of population. Thus the new station would have an effective catchment population of over 30,000 within three miles.

Whilst doing economic research (during my railway career), I analysed, without a computer, an Origin & Destination Survey of almost every non-Greater London station on the Southern Region. I found that trip generation at local stations (not major interchanges) conformed to certain principles which could predict traffic levels based on the size, shape and characteristics of the catchment area. The most significant predictor was the number of

people within walking and cycling distance of the station. The trip rate of people within ½ mile of the station was up to four times greater than at two miles and twice as great as at one mile. My own broad estimate (for Stonehouse Bristol Road) is 300,000 passengers a year. Currently, Stroud has around 500,000, Stonehouse 150,000 and Cam & Dursley 200,000. Yate, with a similar population to ‘Stroudwater’, has over 350,000 passengers per year.”

Next Railfuture Severnside newsletter will be number 36 in New Year 2018.

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