



campaigning by
The Railway Development
Society Limited

THAMES VALLEY BRANCH Newsletter 81 February 2013

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Next meeting: Annual General Meeting at Bicester on Saturday 23rd March 2013

The Branch AGM will be held at the Methodist Church Hall, Victoria Street, Bicester, OX26 6QJ at 10.30 on Saturday 23rd March 2013. The venue is a few minutes walk from both Bicester stations; the 0928 from Oxford arrives at 0953. After the formal business our guest speaker, **Richard Harper, Head of Network Development for Chiltern Railways** will talk about their plans for the future including, of course, their proposed Oxford - London Marylebone service. After the meeting, the AGM of the OBRAC will be held in the same venue.

Joint meeting with Oxon-Bucks Rail Action Committee (OBRAC), Bletchley, 29th October 2012

Highlights from Patrick O'Sullivan, Rail Consultant - East West Rail Consortium's presentation:- Total investment on EWR western section will now be circa £500m (v £211m) following upgrade to include electrification. Eventual total contribution from EWR stakeholders will be between £30m & £50m.

Project Progress

Environmental survey planned to start in 2013 & planning process & public consultation - Network Rail to decide on which option to obtain planning approval: Dev Consent Order, TWA (not favoured after Chiltern's experience) or within 'Permitted Development'.

2014/15: Powers to construct authorised.

2015: Construction starts; phased construction;

1. Water Eaton - Bicester,
2. Oxford area
3. Bicester - Bletchley - including new Winslow station; possible connection to down fast at Bletchley
4. Aylesbury - Claydon
5. Bletchley - Bedford - potential to consider Stewartby chord

Should all be double track from the start - except Claydon - Aylesbury north goods loop.

Not electrified from the start; some masts to be put up but initially no wires (metal theft)

Network Rail to remodel Oxford station for EG3, EWR and GW electrification.

Target for completion of Oxford - Bletchley is 2017, but Bletchley - Bedford not until 2019.

90/100mph linespeed from Oxford - Bedford when complete.

Cambridgeshire CC to take on leadership of EWR central section; Bedford - Cambridge.

Visit to Reading depot

On 22nd November a group of members enjoyed an evening visit to First Great Western's Reading depot where we were shown plans for the new depot to replace it, currently under construction on the north side, and were given an overview of the project and how they will manage the migration process. It will employ about 100 more staff than at present, will be better situated operationally by being on the "relief line" side of the formation, be built with ground source heating and grey water recycling and will be electrified from the start. We were also given a talk about their current operations and a tour of the site. They service about 35/36 Class 165/166 units nightly and achieve an availability of 92%. Thanks go to our committee member Chris Bates for organising this and to FGW's Dale Wishart and Rishi Ravindran for hosting us.

Network Rail public meeting, 9th January 2013, Oxford Town Hall: Investment in the Oxford Rail Corridor

Some of your committee attended this meeting at which Network Rail outlined their thinking for increasing capacity through the Oxford area to allow for future growth with, for example, freight traffic expected to increase to 40 trains per day each way by the end of the decade and trains per hour through north Oxford up from 12 to 22. Plans include resignalling for tighter headways (4 minutes down to 3 between Didcot and Oxford & 8 minutes down to 4 between Wolvercote and Aynho junctions by 2017 and extending the down loop north of Oxford. At Oxford station in addition to the north facing bays for EWR/Marylebone services, plans include a new through platform on the west (down) side of the station and all through platforms to be signalled for reversible working. Plans for a south facing bay on part of the Becket Street car park appear to have been dropped. The new down platform would require the Botley Road bridge to be rebuilt and widened thus creating greater benefits in much the same way as the Cow Lane road bridge has in Reading.

A copy of Network Rail's presentation is available on request by email to the Branch Secretary.

Chairman's Message

I was very pleased by the interest shown in our stand at the Oxford Green Fair in the Town Hall on 1st December; not only were we pleased to recruit some new members as a result, it became clear that most people who spoke to us wanted East – West Rail extended to Cambridge as their first priority, and the Strap Line – "Next Stop Cambridge" for the campaign has now appeared on the Railfuture East – West Rail website. The other two big issues mentioned were Witney and Wantage-Grove Parkway, so it is clear that as a branch we are campaigning for the right long term issues. We are grateful to John Henderson of the East Anglia branch for joining us and lending us their EWR banner for the day and we look forward to being there again this year.

I have been advised to say little on legal matters regarding various schemes in North Oxford but it is fair to say the matters are ones of importance and frustration to us all.

I must thank the High Wycombe Society for their efforts to persuade councillors to protect the trackbed from Bourne End to High Wycombe. Whilst unsuccessful, I have no doubt in the long term this common sense link will be restored, at yet more public expense, and the branch will do anything to help if it can.

On a positive note the issue of extending the wires west from Newbury took a step forward just as we were getting ready to pursue the matter and the public meeting at Oxford Town Hall showed a larger scheme for Oxford (on the same site), than we could have hoped for one year ago.

Everyone will, I hope, be aware that on the 2nd November 2013, we host the National Rail Users Conference in Oxford and the Branch Committee would welcome assistance from members in this matter.

Other news

Chiltern's Evergreen 3 project is, as many of you will be aware, subject to a judicial review the outcome of which we await with interest.

Committee member Nigel Rose has submitted the branch's contribution to Railfuture's response to the ORR following publication of Network Rail's Strategic Business Plan. Among the priorities in the documents that we welcome are recognition of western access to Heathrow, electric spine via Coventry and EWR with upgrading between Coventry - Leamington to allow half hourly XC services, Oxford station de-bottlenecking, electrification of Thames Valley branches and platform lengthening for Chiltern's train lengthening aspiration. However we were disappointed at no reference to Berks & Hants electrification beyond Newbury despite more recent government announcements of inclusion.

The Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group, previously a member of the Severnside branch of Railfuture (because Bedwyn is in Wiltshire), have transferred to our branch which makes sense given that their train service is really in the Thames Valley area. We welcome them to the branch and also congratulate them on winning the silver award in the best website category at the first ever Rail User Group awards. We support their campaign to extend electrification westwards from Newbury to at least Westbury as a result of which the DfT have asked NR to pursue this option.

And finally....The MOD are selling some of their rolling stock at Bicester including the 1907 ex LSWR coach in which some members travelled on a visit in 2001, thus ruling out any prospect of a repeat trip!



Photo: Chris Bates
Branch members at Reading Depot on 22nd November with FGW's Dale Wishart and Rishi Ravindran (left)



Photo: Hugh Jaeger
Our stand at the Green Fair, Oxford Town Hall, 1st December.

Edited by Andrew McCallum with contributions from Richard Stow, John Elvin & Martin Smith.