



campaigning by
The Railway Development
Society Limited

THAMES VALLEY BRANCH
Newsletter 87 July 2015

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Next members' meeting: Wednesday 9th September 2015 at 7pm at Bicester Town Council, The Garth, Launton Road, Bicester, Oxfordshire, OX26 6PS

Our guest speaker will be Stephen Barker of Chiltern Railways who will address us on the subject of the Bicester – Oxford railway.

This will be a joint meeting with OBRAC (Oxon & Bucks Rail Action Committee).

For directions please see: <http://www.bicester.gov.uk/> It is a short walk from Bicester Village station. From Bicester North Station it is about a 15 minute walk via Buckingham Road, North Street and Sheep Street to Launton Road.

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting, 18th April 2015, 10.30. West Oxford Community Centre, Oxford.

19 members and supporters were present.

Apologies were received from: Roger Blake, Alan Francis, Mark Goodacre.

The Chairman's Review of the Year is below.

Secretary's report.

Meetings: Since last year's AGM here in Oxford, where our guest speaker was Mike Hogg of First Great Western who gave us a very upbeat presentation on plans for the Oxford area, we have held another meeting in the autumn in Reading at which George Bathurst of the Windsor Link company spoke enthusiastically about their project to link the two railways in Windsor. We published three newsletters which is our usual number, all are now illustrated with our own member's photos showing the progress on schemes in our area. For this year we are hoping to arrange meetings in Bicester in the summer and somewhere else in the autumn.

Membership: A year ago our membership stood at 115 and is now 110 which is a decrease of 4.5% which is disappointing but it included three members who joined in just the last few days. However, in recent years we have been slowly increasing our membership; I'm sure it is easier to recruit if there are obvious threats to the railways in an area. Most join from the website though we don't know what drew them there in the first place. 39% pay the pensioner rate and only 2 members pay the student rate even though we have 6 universities in our area. I have been informed by David Harby that the Scottish branch have recently been successful recruiting new members at model railway shows; perhaps something we might consider more.

The Secretary re-iterated the Chairman's appeal for more members to come forward to help and said that the committee would welcome a new member from Berkshire where it is unrepresented.

The Treasurer had previously distributed the branch accounts with the recent newsletter to members. These were accepted by the meeting.

The officers and committee members were all re-elected as follows:-

Chairman: Richard Stow	Proposed by Hugh Jaeger, seconded by John Elvin
Vice Chairman: David King	Proposed by Andrew McCallum, seconded by Martin Smith
Secretary: Andrew McCallum	Proposed by Chris Bates, seconded by David King
Treasurer: John Elvin	Proposed by Andrew McCallum, seconded by Chris Bates
Other committee members:	Nigel Rose, Martin Smith, Chris Bates, Hugh Jaeger, Nigel Phillips & Alan Francis

were all unanimously re-elected.

To conclude, Hugh Jaeger proposed a vote of thanks to the officers of the committee for their hard work over the year, especially the Chairman, which was carried by acclamation.

The formal business was concluded at 11.00.

Our guest speaker was Adrian Shooter CBE, Chairman of Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership and former Chairman of Chiltern Railways.

He gave us a fascinating and wide ranging talk based on his career highlights and leading to thoughts on where we go from here of which this is very much a summary of some of the main points.

A locomotive engineer by profession, Adrian joined Chiltern in 1994, his management career having begun as Area Manager at St Pancras in 1984 and then in 1987 Manager, Red Star Parcels and then Director, Parcels which included the Post Office contract. He pointed out they were a bit like a present day TOC with their own locos and staff and productivity improved in this era.

At Chiltern he assembled his own team and they were able to settle on a 20 year vision in 1994 and when the Oxford route is completed they will have achieved all but one objective in this plan (the one that got away being an ambitious plan for a Parkway station at Lutterworth to abstract traffic from the M1 & M6.)

Prior to 1994 Network SouthEast spent £80 million on the route then Railtrack spent £12 million on re-doubling from Princes Risborough – Bicester, paid for by enhanced track access charges although Railtrack had to fund overruns. They managed to achieve a reduction in the cost of Bicester – Aynho Junction re-doubling from Railtrack's original figure of £180 million to £52 million. The new trains delivered in 1998 were the first ordered post privatisation. The frequency to Bicester was doubled with growth rates of 30% p.a. afterwards.

Warwick Parkway station, which opened in October 2000, was driven by the relatively poor road access and parking at Leamington Spa. Chiltern worked with Warwickshire County Council who were helpful and who own the car park (the station belongs to Chiltern). This is a good example of the importance of working co-operatively with local authorities.

Adrian had realised the scope for Oxford right from the start with Oxford – Princes Risborough via Thame being a possibility at first but they soon realised that Bicester was the way to go. Cherwell District Council were helpful and reserved land at Gavray for the new chord. Interestingly there was not a single objection to this brand new section of railway whereas in north Oxford where the work is merely an upgrade to an existing railway there were lots of objections. He also reminded us that the large number of level crossings between Oxford and Bicester is being reduced to just two remaining; Aristotle Lane, Oxford & London Road, Bicester, due to the Transport & Works Act Order.

Adrian also spoke about some of the difficulties with modelling for new schemes and pointed out the differences between modelling for changes in services such as increasing from, say, 2 to 3tph on a route and modelling for where a totally new type of service is being proposed. Conventional modelling does not work so well in these scenarios which is where groups like Railfuture can help by looking at other ways to assess traffic levels.

Turning to the Cowley branch proposal, he is pleased that Chiltern are interested. He feels that branch line expenditure is minimal but Oxford – Kennington Junction would be expensive with an extra track. To progress, the scheme needs us to find more evidence of support and to find numerate benefits that can be measured by the DfT, LEPs and Councils such as congestion relief and the impossibility of improving roads.

AGM 2015 - Chairman's Review of the year.

I think the first thing to say about campaigning for Rail in the Thames Valley is that 2015 will see Stage 1 of East West Rail come into service, the first new mainline service to London for 100 years and a massive boost to connectivity in the region; its an achievement for everyone who has campaigned over the years.

Last year's AGM was addressed by Mike Hogg from First Group, setting out the operators aspirations for the future, with a degree of enthusiasm and during the meeting it emerged that the operator was looking at a Hanborough to Cowley service, and expansion at Hanborough. Interestingly committee member Nigel Rose, went to a meeting with First Group this week and reports that development on the west side of the Station is still on the Agenda. This scheme failed at GRIP 1 stage; however we are forever grateful to Chiltern for promoting an extension of the Marylebone services to Cowley and Hanborough – Cowley remains a priority for us.

The grant of the new franchise to First Group has led to many of the options becoming reality, including car parking at Kingham.

Our other Branch public meeting was at Reading, where George Bathurst gave us an update on the Windsor Link project; this scheme is simpler than thought and much of the design work has been done.

During the year I have had the opportunity to attend various meetings, twice with Railfuture with the Oxfordshire Council member for Transport, I represented Railfuture in a 30 minute meeting with David Cameron, regarding Witney Oxford Transport, and I must say it was a very productive and enjoyable meeting, despite my nerves beforehand.

I have joined committee members for various meetings with officers, and I am grateful for committee members who attended various LTP4 meetings, LEP meetings and meetings with operators and with other voluntary groups like the CPRE; these can be time consuming but can also be incredibly productive, as it is surprising how limited the knowledge of Rail is amongst many opinion formers; I am pleased they appreciate our guidance, a massive contrast to 30 years ago. I am grateful to Nigel Phillips, for organising a meeting with Buckinghamshire County Council, in the next few months; I think this will become more of the pattern of our campaigning over the next few years, being pro-active, not re-active.

I enjoy the Green Fair, as our stand enables us to meet people with no great knowledge of rail. It was, however, interesting that the public are still enthusiastic to get to Cambridge, the challenge will be to get the massive support for East – West rail (from a cross section of Councillors, MPs and the public) to be transferred to our local schemes, such as Witney.

It may be helpful if I go through our core objectives and progress this year.

1. Witney Oxford Transport.

The County Council has completed a baseline study. This is a review of all the options, it is a very comprehensive study and identifies options such as Trams and Heavy Rail and rejects others, but I would stress that public transport use is very high anyway to Central Oxford but car use is high to the periphery such as Cowley so any option has to reflect this.

I attended with various committee members a meeting at Bedford with URS as it was; they have been asked to carry out an engineering study. The outcome is imminent as I write this. I regret to say Tram UK have never replied to our request for assistance.

The Growth Bid allocated £35m plus £5m local funding, so I expect progress, however the "Railfuture" policy is that we want a long term strategy.

2. Bourne End – High Wycombe.

Nigel Phillips has continued to press this case and together with our consultant Jonathan Roberts Consulting, we put in a bid for Growth Funding for a study. I am annoyed that as at today this has not been successful as it was a very professional bid. In the meantime we objected to a planning application on the track bed. This was rejected and has now gone to appeal which shows how crucial it is to get a scheme in place. The Western Access to Heathrow and East West Rail have improved the business case and it's just a matter of getting the message across.

3. Grove – Wantage.

This is now in the LTP4 as a Strategic Interchange and the new bridge will make provision for a station.

4. Cowley Branch.

This is very much a Chiltern Railways scheme, we have a small group Trains 4 Cowley. This is in the LTP4 plans, but is not a County Council Scheme.

5. East – West Rail

I have been liaising with East Anglia Branch about the eastern section. As of today the route decision is delayed, however Railfuture have put forward some very persuasive options. David King has taken the lead on liaison for construction etc; Network Rail are keen to get on with it.

Members may like to know the section from Calvert to Aylesbury will be double track; the decision is not made on the Aylesbury to Princes Risborough section yet.

We retain close links with Bus Users UK (Oxford Branch), and see bus links and cycle parking as crucial to the success of Oxford Parkway.

On the downside our media appearances have been less this year, I am very keen to improve this, however we have continued to write letters and use any opportunity to promote rail where we can.

I would like to thank our Branch Committee and Andrew McCallum our Secretary for their hard work and support during the year, and look forward to progress next year. It continues to be very gratifying to see so much investment in Rail. I am mindful that Members in Milton Keynes have difficulty getting to meetings etc, I hope in 2 or 3 years these issues will be a thing of the past.

Should anyone wish to become more actively involved in the group, we would welcome the help, as we find the Branch at the centre of a huge Rail Investment Programme.

Witney Oxford Transport Group (WOT) update

The consultants have delivered their preliminary findings to Oxfordshire County Council relating to long term public transport options for the corridor, covering heavy rail, light rail and buses along the route of the old branch line. They will follow up with likely costs and feasibility for dualling the remainder of the A40. However, the limited funds available (£35M) mean that OCC will have to implement a bus lane solution alongside the A40 itself in the short term, whilst keeping the longer term options open. It is expected that the latter will be put out to consultation in the autumn. The bus scheme would include a P&R site at Eynsham. WOT is also urging action on the other short term scheme, being promoted by FGW: an additional large car park on land to the west of Hanborough station, coupled with completion of the re-doubling of the North Cotswold line. This will provide for express bus connections from Witney and Carterton, without prejudicing the longer term schemes for the corridor. However, there are concerns about the proposed road access to the car park as the A4095 is already severely congested and would not provide effective capacity for the bus link. Whilst fully supporting the car park scheme, WOT and Railfuture are urging OCC to provide a better direct road link from the A40, including immediate safeguarding of the route in planning terms across adjoining land. If the improvements at Hanborough can be implemented, they open up the possibilities of a cross-City rail shuttle service across to the Cowley branch and also the opportunity for trains from London to run up to reverse, reducing congestion in sidings around Oxford station. It has to be hoped that local objections around Hanborough about the associated housing development do not scupper these ideas and their strategic benefits to the wider community. Housing developments near to railway stations must be the most sustainable locations.

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

High Wycombe - Bourne End

Some good news at High Wycombe: the application to build 22 houses on the disused solum of the Bourne End branch has been withdrawn. There was a lot of local opposition to this application including one from Railfuture, and the plans to build many houses on reserved sites on this side of High Wycombe will add weight to the argument for re-opening this strategic link to the Thames Valley and Heathrow. The subway connecting the up and down platforms at High Wycombe has closed, replaced by a temporary footbridge, pending the construction of a permanent new bridge with lifts which will also connect directly to the car park. This is to enable the lengthening of the down platform to accommodate longer trains.

Chiltern – EWR update

Bicester South Junction to Oxford Parkway

Double track is now laid and connected all the way from Bicester South Junction to Oxford Parkway Station and the whole line will be totally controlled from Marylebone signalling centre. Awaiting installation of signal posts and signalling that is due to be commissioned in September followed by test running and driver training. Construction works are on course to achieve the public launch on Monday 26 October 2015. At Oxford Parkway station the footbridge has been lifted into place (see photo) and other stations are almost complete as per photos.

On to Oxford in 2016

On 16th June, Oxford City Council agreed to discharge planning condition 19 for Section H. This was enabled by Network Rail's decision, supported by Chiltern, to relocate a new set of points at Woodstock Road Junction away from a residential area to reduce the noise and vibration impact. The City Council's discharge decision enabled work to start on the major task to lower the track in Wolvercote tunnel that is a critical part of the construction project for getting into Oxford by Spring 2016. Chiltern confirm this is still their current planned opening date.

Ex Trans Pennine Express Class 170 DMUs

The first five Class 170s have left TPE and are at Wabtec Loughborough for conversion into Chiltern specification Class 168/3s. The first modified unit is expected to come out of the works in August. The other four ex TPE units will move south prior to the service being extended into Oxford in 2016.

High Wycombe

Chiltern are looking to extend High Wycombe multi storey car park, having applied for £2.2m of SCPF grant funding, as the three storey car park is now full by late morning on most weekdays.

Chairman's Comment

Since the last newsletter much has happened, as members will know, in transport matters in the Thames Valley. Two things stand out in my mind however. Firstly, I went the Open Technical Meeting on the Noise Abatement Matters, on 11 June at Oxford Town Hall, and found myself in a minority of 1. I was shocked at the misinformation and virulence of the objectors to East-West Rail as they sought to complain about noise, vibration and urged the council not to grant the discharge of conditions relating to noise mitigation. Whilst sitting on my own, I did wonder if they would even hear the railway over the roar of the A34 traffic noise. Discharge was formally granted on 16th June, and I hope we never hear about bats, vibration and noise ever again.

The second item is Witney. As you will see elsewhere in this newsletter, the County will spend £40m, on a bus lane towards Eynsham and we have been involved, with Witney Oxford Transport, in the Witney Campaign. Railfuture Thames Valley Branch's objective going forward will be to press for heavy rail or tram trains over the next 20 years, to replace the busway, and to ensure the works undertaken do not hinder this. Hanborough is now a key short term rail objective.

For all our objectives, it is clear the Oxford Area Remodelling needs to be 4 tracks and the Secretary of States decision to "pause" some work gives us the opportunity to lobby for a 3/4 track railway; this being essential for Witney and in the shorter term Cowley. Much better to get it right now, rather than re-do it in 10 years time. I see the pause as an opportunity and most members have been aware of the issues for some months now.

Members will be aware the branch is preparing to host the 2016 Railfuture AGM, which is to be held in Milton Keynes; all offers of help and advice will be appreciated.

Cotswold Line

In addition to activity at Hanborough, it is pleasing to report 100 new car parking spaces at Kingham being finished as I write; work on the new footbridge will start in a few weeks.

The costs of Worcester Parkway continue to rise, towards £30m, however the scheme is progressing and looks incredibly cheap compared to dualling a nearby road bridge for rush hours traffic, at a cost of £85m.

The new timetable seems to be working well, reducing overcrowding in the morning peak.

Cowley Branch

This formed the core of the Branch's submission to Oxfordshire's LTP4 consultation; the scheme however is going to be dependant on the Oxford – Didcot corridor upgrade (see above).

Oxford – Marylebone Scheme

Old track has been lifted from Oxford North Junction to Oxford Parkway and work on First Turn Bridge is underway.

Steeple Claydon Station.

It was pleasing to note the Bucks County Council study has projected 60,000 passengers a year and the station now has strong Parish Council support. The Chairman of the HS2 Select committee was surprised it was not in the HS2 bill when he enquired. Is this an omission which can be corrected? HS2 Limited expects 2000 people to be working at Claydon Depot during construction.

Finally.....Please note the date of our meeting in Bicester on 9th September. Stephen Barker's presentation is very topical, the venue is adjacent to the railway and I look forward to seeing many of you there.

PHOTOS – with an East West Rail theme this time



Both: Andrew McCallum

The "Up & Down Jericho" line north of Oxford station being re-laid, seen on 21st July 2015.

Looking towards Wolvercote from Oxford Parkway on 9th July 2015



Both: Andrew McCallum

Oxford Parkway station on 9th July 2015



Both: John Elvin

Islip station on 19th July 2015

Track re-laid in the formerly waterlogged cutting at Islip.



Both: John Elvin

Looking west at Bicester to the new east facing entrance to the MOD sidings

Looking east at an almost complete Bicester Village station just awaiting the footbridge Both on 19th July 2015



Both: Nigel Phillips

Vegetation clearance works at Steeple Claydon

and at Verney Junction

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

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