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The Railway Development  
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## THAMES VALLEY BRANCH Newsletter 88    October 2015

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### **Next members' meeting: Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> November 2015**

The next Railfuture Thames Valley Branch members' meeting will be held on **Wednesday 18th November at 7pm at the New Hope Centre, 95 York Road, Reading, RG1 8DU**

Our guest speaker will be **Tom Pierpoint, Regional Development Manager, Great Western Railway** and he will talk to us about the new GWR franchise, in particular plans for the Thames Valley area.

The venue is a 7-8 minute walk from Reading Station. Leave by the new northern entrance beyond platform 15 and from Trooper Potts Way turn left into Vastern Road (dual carriageway). Just before the roundabout cross Vastern Road at the pedestrian crossing. Continue past the roundabout into Caversham Road and cross to the other side at the pedestrian crossing just before the Rainbow Lodge Hotel. York Road is on the left beside the Vespa dealer. You will then see the New Hope Centre on the right on the corner of Newport Road. We shall be on the first floor (lift available). We look forward to seeing many of you there.

*Those of you for whom we have an email address will have already received notice of this meeting. If you have an email address but did not receive an email about this meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> September, please supply your email address to the Secretary so that we can give you prior notice of meetings etc.*

### **The guest speaker at our members' meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> September in Bicester was Stephen Barker of Chiltern Railways. Here is a summary of his presentation on the Bicester – Oxford railway.**

This railway opened in 1850/51 and Chiltern took over operation from First Great Western in 2011. Their Marylebone – Oxford scheme is designed as a relief buster for the Oxford – Reading – Paddington route with the new station at Oxford Parkway opening up many new journey opportunities. Prior to the re-build it was a single track 40mph railway and is now a 100mph double track route with bi-directional signalling throughout. Freight speed is up to 75mph. The service will be half hourly all day every day. Difficulty of access to Oxford station is a deterrent to rail travel for many who will find Oxford Parkway more accessible and it should attract new users to rail travel as well.

The rebuild involved ¾ mile new railway, 11 miles rebuilt railway, 36 level crossings removed, 14 new bridges as well as track lowering in Wolvercote tunnel by 700mm with the foundations needing underpinning. A Transport and Works Act Order was needed to acquire land for example alongside the railway to rebuild embankments. This TWA order took five years from preparation to dismissal of a legal challenge and cost £10 million.

Ecology was a significant part of the project. Five badger setts were built, butterfly friendly plants were planted, otters were found in the river Cherwell, 25km of newt fencing was laid and about 7,000 newts re-homed. Bats do not live in Wolvercote tunnel but use it to travel between their roosts and feeding grounds in Port Meadow.

At the time of the talk the signals on the new chord had been lit and driver training runs were commencing. Finishing touches to the stations at Bicester Village, Islip and Oxford Parkway are in hand ready for opening to passenger service on 26<sup>th</sup> October. This first part of the scheme includes laying the new track towards Bletchley as far as just beyond the bridge under the mainline.

Full service through to and from Oxford station is scheduled for "Spring 2016" and work at Oxford station for the new north bays is due to commence shortly. The two parcels vans that have been there since at least 1985 will go to a preservation society.

Journey times will be 66 minutes Oxford - Marylebone and 58 minutes Oxford Parkway – Marylebone. Class 168s including the ex-Trans Pennine sets will be used along with one silver train each way.

Stephen showed us numerous photos taken during the works including some of the new bridge at Wolvercote on First Turn Road.

In answer to questions Stephen said:-

- The decision about the London Road level crossing in Bicester replacement would be a matter for Oxfordshire County Council.
- Chiltern would love to be the operator of the EWR services but the DfT will probably choose through the usual processes.
- The car park at Oxford Parkway station will have 850 spaces (with permission for 300 more) which are in addition to the spaces in the existing park & ride car park.
- The official opening ceremony would *not* be performed by the Queen who had that very day opened the new Borders railway in a ceremony at Tweedbank station!

#### **Visit to Vivarail at Long Marston on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2015**

A group of Railfuture Thames Valley branch members were invited by Adrian Shooter, Chairman of Vivarail and a Railfuture Vice-President, to join a party for an inspection of their D-Train prototype. This is ex London Transport District Line stock which the company are working on converting for use on the main line as diesel units. Others in the party ranged from Chris Green to reporters from BBC Coventry & Warwickshire and the Manchester Evening News. After a presentation on the project by Adrian we were taken for a test ride on their prototype vehicle for three circuits of Long Marston's circular track, totalling about 7 miles. Afterwards we were shown two other vehicles in the workshop, one raised on jacks to inspect the "oily parts" and the other to sample alternative interior layouts. We also saw the vehicle which had been crashed in a controlled test to prove crashworthiness.

Your editor confesses that any doubts he had harboured about the suitability of D78 stock for main line use were blown away on this visit. The ride quality is good, the choice of seating and luggage/bike space layouts look excellent and these could well be ideal trains for both urban and rural branch line work especially in scenic areas due to the large windows with bays of four seats correctly aligned. Two or three car versions could be available with test running in passenger service in 2016.

Here are the "quotes" which some of us provided for Vivarail:-

*"If I was a commuter in, say, northern England and I had to board one of these trains every work day morning I'd be happy even if I had to stand. The ride is rock steady (even on the less than perfect jointed track at Long Marston), the seating options are fit for purpose and the overall on board experience is one of spaciousness with a light and airy ambience. It was refreshing to hear that families are being considered in the design of the interior with recognition of the importance of bays of four seats at a window."*

*"It was refreshing today to hear a train builder talking about luggage space, passengers with electronic devices, passengers with bicycles and families looking out of windows on scenic routes. No mention was made of cramming the maximum number of seats into the available space. Let's hope any TOCs who may buy these trains are as forward-thinking as Vivarail."*

*"I was very impressed with the vehicle. It was much smoother and quieter than I expected. Viva Rail certainly seem to have put a great deal of thought into the design particularly with regard to maintenance where the major components can be replaced as modules very quickly and without elaborate equipment. 10 minutes for an engine change! Viva rail have also paid a great deal attention to seats, internal layout, toilet facilities and luggage space."*

*“We were very impressed with the work so far. The test car looks better in the flesh than the artist's impressions. The ride is smooth and relatively quiet at the speeds that were attainable on the test track. The ease of maintenance by swapping engine/alternator rafts in ten minutes (given a suitable surface) is an attractive feature for operators. The ex-LU seating was reasonably comfortable, which is more than I can say for the high-back seats. These were hard and the high backs restrict the view. Aircraft style seating would be particularly unpleasant.”*

*“Prior to the visit my view was that to use modified District Line trains on the national network was perhaps a case of needs must but not a thing to be enthusiastic about. The visit to Viva Rail changed all that. It turns out the aluminium bodysells, bogies and electric motors of the London Underground trains are close to the perfect starting point for a new train. Viva Rail have added a whisper quiet diesel engine and a good dollop of imagination to create a winner. I was impressed by just how user-sensitive they are with seats aligned to windows, ample space for bikes (both full sized and folding) and real attention to detail, such as the inclusion of a reassuringly mechanical lock to the electrically operated toilet door. I was struck by just how passionate the staff of Viva Rail are about the D-Train project. It's a smart imaginative solution to the national shortage of rolling stock.”*

*“A really worthwhile visit and I was impressed with the amount of modification work being undertaken on the former Underground trains. The engines were quieter than a conventional DMU and the ride (on rough track) was very smooth and the new seating looked and felt comfortable. Any remaining sceptics need to see and experience the refurbished train for themselves. Certainly this new class 230 is a much more pleasant experience than riding in one of the four wheeled 'Pacers' that should be retired in favour of this quality refurbished train.”*

For more on this project please see [www.vivarail.co.uk](http://www.vivarail.co.uk)

With thanks to Adrian Shooter and Alice Gillman of Vivarail for facilitating this visit.

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

Oxfordshire County Council have published their consultation on options for improving transport along the A40 corridor from Oxford to Witney. Comments have to be submitted by 8<sup>th</sup> November. Public exhibitions are also being held.

Improvements will start with the £38M scheme already approved to install a bus lane eastwards from a new P&R at Eynsham along the north side of the A40, coupled with bus priority at Swinford toll bridge.

There are then five options for the next stage which have yet to be bid for:

- extend new bus lane westwards to Witney;
- dualling the remainder of the A40 towards Oxford;
- guided bus using the bed of the old rail track west from Cassington;
- tram/train utilising the old track to Yarnton;
- re-instatement of the old railway from Yarnton to south of Witney or alternative heavy rail route north of the A40

We are concerned that the £120M headline figure, quoted at the exhibition and picked up by the local press, for dualling was very misleading as it was based on the assumption that the earthworks for the £38M bus lane currently under way would be re-used for the dualling with the bus lane being scrapped! They also mention the additional £100M needed to get the dualling nearer to where people want to go (the so-called “Top Hat”) so really dualling should be costed at £120M + £38M + £100M = £258M, similar to the more sustainable guided bus, train or tram proposals. The latter have the benefit of creating a second alternative “track”, reducing the problems from perturbations on the A40. Also we know that dualling just attracts more cars and will fill up very quickly and does not remove the bottlenecks nearer into Oxford. As 91% of the A40 peak traffic starts in West Oxfordshire and 71% is destined for greater Oxford, this is a perfect route for public transport. The problem for buses at the moment is that they get stuck in traffic like the cars. Separating them out would improve reliability and make them more attractive. A bus lane extended westwards at a cost of around £50M would make sense in the short to medium term, provided that there is a high frequency service (~5 minutes) along the core coupled with efficient extensions from the outer villages and to the hospitals and business areas to the east of the City and the enabling works do not preclude a long term rail solution.

At the same time every effort must be made to make better use of Hanborough station for access to the rail network from the corridor, coupled with a link across Oxford on to a Cowley branch re-opened for passengers. Local planning issues must not be allowed to get in the way of GWR's ambitions.

In the medium to long term heavy rail should be a no-brainer. By that time Network Rail's current difficulties should be behind them and Cassington quarry will have been worked out. It will also be clear how Oxford Parkway station is performing and whether a link to it using the old LNWR route from Yarnton and on to EWR would make sense.

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

### **Chairman's Comment**

At the start of October I attended the Branches and Groups Day in Birmingham; this is an event where Chairmen and officers of Railfuture Branches review how things are going and swap best practice.

Ian Brown started the day off, rounding up Transport Policy and the relevance of Railfuture: 1) Network Rail have no real interest in expanding the Network, only maximising sales of paths on the existing network 2) TOCs also have no real interest (with the exception of Chiltern), in doing anything other than maximising income from the existing services. 3) The Treasury has spotted that bus services are cheaper than trains, as the Spending Review draws nearer (I despair at the calibre of some Civil Servants).

This is the difficult backdrop we face but on the plus side, as an organisation we are getting much better at campaigning and getting our foot in the door at an early stage.

It seems remarkable that the only National organisation campaigning for rail is Railfuture and that is why it is so important to keep pressing for a Bigger Better Railway because no one else is and in the Thames Valley we are about to see Oxford Parkway opening on Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> October (preview day). As a Branch I hope we can build on its success, in future campaigning.

### **Cotswold Line**

Kingham

The car park is complete, offering 100 spaces. They are already filling up and the footbridge nears completion. Lifts will be added next year. With the new parking, origin and destination study suggests Kingham is now becoming a railhead for west Cheltenham. A new Bus Service, the 802, has started from 29th September 2015 linking Kingham Station to Bourton on the Water, with good rail/bus connections.

Worcestershire Parkway

This continues, despite the reservations of some, hopefully boosting the northern end of the Cotswold Line.

Stratford - Honeybourne

The District Council which was not enthusiastic in the past is seeking to progress to a new study.

### **Freight**

All freight to Banbury Road Stone Terminal and Bicester MOD is now travelling via the Bicester chord, reducing time taken to serve the sites and removing the detour via Calvert.

### **Bicester to Oxford Opening**

*Oxford Parkway Launch*

Chiltern Railways (CR) remains on course to officially launch the new service to Oxford Parkway on Monday 26th October, but with the first public trains actually running on Sunday 25th October (07:49 from Oxford Parkway).

Following the successful completion of signal commissioning over the weekend of 26th & 27th September, CR started driver route learning trains on Monday 28th September.

The pocket timetable booklet commencing 25th October has been published and is available from staffed CR stations.

### **Class 168/3s**

In September, the first of the refurbished Class 168/3 trains arrived at Wembley depot followed by the start of a driver familiarisation testing programme.

**PHOTOS:**



Two views of works at Wolvercote tunnel looking north and south, 4<sup>th</sup> October 2015.

Both: Richard Stow



Oxford Parkway station on 1<sup>st</sup> October – 25 days to go!  
Andrew McCallum

The new car park at Kingham station, beyond bridge.  
Richard Stow



Vivarail's D-train prototype at Long Marston during a visit by members on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2015.

One of the sample internal layouts for the D-train, on a vehicle in the workshop.

Both: John Elvin

Edited by Andrew McCallum with contributions from Richard Stow, John Elvin, Nigel Rose & members on the Vivarail trip.

