



THAMES VALLEY

campaigning by
The Railway Development Society Limited

THAMES VALLEY BRANCH Newsletter 92 August 2017

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Next members' meeting:

We are still working on arranging our next members' event and will notify you separately in due course.

Railfuture Thames Valley Branch AGM 22nd April 2017, 10.30 **The Hub, Easton Street, High Wycombe.**

24 members and supporters were present. No apologies were received. The Secretary opened the meeting, welcomed members to our first meeting at High Wycombe, marking the start of Chiltern's services through to Oxford and thanked committee member Nigel Phillips for arranging the venue.

Chairman's Report – Thames Valley Branch

2016-17 has continued to see heavy rail investment in the Thames Valley Branch area and there have been a number of major project completions; since the last AGM this included the extension of services to Oxford City from Oxford Parkway, the completion of Banbury re-modelling and completing electrification to Maidenhead from Paddington on the Great Western main line.

This year ahead will see the start of Oxford Parkway having exceeded all expectations in terms of demand, rather like most rail investment.

The branch has had a busy year, lobbying where we can and assisting others with constructive advice in transport matters.

Our 2016 AGM was addressed by Chris Austin, OBE, a Railfuture Vice President and Co- author of *Disconnected!*, a second book analysing the catastrophic transport failures of the late 1960s and author of a report when at ATOC into re-openings. Chris went through the folly of some closures and the hurdles of re-opening lines, the main message being that it was easy to close; it's hard to re-open.

We had a meeting at Bicester in the summer addressed by Martin Tugwell of Heartland Strategic Alliance Transport Forum; this was very valuable as it gave us an insight into the changing way transport planning and funding is evolving.

We held an autumn meeting in Oxford with Rob Mashford of Network Rail in Jericho; the room was a bit small but all present gained a good idea of what is planned for Oxford over the next 2 years.

The Branch also hosted the Railfuture National AGM at Milton Keynes in May and I must thank Iain Stewart MP, the Mayor of Milton Keynes, Steve Coventry and Allison Cosgrove, of Railfuture Scotland together with branch members who helped. It was a great success and shows how much a small branch can achieve.

During the year I have had the opportunity to attend various meetings, twice with Railfuture with the Oxfordshire County Council cabinet member for Transport, and meetings with other elected members and officials. It is at these meetings when we get the opportunity to lobby for rail and sustainable transport. We have also responded to various local plan and transport strategies.

I am grateful to Committee members who have sat on various boards and attended various meetings.

I continue to enjoy the Oxford Green Fair; it gives me the opportunity to talk to non-rail enthusiasts, i.e. our target audience. At the Green Fair it was clear the Oxford - Cambridge issue eclipses all others.

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

1. Witney Oxford Transport.
We await work on the busway. WOT held a successful conference in October 2016 and following this I was able to get our message out that the Busway is only the first stage of the plan.
2. Bourne End – High Wycombe.
Nigel Phillips has continued work tirelessly. It is good to hear that £100,000 is to be made available from Wycombe District Council for a study of the scheme.
Work is to be carried out later in the year to assess the feasibility of works at Bourne End for 2tph on the existing branch for which WDC is providing £350,000.
3. Grove – Wantage.
This is a no-brainer. £20 million is to be spent enlarging the car park at Didcot. Most passengers come from the west of Didcot (none from the east), some as far west as Fairford and Cirencester. Perhaps the £20m could have been better spent on a station nearer the customers.
The Railway is there to serve the customer; I thought the BR days had gone.
The business case is now so strong I expect to see some progress here in the next year.
4. Cowley Branch/ Hanborough.
Railfuture supported the planning application which included the Car Park at Hanborough. The appeal was successful but the Inspector was not convinced of the need for a car park. Much blame must be put on the Local Authority.
5. East – West Rail. This is progressing to a Transport and Works Act Order; it all rather frustrating.
6. HS2. The branch contains a large length of the project and I would appreciate members' thoughts as we move into the delivery phase.

We continue to retain close links with Bus Users UK (Oxford Branch).

Our media appearances have been better than last year and I have done a number of interviews. However I would welcome a new press officer to come forward; there is plenty of news around.

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.

I continue to be amazed at the scale of investment in rail in the Branch area but I suspect its going to get more difficult over the next few years. This is where Railfuture comes into its own as the only national voluntary lobby group.

Should anyone wish to become more actively involved in the group, we would welcome the help.

Secretary's report.

Meetings: Since last year's AGM in Oxford we have held two meetings, one in Bicester in September with Martin Tugwell of the England's Heartland Strategic Alliance and one in November in Oxford with Rob Mashford and Amy Harland of Network Rail. Attendance at the former was low but at the latter it was high with standing room only at the back. This perhaps reflects members' interest in grass roots activity as this presentation was all about the detail of NR's works in the Oxford area.

We hope to arrange events in Reading this year, bringing the focus back to Berkshire.

We only published two newsletters as the autumn issue was deferred until December to await the Chancellor's Autumn statement and to cover Chiltern reaching Oxford. The next issue will include a report on this AGM. Please feel free to submit contributions, either photos or news items.

Membership: A year ago our membership stood at 118 having gained 7% that year, Today it is also 118. There have of course been some changes. It is to be hoped that the new national recruitment drive will bear fruit and bring younger and a greater diversity of members (we have only about 10% women). Static membership perhaps suggests difficulty recruiting when no serious threats to railways in our area exist.

Treasurer's Report.

The branch accounts had previously been distributed to members and copies were available at the meeting. They were accepted by the meeting.

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

Chairman: Richard Stow	Proposed by David King, seconded by John Elvin
Vice Chairman: David King	Proposed by Chris Bates, seconded by Nigel Rose
Secretary: Andrew McCallum	Proposed by Richard Stow, seconded by John Elvin
Treasurer: John Elvin	Proposed by Andrew McCallum, seconded by Chris Bates

Other committee members: Nigel Rose, Martin Smith, Chris Bates, Vic Angell, Nigel Phillips & Alan Francis were all unanimously re-elected.

Finally.....

Richard Stow announced that this would be his final year as Chairman and that he would stand down at next year's AGM. John Elvin announced that this would be his final year as Treasurer and that he too would stand down at next year's AGM. *Your committee would therefore very much welcome hearing from anyone interested in either post. Please contact either the Chairman or Secretary in the first instance to find out more.*

Our guest speaker was Stephen Barker, Strategic Development Engineer, Chiltern Railways, who gave us a presentation reviewing the reopening and start of services between Oxford and London Marylebone and also Chiltern's future plans, covering the remaining years of the franchise. He works part time also for East West Rail and covered this as well.

He started with a review of the Bicester - Oxford scheme which has now achieved what it set out to do: relieve overcrowding between Oxford & London, restore a High Wycombe - Oxford link, and provide easy access at Oxford Parkway, especially to the hospitals. Bicester - Oxford commuting is a key market with jobs in Oxford but affordable homes in Bicester. The line speed is 100mph and although the service is half hourly at present there is more capacity for the future. The Transport & Works Act Order had 320 objections and between 2008 & 2013 cost £10 million. During the works the MOD Bicester and Banbury Road aggregates terminals were both kept open. Bicester Village and Oxford Parkway stations both have state of the art ticket vending machines which also provide train running information and both have a staff member on duty to help who is easily visible to approach. The track through Wolvercote tunnel and cutting was lowered 700mm. Some trains are very busy and Stephen said the train planners are constantly monitoring passenger volumes to juggle stock diagrams to services.

Stephen then informed us that he is working part time on EWR with Rob Brighthouse (former MD of Chiltern Railways). He said the current Secretary of State for Transport believes EWR is vital for the UK's economy and is second only to HS2 in that respect. He said they are looking at ways to reduce costs for the whole scheme between Oxford/Aylesbury and Milton Keynes/Cambridge. The new company will deliver EWR faster and cheaper than if in the public sector.

Returning to Chiltern he then considered terminal capacity in London. Marylebone is on a constricted site and can't expand to provide more capacity without incurring massive expense in buying up adjacent property. Old Oak Common could provide a second London terminus for Chiltern by use of the line from Northolt. A station there is planned anyway and it would provide interchange with HS2, GWR, Crossrail and London Overground. Research suggests that around two thirds of Marylebone users would reach their final destination quicker via Old Oak Common. Chiltern are talking to the DfT and HS2 and it looks like this will be a viable option and will be compared to the costs of expanding Marylebone.

Finally Stephen said Chiltern have not forgotten Cowley but uncertainty around Oxford development and electrification is causing delay.

In answer to questions, Stephen said that Chiltern's negotiations for franchise renewal are ongoing and a five year extension option is in the contract. Chiltern would be interested in principle in an EWR franchise, he added. The EWR western section budget is £1.5billion and the civil engineering between Bicester and Bletchley is easier than between Bicester and Oxford. While the ticket machines at Oxford Parkway & Bicester Village are the latest model, Chiltern and their parent company, Arriva, are working on the next generation of machine as part of an industry wide project.

Andrew McCallum

Vacancy For Branch Treasurer

Our branch Treasurer will be not be standing for re-election (after around 15 years) at the next AGM in the Spring of 2018. We therefore need to recruit a replacement, ideally well before then, so as to arrange a smooth handover. Help and advice will be readily available to the new treasurer for as long as he/she requires it. It is, by no means, a difficult job and would ideally suit anyone who manages their own bank account and understands very basic bookkeeping.

There are only around six cheques issued every year and a simple set of accounts to produce at the end of each year. A computer is not essential but, if available, our current treasurer has devised a self balancing spreadsheet that prepares the accounts figures direct from the bank account entries.

If you think you might be interested in taking on this role or would just like more information at this stage, please will you contact the branch secretary who will pass on your details to the Treasurer. You will be made very welcome.

Chairman's Comment

Lost unfortunately in the media, members may not have noticed that the DfT, Railfuture and CBT have jointly produced a handbook "Expanding the Railways"; this is a key resource in our mission for a bigger and better railway. I urge everyone to have a read; it gives us a clear guide, for the first time, how to judge whether a scheme is worth pursuing and makes it more difficult for the Treasury to reject strong schemes that tick the boxes, such as East West Rail and Wantage Grove Parkway. It also gives us a clear map on how to press on with Witney and High Wycombe - Heathrow.

It can be read here: <http://www.railfuture.org.uk/article1745-Expanding-the-Railways>

Members and Rail User Groups are reminded that Railfuture's Autumn conference this year is in Leicester on 4th November. The RUG awards will be presented there for which the closing date is 2nd September and the "early bird" bookings close on 31st August.

Details are at: <http://www.railfuture.org.uk/conferences/> and <http://www.railfuture.org.uk/RUG+Awards>

Cotswold Line

The North Cotswold Improvement Scheme will deliver 7 platform extensions by 2019, including the Kingham up platform, which is needed for 2 X 5 car IETs; it is presently at Grip 3.

At last vegetation is being cleared from the lineside, apparently 7m from the rail is being removed to prevent damage to the IETs; work is progressing south of Moreton in Marsh at present.

At the CLPG AGM it was announced that a new task force is to be created to press for half hourly services over the Cotswold Line and full re-doubling; something we welcome.

Witney Oxford Transport Group

Members recently met with local councillors and with the Witney MP, Robert Courts as a result of which Richard Stow had a 15 minute interview on Jack FM local radio.

Freight

The Transport & Works Order was heard on 19th July at the Littlebury Hotel into new sidings at FCC incinerator and tip, into the £80 m Greatmoor Wood Sidings scheme; unlike the Oxford - Bicester Scheme this was a short enquiry. This should offer better unloading for refuse trains; access will be via Bicester

during the works. It is needed as the existing sidings, which we visited a few years ago, are on the route of HS2.

Didcot South Junction

Network Rail have identified this as a key priority as it is now the biggest cause of delay minutes; if these can be cut it may increase Reading - Paddington paths to 28 per hour (now 24). It has not escaped our notice that it should improve reliability on the Didcot - Swindon Route, opening the way for Wantage-Grove Parkway.

Reading Green Park

Work continues on the design; no doubt new fencing will soon appear. It will receive £2.3 million from the Government's new station fund-2, just announced on 28th July.

Richard Stow

Chiltern News

.Since the Oxford - Marylebone route opened in December 2016 the rail market between Oxford and London has grown 18%. Passenger volumes at Bicester Village and Oxford Parkway continue to grow. So far about 3 million journeys have been made and over a million passengers have used Oxford Parkway.

Banbury depot is now operational although work is continuing on site and it is expected to be completed by the end of the year.

Consultations & meetings

Your committee are currently contributing to Railfuture's response to the EWR consultation (<http://ewrconsultation.co.uk/>) and Oxford City Council's consultation on their Oxford Station Supplementary Planning Document (<https://consultation.oxford.gov.uk/consult.ti/StationSPD/consultationHome>). Several committee members have attended the public events for these.

Meetings are forthcoming with the relevant transport councillors and officers at both Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire County Councils.

Andrew McCallum

Photos



Work at Chiltern's new Banbury depot earlier this Summer.

Andrew McCallum



The last day of service for Chiltern's Class 121 "bubble cars", 19th May 2017, seen here at Princes Risborough. The Chinnor Railway's bubble car can be seen in the background. Class 165s now operate these services.

John Elvin

The last week in July saw Network Rail undertake extensive works during a blockade at Oxford when Chiltern provided the only trains to London. The first three of these show the rapid progress being made. These were all taken from the Osney Lane footbridge south of the station. Note the car park in use for the rail replacement coaches.

All four: Richard Stow



On Saturday, the first day, looking north.



On Monday, looking south.



On Tuesday, looking north. Note new crossover.



Five works trains lined up at South Hinksey yard.



First day of service after the blockade was 31st July, both views from Osney Lane Bridge. *Andrew McCallum*



Edited by Andrew McCallum with contributions from Richard Stow.