



THAMES VALLEY

campaigning for
all Britain's rail users

THAMES VALLEY BRANCH Newsletter 93 January 2018

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Next members' meeting

Monday 19th February 2018, 6.30pm at the Jericho Community Centre, 33a Canal Street, Oxford, OX2 6BQ.

A presentation by Rob Mashford of Network Rail about the ongoing works and their scheme for the Oxford corridor as a whole.

All members and guests welcome.

Summary of Branch Meeting in Reading on 23rd November 2017

The guest speaker was Tom Pierpoint, Regional Development Manager, Great Western Railway. Here is a summary of his presentation on the GWR franchise.

It should be noted that this talk took place before DfT announced an extension of the GWR direct award from April 2019 till April 2020.

Tom began with an overview of the introduction of the new train fleets. 7 additional IET trains had been ordered, the first had entered service in October and from January 2018 they will appear on the north Cotswold line, initially off peak then by January 2019 they will operate all services and all the Paddington – Oxford fast trains. For local electric services, all will be operated by the new 387s with no cascaded stock. 387 services to Didcot commence in January. The biggest timetable change will come in December 2018 when the IET services are speeded up with more Bristol trains and hourly north Cotswold trains.

Network Rail's short notice blockades in the Reading area had recently been very challenging and there will be more blockades across the network in 2018.

With 387 services having to terminate at Didcot it is hoped to have cross-platform interchange wherever possible with the Didcot-Oxford services. The Oxford – Banbury stopping trains (in their existing times) will be incorporated into the Didcot – Oxford services. About half the existing Turbo fleet will remain in the Thames Valley with the remainder heading west to the Bristol area.

Turning to individual routes, Tom started with their aspiration to run 3tph Reading – Gatwick which is deferred due to NR's concerns over 5 level crossings and Redhill – Gatwick capacity. The longer term aspiration is to achieve Reading – Gatwick in an hour.

Reading – Basingstoke electrification has been deferred until at least CP6; meanwhile Green Park station is due to open in 2019.

GWR have plans for station redevelopment at Newbury with a larger car park and new footbridge, better bus – rail interchange and new offices at the station for business start-ups but all maintaining the traditional station architecture. Paddington – Bedwyn services will be 5 car IETs from January 2019 (all platforms are long enough) dependent on NR lengthening the Bedwyn turnback siding.

Work has started on the £20 million scheme to multi-story Didcot's west car park which will have 6 floors.

On the branches, Henley will have 2tph all day, at Bourne End a new layout (awaiting NR GRIP 3) will allow 2tph Maidenhead – Marlow all day.

Turning to Crossrail, Tom pointed out that the much reduced journey times between Paddington and the City & Docklands will result in increases in traffic to/from Wales and the west in and out of Paddington. The Western Rail Link to Heathrow (previously called WRATH) is due to open in 2024 in NR's current plans.

Tom concluded by turning to the Cotswold line and GWR's plans for Hanborough. They have purchased a second hand modular station building from Abbey Wood (where a new station for Crossrail has been built) which will be a big improvement in facilities here but is not a permanent building and land has been secured for a 400 car space increase in the car park, which has already been expanded twice. Hanborough should be part of Oxford's Park & Ride network with the potential for a new bus link with Eynsham including its proposed new Garden Village development.

Finally, as part of the question and answer session a discussion ensued on the re-opening of the Stratford to Honeybourne line. GWR would be keen to operate such a service though possibly a first step, due to the difficulty of access to Stratford station, would be Honeybourne – Long Marston with a Park & Ride at the latter and with funding from the developer of the large new Long Marston combined housing and employment site. As Tom reminded us, a rail vehicle manufacturer is based at Long Marston and they would no doubt be interested!

Andrew McCallum

Chairman's Comment

The recent announcement in mid-December, of what is a major change of Transport Policy, is very welcome to us as a Branch; at last East West has got the green light, (BCR 11.6) but just as significantly it gives us a hope of pushing our key objectives, all of which will exceed the BCR of 2 and for the first time since the late 19th Century, this announcement, contains a commitment to a Bigger Railway.

The one thing we in the Thames Valley have is very good Cost/Benefit ratios: Cowley Branch, Wantage Science Vale Parkway, Milton Keynes - Heathrow (via Bourne End) and the Witney High Quality Transit Link all meet the criteria, with a margin to spare.

Needless to say the Oxford - Cambridge Expressway, seems to be rather missing a robust BCR.

Meetings

Branch Committee members met with the new Oxfordshire County Council Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment, Cllr Yvonne Constance, on 8th November for what turned out to be a very excellent exchange of views. The county is to update its trailblazing Rail Strategy (which we have used as a template for other Councils to copy), we discussed Science Vale Parkway, Witney and Cowley and ensured our views and those of the County are similar. It is clear we must lobby in partnership to achieve our objectives.

This followed our meeting with Bucks County Council, at officer level, in the previous month when we were able to productively identify a list of objectives to pursue.

Since these two meetings the Treasury has agreed to fund (at last) the East – West Scheme.

Cotswold Line

Hanborough

The car parking spaces for 400 cars to the west of the station have now been secured, thanks to the new land owner, and is to be held within the Rail Industry; this has been a long saga, but it is with relief that it is now resolved.

Kingham

Planning permission for 8 houses has been granted by West Oxfordshire District Council at the Station entrance.

Service Provision

Members may be aware the level of service is falling short, at present. This seems to be due to staff and stock shortages. Let's hope it is soon resolved with the IET units; most stations within driving distance of Oxford Parkway are now losing passengers, including Hanborough. What this shows is that passengers in prosperous areas (such as the North Cotswolds) will revert to the car if the rail service is not excellent.

Cowley Branch

The Treasury mentioned £300,000 for a study in the Budget; the 2019 opening date may be a bit optimistic but the transport case is overwhelming.

Wantage Science Vale Parkway

We have had two meetings with the Leader of the District Council, Cllr Matthew Barber, who has seen the benefits to the Vale of White Horse with clarity and vision.

We await the outcome the SLC Rail study, commissioned by the County, which will identify the optimum location. It has been drawn to our attention this site affects the London - Bristol and South Wales services, however, if the main line needs quadrupling, so be it. This is a massive opportunity site for the nation, connecting high tech employment and housing.

The Great Western Taskforce is to be reinvigorated to look at whole line, although this branch is only interested in Science Vale and Swindon East.

Bourne End

According to the latest MMPA Newsletter, land surveys at Bourne End have been carried out with a view to reinstating the track connection that will allow a half hourly service to Maidenhead all day. Further surveys should have been completed before Christmas. The next stage of the design process is due in May.

HS2 Ltd

Ground investigations continue but contractors will be shortly finalising designs and mobilising; until the designs are final and agreed, work cannot begin but works will start this year. *Richard Stow*

Chiltern Railways

Passenger numbers are continuing to rise particularly on the Oxford route where, on certain weekdays, station car parks are regularly reported as full - particularly at Bicester Village and the 850 space Oxford Parkway. We understand planning permission to increase parking capacity at both stations was approved via the original TWAO authorising the line's rebuilding.

October 2017 marked two years since Chiltern Railways began running services from Oxford Parkway and Bicester Village stations and passenger numbers along the line are continue to grow. At the two-year mark, four million journeys had been made with 1.5 million passengers travelling through Oxford Parkway.

Bicester Village station saw 2.5 million passengers use the station and was voted 'Small Station of the Year' at the National Rail Awards on 21st September 2017. Judges remarked on the "thoughtful customer service touch", by the provision of foreign language signage to cater for the large numbers of overseas visitors to the adjacent shopping outlet. They also said the new station "set a new incredibly high standard for small stations".

As a result of stakeholder feedback, CR are continuing to produce printed timetable booklets although with a much reduced print run. The booklets are not on general display but are readily available to any passenger upon request. *John Elvin*

Oxford Green Fair

The branch had another successful stand at the Oxford Green Fair in the Town Hall on 2nd December (see photo on next page). We gained some new members and sold some copies of the latest edition of "Britain's Growing Railway" but above all we had many interesting conversations with visitors. There is much demand to be able to travel east, not just to Cambridge but Milton Keynes especially and there is a sense of frustration that it is taking so long to get the line built. Re-opening to Cowley was widely supported and there was also a noticeable requirement to be able to travel westwards without having to change at Didcot. The branch's new banner had its first public outing and was the cause of much lively discussion. *Andrew McCallum*

Photos: focusing on the start on 2nd Jan of electric services to/from Didcot with connections for Oxford.



Railfuture's Martin Smith & Andrew McCallum with visitor at our Oxford Green Fair stand. *Richard Stow*



Class 387 at Didcot Parkway on 3rd January 2018, the 2nd day of electric train operation from London.



Cross platform interchange at Didcot; passengers having switched trains, both are ready to depart.



Passengers from a 387 out of sight on platform 4 board the connecting train for Oxford on platform 5



Two views of the new north sidings at Oxford, now in use though work continues, with Newcastle and Marylebone bound trains respectively, passing. Learn more on this at our members' meeting on 19th February (see front page).



All: Andrew McCallum on 3rd January 2018

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