

**This short Newsletter is to let you know about the revised arrangements for our 2018 AGM. We had to postpone the meeting arranged for 3<sup>rd</sup> March due to the severe wintry conditions – let's hope we have better weather in April! We made every effort to notify members of the postponement and we hope that no-one was unduly inconvenienced. The meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> March was to be held in the Above Bar Church Centre in Southampton, but they couldn't accommodate us on the revised date, so we will be returning to last year's excellent venue at Brockenhurst.**

## **Annual General Meeting**

The postponed 2018 AGM of Railfuture Wessex Branch will be held on **Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> April** at **Brockenhurst Village Hall**, Highwood Rd, SO42 7RY, just a 5 min walk from Brockenhurst station. The meeting will start at **11:00am** (arrival and tea/coffee from 10:30am). We have to vacate the room by 1:30pm.

We couldn't get a guest speaker at short notice, but we've assembled some interesting video presentations about recent rail developments in the South. Also we'll have the usual review of our campaigns and activities over the past year, with time to discuss priorities for the year ahead.

Branch members are eligible to stand for election to any of the committee posts. If you wish to stand, it would be helpful if you could let our Chairman or Secretary know prior to the AGM – see contact details below.

*Directions to Brockenhurst Village Hall:* From the station booking hall, bear left and head diagonally across the car park, then through a pedestrian exit gate into Avenue Road. Continue along Avenue Road (becomes East Bank Road), walking parallel to the railway. At the end of East Bank Road, continue straight ahead along a footpath. Go straight across Partridge Road and carry on along the footpath until it ends at the junction with Highwood Road. Turn right into Highwood Road and the Village Hall is a few yards up on the left.

*Beware if coming from the west:* buses replace trains between Bournemouth and Poole on 7<sup>th</sup> April. After the meeting, you could have lunch in Brockenhurst (there are several pubs and cafes within a short walk of the station). Why not enjoy a ride on the picturesque branch line to Lymington in the afternoon, arriving in time for tea on the quayside! Alternatively, follow one of the many New Forest walking trails which start from Brockenhurst.

By the time of the AGM, we should know more about SWR's final timetable for the big change in December, and we may have details of the capacity enhancements promised for May.

### *News in Brief*

Your Hon. Sec., Tony Smale, discovered a massive hike of around 30% in price of the **Freedom of Severn and Solent Rover** for 2018. Last year, the ticket cost £46.45 for an adult travelling on any 3 days in 7, or £71.20 on any 8 days in 15, with reductions for children and for railcard holders. He was quoted two different sets of prices for 2018, but suffice to say they're a lot higher than last year. Tony reported the matter to ticketing expert Barry Doe (a former vice-president of Railfuture) - Barry thinks the steep price rise is because the ticket was unrealistically cheap and undercut end-to-end return fares on some routes.

When they took on the South Western franchise, SWR announced a new **Customer & Communities Improvement Fund** of £81,000 for community rail projects on the Isle of Wight. Local groups were invited to apply for a slice of the cash and four projects have now been selected for funding: (i) a café and community space at Ryde Esplanade (ii) decorating and fitting out community rooms at Sandown (iii) a bus shelter outside Shanklin station and (iv) repainting and signage for the bus museum at Ryde St John's Road. The suggestion for a bus shelter at Shanklin came from Wessex Branch committee member, Stuart George, who is quoted as being "delighted" in SWR's press release! From 2020, a further tranche of funding will be made available for projects on the mainland rail network – so start thinking of something that could improve your local station!

The Wessex committee has begun assembling its thoughts in advance of the forthcoming consultation on the next **Cross Country franchise** which will commence in 2019. Additional rolling stock of a type more suited to long distance travel is likely to be at the top of the wish list. We also want to see a return to a more sensible seat reservation system to prevent the uncertainty of being ejected from your seat by someone with a last-minute booking.

The **South Hampshire Rail Users' Group** raise a number of issues in their latest newsletter "Hogrider". For example, they say that staffing of booking offices is often inadequate and cite an occasion in January when a single booking clerk was on hand at Southampton Central upside to deal with time-consuming requests. A common theme in the group's response to various consultations has been the need to address poor connectivity between South Hampshire and the Westcountry, either via better connections at places such as Salisbury and Westbury or by running through trains.

This month's Railway Magazine reports that sources in Dorset have revealed that the occasional DB stone trains contract to **Hamworthy Quay** ends in April and with no other traffic, the future of the line is unclear. – *thanks to Robin Attwood for spotting that*

Canvas Coffee refreshment room at Portsmouth and Southsea station were runners up in Railfuture's 2017 **Best Station Café** competition. It's a social enterprise giving training to disadvantaged people and serving locally-roasted, speciality coffee as well as really scrummy cakes. If you're in the area, do drop in, smell the beans and enjoy the unique, friendly atmosphere.

*If you would like further details of any of the above items, please contact the Secretary.*

### Dates for your diary

**7 April 2018:** Wessex Branch AGM in Brockenhurst. **12 May 2018:** Railfuture national AGM in Edinburgh. **23 June 2018:** Railfuture Summer Conference in Carlisle. **10 Nov 2018:** Railfuture Autumn Conference in Reading. **20 May & 9 Dec 2018:** National Rail timetable change dates.

### Branch contacts

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