

Chairman's Message

Well here we are again ... and as our President says "what is franchising for?" It appears that it's not just South Western Railway that are in the mire, with Network Rail taking some of the blame for poor performance, it's also the Department for Transport, unions with their unpopular strike action, plus - dare we suggest - poor management.

In any event, now that the Secretary of State has called a halt to the December 2018 timetable changes, it's given SWR a way of going back to see if they can re-negotiate their franchise contract. Watch this space, as the saying goes ... but it's a shame the railway has got to this stage, just when it appeared on the surface in 2017 things were going well.

Our passengers are feeling the heat (not just due to failed air conditioning!) and they're understandably losing faith in the rail industry as it strives to do the right thing. There is no doubt that passenger journeys will fall, and this presents us with a challenge: how can Railfuture bring its skills to bear in improving the current poor position? SWR and NR (especially the latter) must improve efficiency but they certainly need more resources, cash and human, if they're to resolve current maintenance issues – we can all agree the resilience of signalling across the network leaves much to be desired.

Long term, a Woking flyover (see page 3) may not be as effective as forecast, because Clapham Junction capacity problems will not have been resolved. Last year's Waterloo remodelling served to refocus attention on the limited number of trains able to pass through CJ in the peaks, so tackling capacity at Woking would simply move more trains into the CJ bottleneck. Crossrail 2 may take some pressure off CJ but it's not expected to be operational until "the early 2030s".

The announcement that the Great Western Railway franchise will not be split in two comes as a relief! We do need to keep up to speed with all these issues, and those others you will read about in this newsletter, to ensure we have an ability where possible to help in their resolution.

Best wishes

Chair, Bruce Duncan.

New Railfuture campaign leaflet for Welborne Station

You will be aware from past newsletters that Railfuture Wessex branch has been actively campaigning for a new station to be included in the proposed new town of Welborne just north of Fareham on the line to Eastleigh. Thanks to the hard work of committee member Alan Mayes we have published a new leaflet which summarises the development and our proposals. Members reading this newsletter on email may access the leaflet via this link: <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/display1800> and those receiving it by post will find a copy enclosed. If anyone would like one or more printed copies to pass to interested parties please contact John Holland: johnholland442@gmail.com or 023 9283 9660.

CrossCountry Franchise Consultations

Dr Stephen Wright from Railfuture's West Midlands branch is coordinating our official response to the franchise renewal consultations by the due date of 30th August 2018. Dr Wright arranged meetings with representatives of branches on the XC network, and David Brace attended to put forward views from a Wessex perspective. David will be summarising our branch aspirations, which will hopefully be reflected in the overall Railfuture submission.

A reminder: you are welcome to compile your own individual response to Government consultations, but you should not purport to represent Railfuture when you submit your comments.

Draft Transport Strategy for Southampton

At the end of July, Southampton City Council launched a 12-week consultation on its transport strategy for the period up to 2040. Wessex Branch will be preparing its submission in the coming weeks focussing on rail aspects of the strategy. We would like to hear from anyone in the Southampton area willing to help with this task, either by reviewing the background documents or by simply submitting ideas for inclusion.

The City Council is holding public drop-in sessions at various venues during September: Civic Centre (4th), Shirley Library (15th), Portswood Library (19th) and Bitterne Library (29th). Copies of consultation documents can be seen at libraries, or read them online at: <http://www.southampton.gov.uk/ltp4>

Island Line

At a recent meeting of the Island Line Stakeholder Forum, it was revealed that SWR has now submitted its preferred option to the Department for Transport. We will have to wait a little longer to find out what their plan actually is and whether it has the DfT seal of approval. The IoW Steam Railway appears to have given it the thumbs down since it would make their aspiration of running steam trains through to Ryde St Johns Road problematic.

Securing the future of the railway pier is being treated as a separate issue. It could either continue to be maintained on a “patch and mend” basis, or it could receive a complete refurbishment costed at £60m but which should last 60 years.

Others issues raised at the meeting included the difficulty of the guard getting through the train to check tickets, the need to improve marketing of the line, and whether trains needed to stop so far from the buffers at each end of the line.

Meanwhile, the Isle of Wight Council has published a “Regeneration Strategy”, and we note with dismay that the important role of public transport gets scant recognition.

Swanage Railway

Your Secretary attended a Purbeck Community Rail Partnership meeting recently, where we learnt that progress is at last being made on refurbishment of Swanage Railway’s heritage diesel units –they are expected back from Eastleigh works by September and will be needed for the introduction of regular services to and from Wareham, scheduled to resume in April 2019.

Meanwhile, there’s been much positive feedback about SWR’s summer Saturday diesel service from Salisbury to Corfe Castle via Yeovil and Weymouth, with a full 3-car trainload arriving at Corfe on each run. Regrettably, RMT industrial action on four consecutive Saturdays has effectively curtailed the service, but there should still be three more days on which the train will run if you want to give it a try: Sat 25 Aug, Mon 27 Aug and Sat 8 Sept.

Arriving at Corfe Castle
photo: Paul Blowfield



Woking Remodelling - from an item in Surrey News

A flyover just west of Woking station could be built at the station in the next five years. James Waight, head of strategic planning for Network Rail, told councillors at Woking Borough Council in June that a number of changes are proposed, including a new station. Woking would be the first station on the Wessex Route to benefit from the Rail Network Enhancement Pipeline (RNEP), which allows Network Rail to find third parties to bid to fund improvements.

Mr Waight said due to an increase in passenger numbers over the next 12 years, there was a "significant challenge in terms of accommodating the number of people wishing to travel by rail". He said the flyover would separate the Portsmouth and Bournemouth lines and allow two additional slots to access Waterloo station every hour. "This is a £200 to £300 million piece of engineering. It takes a long time to plan and get it right. It could even be a dive-under as opposed to fly-over, depending on the water table ... we're currently working on a £5.2million study looking into which would be best for the station."

A new platform six for Woking station is also being proposed.

Tisbury trial for new planning process

Salisbury to Exeter Rail Users' Group and TravelWatch SouthWest have both joined the West of England Line Strategy Group, which includes representatives from NR, SWR and local authorities. The group is actively looking at reinstating the second platform at Tisbury and double tracking from Tisbury to Dinton, both of which were included in SERUG's 4-point plan put to MPs at the House of Commons earlier this year (see our article in July's Railwatch).

The Tisbury scheme may well be the first use of Network Rail's new "CMSP" regime (yet another acronym to learn: *Continuous Modelling Strategic Planning*). CMSP itself forms a part of the new "RNEP" process (which you will remember from the previous item about Woking). The dreaded "GRIP" is still there of course but the new process enables continuous work rather than work programmed in 5 year fixed periods.

Bruce Duncan comments (in his capacity as SERUG's Chairman): "So far so good, although the line's 30 year old rolling stock is feeling somewhat jaded – a bit like its customers!"

Cross-Party Group to tackle South Western Railway issues

MPs in the area served by South Western Railway have joined together to form an All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) in the House of Commons. The APPG will focus on issues affecting travellers and commuters on South Western Railway and work across parties to hold rail bosses to account and stand up for passengers.

Members include MPs Steve Brine (Winchester), Maria Miller (Basingstoke), Alan Mak (Havant), Vice-Chair Stephen Morgan (Portsmouth South) and Chair Ed Davey (Kingston and Surbiton). MPs representing the West of England Line, led by Sir Oliver Letwin, have also joined the APPG.

Freight News

Robin Attwood, our Freight Group representative, reports that Southampton City Council has granted Network Rail planning permission to extend two sidings at Redbridge to take 775m trains. This will improve somewhat the existing problems with stabling long freights. NR had originally submitted a planning application for two additional 775m sidings and Railfuture had backed this proposal – however, the Council rejected it after objections from local residents.

Robin also keeps a watch on freight movements over the branch line to Marchwood Freightliner Terminal. He says there are now three 400-ton trains from Southampton MCT to Marchwood FLT (Saturdays only) and three 400-ton trains from Marchwood FLT to Southampton MCT (Mondays only), as shown in the working timetable which runs to early December. There is still military traffic to/from Marchwood Military Base, mainly to Bicester MoD and Eastleigh East Yard, with the odd working to/from Kineton MoD (Fenny Compton).

Other News

Dorset Coastal Forum has submitted a bid to the Coastal Communities Fund for £517,000 to transform **Weymouth** railway station, its forecourt and environs. The total cost of the project is said to be £900,000.

Work to install new lifts at **Pokesdown** railway station is expected to start next summer, with completion early in 2020. Campaigners have spent years calling for the lifts to be restored, allowing more disabled people to use the station. Once installed, the facilities will save people with pushchairs and baggage climbing the 44 steps up to street level on Christchurch Road.

Cross Country has introduced a **Southampton-Aberdeen** service which runs on weekdays only during the summer period. It would still be quicker to travel via London with little difference in cost – however the XC service may be useful for travel to/from intermediate stations.

The Association of Community Rail Partnerships (ACoRP) has appointed a new Community Rail Support Officer for the south: Daniel Wright. Daniel will be our first point of contact for community rail on the South Western Railway network, and will be working with SWR in finding community uses for redundant station buildings.

Railfuture Autumn Conference comes to Reading

Railfuture's Autumn Conference 2018 will be held at the Novotel Hotel in Reading on Saturday 10th Nov. If you haven't been to one of these conferences before, now is your chance since travel to and from the town is quite easy from all parts of the Wessex area.

Top-line speakers will be presenting details of the Crossrail project, plans for new links to Heathrow Airport, the progress of electrification, and new station projects. We'll also have the results of the Rail User Group Awards competition and the opportunity to chat to other rail campaigners at lunchtime and during the refreshment breaks.

Book before the end of August to get your "early bird" discount. Also, nominations for the RUG Awards close on 1st September so you still have time to enter. Full details in your July Railwatch.

More dates for your diary

The next meeting of TravelWatch SouthWest will be on **Sat 6th October**. These meetings are usually held in Taunton.

The next Wessex Branch committee meeting is scheduled for **Sat 13th October** in Fareham. You are welcome to attend and join in the discussions – please contact the Secretary for details of time and venue.

We plan to hold next year's Branch AGM in Portsmouth on **Sat 6th April 2019**: details nearer the date.

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If you received this newsletter by post and have since acquired an internet connection, please let us know your email address as this will help us to reduce the cost of sending out newsletters – *thanks*.

Branch contacts

Chairman bruce.duncan@railfuture.org.uk or **Secretary** tony.smale@railfuture.org.uk
Secretary's address: 63 Church Lane, Wool, Wareham BH20 6DD tel 01929 462116
Follow us on Twitter @RailfutureWessx