

BRIAN COOK R.I.P.

With sadness we advise of the death of long time Railfuture member Brian Cook. Brian served on the Wessex Branch Committee - he was the Branch representative with the East Hampshire Community Rail Partnership and assisted with Branch membership matters. His cheery presence will be greatly missed by the Committee. - CB

Chairman's Message

Firstly, I was very sorry to hear that we had lost the talent, contribution and humour of Brian Cook, a most valued member of the committee for many years. The committee extends its sympathy to his family and friends.

We had an excellent committee meeting on the 15th June with a lot of topics covered, many of which are reported in this newsletter. I am delighted to be chairing a committee with so much knowledge and enthusiasm for rail. Nick Farthing from the Three Rivers Community Rail Partnership (and a former Chair of Railfuture Wessex) gave us a presentation on a number of issues, notably: the progress being made to re-open the Waterside Line and the creation of a Solent Metro. The work undertaken is broadly in line with our own aspirations so we have offered Nick our support and we intend to work together on these projects.

We agreed that with so much government funding being spent on HS2 and improvements in the North we should continue to push national and local government to also deliver investment in the rail infrastructure in the South.

I and a few other committee members were invited to attend the first SWR/Three Rivers CRP Community Rail Showcase event. It was very well attended not just by those with rail interests but a number of organisations with interests in improving community transport – *see full report below*.

Finally, in my experience of lobbying for rail improvements it is always helpful to be able to represent passengers and to have specific examples of rail shortcomings. If any Wessex members are associated with rail user or passenger groups it would be good to know that and see if there are ways we can become more connected!

Chair, Mike Southgate.

Community Rail Partnership Showcase 15th July

Several members of the Wessex Branch committee and those of other branches of Railfuture attended the first showcase event for CRPs in the South of England. This was held in a Southampton hotel and hosted by the Three Rivers, Isle of Wight & Lymington-to-Brockenhurst CRPs; the event was sponsored by the Association of Community Rail Partnerships (ACoRP) and several local train & bus operators. Over a hundred people attended, representing a wide range of organisations, rail companies and the Dept. for Transport.

Six presentations were made by: the DfT, South Western Railway, the Rail Safety & Standards Board, Paul Salvesson (founder of the community rail movement), Go South Coast Ltd and Hovertravel. Primary emphasis of the day was on forging links within local communities, of which CRPs are but one element.

The workshops encouraged attendees to discuss where they might help each other - typical examples were: use of redundant railway buildings for other community purposes and helping specific community groups,

some of whom had never used rail. Promotion of diversity was important and the attendance of transport operators other than rail led to suggestions that all should work together to benefit local communities. Useful contacts were made and our Chairman plans to meet up again with SWR's Commercial Director.

Portsmouth-Cardiff

For years we've complained about inappropriate rolling stock on the Portsmouth-Cardiff route. As previously reported, Great Western Railway's replacement for the cramped Class 158 units is to be the Class 165/166 Turbo Trains displaced from Paddington outer-suburban services. The intended 5-car formation certainly provides additional seating, but there are plenty of downsides, and our Chairman has taken up a number of these issues with GWR's management.

The lack of a gangway between the 2- and 3-car units when coupled together is clearly going to cause problems with ticket checks, through passage of the refreshment trolley and alighting at stations with short platforms. We're aware of complaints about air conditioning not working and a lack of toilets, and the suburban-style seating is considered uncomfortable for long journeys.

There have been instances of one unit being taken out of service at Westbury, forcing those heading on towards Hampshire to cram into a single 2-car unit, full and standing. With no gangway between units, how are passengers expected to move to the correct portion prior to the split?

Our Chairman makes the point that "whilst the delay repay scheme covers late arrivals there is no compensation for the miserable conditions passengers have to suffer in these circumstances."

We aim to reflect passengers' concerns and work positively with GWR to resolve these issues.

We have since received a response from GWR's Regional Development Manager for our area, Dan Okey, in which he assures us the company has a plan to address some of the technical issues we've raised. Dan continues "we can expect an improved position with unit availability towards the end of the year, with more 2+4 HSTs coming in to support services on Cardiff – Taunton/Penzance services which in turn will free up more turbos for South Wales – South Coast."

GWR December 2019 Timetable Changes

Railfuture Wessex was amongst a number of organisations invited to submit comments to GWR on their services in advance of a major timetable revision planned for Dec 2019. We repeated our concerns about Portsmouth-Cardiff (*see above*) while making several suggestions for improvements on the other GWR routes that affect our area, namely: Weymouth-Bristol, Reading-Basingstoke and the Reading-Gatwick/Tonbridge route which touches the north east corner of Hampshire.

Salisbury-Exeter

Bruce Duncan tells us that the service on the line this summer has been very poor. Rolling stock failures are still with us, but not in the extreme numbers of last year. The big issue is train cancellations due to driver shortages. Long-suffering passengers have suggested a strapline for the operator: "Sometimes Run Trains". Sadly, these problems have led to the repeated cancellation of the Summer Saturday specials to Weymouth and Corfe Castle. With the "PPM" performance measure for July likely to be around 73% (the target is 89%), clearly SWR is in trouble. We would like reassurance that the poor performance is only temporary, but it's unlikely there will be much positive action in the light of news that the finances of the parent company, First Group, are in poor order. Expect lots of promises but little delivery!

Island Line

Stuart George reports that we're still awaiting a response from the DfT to the South Western Railway's "costed option" for the Island Line, which should have been received by the end of 2018. However, there's some good news: Network Rail has agreed to the renovation of the east side of Ryde pier, on which the Island Line trains run, and associated improvements to give it a further life of 60 years.

Under the *Transforming Cities* programme for Portsmouth, the Isle of Wight Council has bid for £15m for improvements at the Ryde Interchange which is adjacent to Ryde Esplanade station. Ryde qualifies for this funding because the ferries and hovercraft between Portsmouth and Ryde are considered to be a major transport corridor. The scheme would deliver: bus station improvements; better waiting facilities for bus and rail passengers; a new footbridge with lifts linking the railway station and hovercraft terminal; a pedestrian and cycleway along the former tramway pier; and improvements to the Park and Ride facilities at Ryde St John's Road station. The initial draft bid was submitted on 20th June and has now been shortlisted. The final bid will be submitted in November 2019.

Infill Electrification

Your committee has been looking at the apparent hiatus in progressing infill electrification in the Wessex area. This appears to be caused by heightened safety concerns with both types of electrification (DC 3rd rail in particular) - the consequent ratcheting up of costs is making schemes unviable.

A related concern in our area is the pressing need to upgrade power supplies on the Southern Region's third rail network. All too often we're told that train length, frequency and, in some cases, line speed have reached the limit of what can be achieved with the available power supply.

In and around our area there are several candidates for infill electrification crying out for implementation: Basingstoke-Salisbury (and beyond), Basingstoke-Reading and the North Downs Line (Reading-Gatwick/Tonbridge) ...then perhaps Eastleigh-Romsey, Southampton-Salisbury-(Bath) and finally reopened branch lines such as the Waterside Line.

The choice between 3rd rail and overhead should be based on a combination of operational considerations, sound engineering, risk assessment and installation/lifetime cost. Certain long-distance services (eg Cross Country) could be vastly improved if the route were to be electrified throughout. It's a scandal that rail freight remains 100% diesel in our area - it needs to be electric-hauled, but the third rail couldn't cope unless upgraded.

Rail risks being outclassed by road transport in the race to become carbon neutral!

We have raised our concerns about infill electrification with Railfuture's Infrastructure and Networks Group, asking them to pursue the matter nationally.

Funding for Improvements at Stations

Re-instatement of the lifts at Pokesdown has run into further delays – you will recall that this project was a franchise commitment when First/MTR took over the South Western network in 2017.

There was a chance that other stations in our area would benefit from the DfT's **Access for All** funding. Devastatingly, of the 73 stations awarded grants in the 2019 funding round, not a single one is in the Wessex Branch area. So ... there's no joy for Yeovil Junction, Dorchester South and all our other stations where passengers have to drag their suitcases over a footbridge to reach the platform.

After the disappointment that no "Access for All" funding would be coming our way, we were rather pleased to see that several of our stations will benefit from "Tranche 5" of the DfT's **Cycle-Rail Fund** over the coming year. Extra cycle racks are to be fitted at Bournemouth, Dorchester South, Gillingham, Parkstone, Wareham and Weymouth. At Winchester, the former signals building is to be refurbished so that it can be used by a cycling charity to offer a repair service. Salisbury is to get a new cycle hub, and a large cycle hub is also promised for Basingstoke together with a new access path.

Other News

The Dept. for Transport says it has "reviewed all ongoing franchise competitions and other live rail projects in the context of the Williams rail review." They continue: "Due to the unique geographic nature of the **Cross Country** franchise, which cuts across multiple parts of the railway, awarding this franchise in 2019 could impact on the review's conclusions. It has therefore been decided that this competition will not proceed. Services will continue to be operated by the existing franchisee with options beyond this to be considered in due course." The DfT promises to consider all responses to the Cross Country public consultation in the development of future options for the franchise (Wessex Branch had contributed to Railfuture's overall submission in 2018).

One further issue we've recently taken up with GWR recently is the service frequency at **Farnborough North**. Currently it has only the hourly stopping service between Reading and Redhill, but we would like consideration given to stopping the Reading-Gatwick trains as well in view of the station's large catchment area and the possibility of interchange with Farnborough Main. The walking route between the two stations could be better signposted as well.

Heathrow has teamed up with First Group to introduce a **Guildford RailAir** coach service to the airport. They tell us: "Coaches will be timed to connect with fast trains from Portsmouth, and passengers will be able to pay a £9 add-on for coach travel when they buy a train ticket for use on the SWR route between Portsmouth and Guildford, making journeys seamless and faster."

The fledgling organisation, **Transport for the South East (TfSE)**, has been consulting on whether it should have full legal powers to decide on transport matters in an area which includes Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. We broadly supported the proposal provided it didn't dilute the excellent work of Solent Transport in South Hampshire and the IoW. There will be an official launch event in Farnborough on 10th October.

Committee member Charles Burns attended the London & SE Branch **Sussex & Coastway Group** meeting in Haywards Heath on 18 July and heard more about the aspirations of TfSE from their rail officer, Rob Dickens (the guest speaker at the meeting). Charles took the opportunity to raise relevant Wessex Branch campaign issues, including: eastern rail access to Southampton airport, Solent Metro proposals, the need for a station at Welborne and the "Swanwick Parkway" development.

Our new **Treasurer**, Robin Attwood, is getting to grips with the Branch accounts. Meanwhile, Alan Mayes has agreed to take on the job of **Membership Secretary** and has started off by making sure we have a precise definition of the Wessex Branch area in terms of postcodes and railway stations.

We've clarified the situation regarding **Joint Membership** with Railfuture's national Membership Administrator. Joint membership is now limited to two persons at the same address - it used to be any number of family members which made things a bit complicated. We're assured that both are counted when declaring Railfuture's total membership and that both have voting rights.

Railfuture Autumn Conference comes to Bristol

Railfuture's National Conference 2019 will be held at St Michael's Church Centre near Bristol Parkway Station on 21st September – an easy day trip for Wessex Branch members! Guest speakers from GWR, CrossCountry, W Midlands Trains, Network Rail and British Transport Police. See Railwatch or the Railfuture website for full details including how to book your place.

The next Wessex Branch committee meeting is scheduled for **3rd Sept 2019**. You are welcome to attend and join in the discussions – please contact the Secretary for details of time and venue.

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