

Branch AGM at Dilton Marsh, 6th April

The AGM of Railfuture Severnside will take place on Saturday 6th April at the Memorial Hall, Dilton Marsh – 13.00 for 14.00. It is hoped to provide some light refreshments at the Hall but the nearby Fairfield café will be open until 16.00. Dilton Marsh station is just a 10 minute walk (directions below) from the Hall and is a microcosm of change in Wiltshire, set amongst fields a generation ago; housing has expanded into the area and it has a natural catchment of around 9,000 people.

All are welcome to the AGM, which will be brief. Then branch member Graham Ellis will talk on **Railway Development across Wider Wiltshire**. He will describe the changes in Wiltshire that he's seen since his involvement with the county started and he will look forward to next year (with some certainty), to probabilities for the next decade, and to possibilities for later.

At one time Wiltshire suffered more road deaths per head of population than any other county in the UK...and that was because everyone passed through it on their way to somewhere else and few actually lived there. But that's history; two-thirds of its population now lives in towns that have grown – typically market towns with significant travel requirements between them as people go about their daily lives. The rail network in Wiltshire remains very much “between land”, that's served by trains passing through, some not stopping once in the county. Trains run at times designed to suit London, Bristol, Southampton or South Wales, with connections at Wiltshire's main interchange of Westbury at times seeming random.

Trains at Dilton Marsh are running to an amended timetable on 6th April. The meeting is timed to allow you to arrive at 13.04 from Westbury or at 13.05 from the Warminster direction. Return trains in both directions leave Dilton Marsh at 17.05. Trains are replaced by buses north of Westbury that day; from Bristol Temple Meads the 11.34 train connects into the 12.00 bus from Bath Spa, due in Westbury 12.48. Truly a multimodal travel experience and typical of the current scene in Wiltshire where major engineering works to help upgrades for those fast and frequent trains through the county are causing significant local disruption. Returning on the 17.05 Dilton Marsh to Westbury gives an arrival of 18.06 at Bath Spa, to connect into a train due in Bristol T.M. at 18.34.

Come on an adventure on 6th April- come visit Dilton Marsh. All welcome.
Graham Ellis.

Please note that Dilton Marsh station is a request stop. Passengers wishing to alight must inform the Conductor and exit from the leading door of the front carriage. For the return journey, it is necessary to give a clear hand signal to the driver.

If arriving by train from Westbury, go down the slope from the platform and turn left under the railway bridge. Walk along the road, passing Fairfield Farm College and Café on your right. The red brick Memorial Hall is the next landmark on your right, almost opposite the junction with Petticoat Lane.

Because the platforms at Dilton Marsh are staggered either side of the bridge, passengers arriving from the Warminster direction will need to turn right at the foot of the slope.

Graham advises that the increase in usage of Dilton Marsh means that most trains booked to call there on request stop anyway. I did a test run from Gloucester on 1st March, using the 10.48 Great Malvern- Brighton. Although there were changes of Conductor at Bristol and Westbury, the message I gave to the first one had been passed on. The catering trolley operator had also alerted the Driver.

According to the Office of Rail and Road, Dilton Marsh recorded 20,302 journeys in 2017/18, almost as many as Avoncliff (20,510) which, along with neighbouring Freshford, also used to be a request stop. Perhaps the time has come to take Dilton Marsh out of the request stop category.

Nigel Bray.

Minutes of Severnside Branch AGM at Bridgwater Railway Club, 14 April 2018.

13 members and one visitor present. John Hassall was in the Chair until he departed at 2.40 pm. David Redgewell took the Chair for the remainder of the meeting.

1. 10 Apologies for absence were received.
A raffle and donations raised £ 20 for Branch funds.

2. Minutes of the previous AGM at Gloucester on 8 April 2017 were accepted.

3. Chairman's Report

John Hassall said the Branch had held four meetings in the past 12 months. He noted that Severnside was one of the few Branches making money from donations and raffles at meetings. In August Railfuture would have a stall at a WSR event in Norton Fitzwarren. This would need literature, membership forms and volunteers to staff it. We were represented at the first two meetings of Somerset rail campaigners in Taunton and the next would be on 23 May. He commended the Minehead Rail Link Campaign and a document produced by RF East Anglia on Seamless Public Transport.

4. Secretary's Report

Nigel Bray said that work to upgrade the network in 2018 would continue to cause disruption but there would be a better system to show for it in 2019. He referred to progress with GW electrification and rolling stock cascades; platform lengthening to accommodate Class 16x and InterCity Express trains; improvements on the TransWilts route; and the work to reinstate four tracks on Filton Bank.

Railfuture Branches would be participating in a unified response to a DfT Consultation on the next Cross Country franchise. He hoped this exercise and a study

of the passenger environment at stations by RF Passenger Group would encourage member involvement. Air quality was an issue which Railfuture ought to exploit. Chris Hughes commented that the Government was proposing electric road vehicles while cutting back on rail electrification. There was a danger that rail could be perceived as a dirty transport mode and lose its moral advantage. Railfuture ought to make electrification a huge issue.

5. Treasurer's Report

In Tony Lloyd's absence, Nigel reported a deficit of £ 117.48 on the profit and loss account, mainly because £ 168 was spent on room hire but also because of a decision at the November meeting to award £ 300 of grants to campaigning organisations against a grants budget of £ 250. It had been difficult to forecast the cost of venues because they were often arranged at relatively short notice. The Branch's financial position was relatively healthy with a balance of £ 857.49 at year end. He anticipated the Branch would at least break even in 2018 as the first two venues including the AGM had been provided free of charge.

6. Election of Officers

David Redgewell was nominated for Vice-Chair to replace Julie Boston, who had stood down. It was decided to abolish his former position of Political Chair. The following were elected unopposed:

Chair, John Hassall; Vice-Chair, David Redgewell; Treasurer, Tony Lloyd; Secretary, Nigel Bray; Media spokesman, Bruce Williamson.

Committee members: Dave Chapple (Friends of Bridgwater Station), John Dixon (Portishead Railway Group), Gerard Duddridge (representing Somerset and liaison with Devon & Cornwall Branch), Graham Ellis (TransWilts Community Rail Partnership), John Stretton (Ashchurch, Tewkesbury & District Rail Promotion Group).

(post-meeting note: Graham remains on the Committee but Sophie Martin now represents TransWilts CRP). It was agreed to leave a vacancy for Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways. Discussion followed on how to recruit more women and younger people.

7. Any Other Business

It was agreed to renew the Branch's affiliation to Bus Users UK. Dave Chapple referred to the scarcity of evening and Sunday buses in Somerset. Gerard Duddridge added that the early finish of bus services made long-distance trips by train difficult without a car or taxi for the final journey. Glen Burrows suggested lobbying full meetings of Somerset County Council, followed by press statements. Nigel Bray was asked to write to GWR seeking retention of the Integrated Transport Manager post. In reply to Nigel, David Redgewell said the Bristol City Centre Framework Consultation was looking at walking and cycling across the city centre, including access to stations.

Asked about Wellington station, Gerard said he was on the working group for the Taunton extension of the Devon Metro, involving local authorities and the LEP. Taunton Deane Council had been looking at station sites and much timetabling work had been done. He said a realistic timescale for reopening was five to six years. Gerard thought that reopening Chard Junction probably depended on additional passing loops to enable more Exeter-Yeovil services to operate. Chris Hughes said Castle Cary was the railhead for the mid Somerset towns which

had poor bus connections to it. Gerard said he would like to see Castle Cary become a transport hub with improvements such as an hourly Bristol- Weymouth service. David Redgewell noted that South Gloucestershire Council and Gloucestershire County Council were working on extension of MetroWest to Gloucester.

Secretary's report of Branch meeting at Gloucester Leisure Centre, 8 September 2018

Members who attended our Branch meeting at GL1 will recall that the lighting in the Bowls Room, which itself has no natural light, kept failing. The Centre Manager told us that there was no electrician on duty to rectify it. Whilst this did not affect my digital slide presentation on British and Irish railway developments, it was very difficult for Robert Crockford to read the notes for his talk on Rail Trip Generation. On behalf of the Branch, I accepted the Centre Manager's offer of a 50 % refund on the room hire charge. This was finally paid, after three reminders, in late February. Naturally we are reviewing possible venues for future meetings in the Gloucester area. We plan to hold a meeting at Stonehouse in October to promote the campaign to reopen the town's Bristol Road station, with which Robert has been involved. Robert's talk on Rail trip generation discussed how passengers reach a station and what are the influences on station usage. In the early 1970s he carried out an origin and destination survey for all B.R. Southern Region stations outside London. This revealed that most passengers living within two miles of a station reached it on foot or by bus. The proportion who drove to a station increased with the distance from it.

Discussing influences on the popularity of rail travel, this had increased through the dispersal of families and the growth of higher education. The leisure market had become more important for train operators, who welcome the increased patronage of off-peak services. Attraction of visitors to a location has influenced station usage, eg Bath Spa station is disproportionately busy (6.4 million recorded journeys in 2017/18) for the size of the city. He said this was less true for smaller towns, unless they were particular tourist magnets.

Service frequency was another factor in the relative popularity of stations. Giving examples of stations which attracted fewer passengers than their populations might suggest, he said Bridgwater needed a better service for its size and proximity to Hinkley Point power station. Gloucester would benefit from being on a direct Swansea- York Cross Country Trains route. The Stroudwater corridor, with a population of 40,000, has no direct rail access to Bristol, hence the campaign to reopen Stonehouse Bristol Road station.

He was not convinced that car parking was crucial to high usage. Worcester's two existing stations were busy despite minimal parking (none at all at Foregate Street) because of a high level of bus travel in the city.

Report of Friends of Bridgwater Station meeting, 12 February 2019

FOBS is affiliated to Railfuture and its meeting in Bridgwater Railway Club, chaired by Glen Burrows, was attended by over 30 people.

Luke Farley, Assistant Regional Development Manager (Central) for GWR, said there would be less planned disruption to train services in 2019 than in 2018, although the main line between Taunton and Exeter would be closed from 17 February to 8 March

for repairs to Whiteball tunnel. The recent quadrupling of Filton Bank had improved performance for both GWR and Cross Country.

He expected the improvements to Bridgwater station forecourt to be completed this summer. GWR was in discussion with Buses of Somerset about the reinstatement of bus services in the forecourt, which had been designed to accommodate them. In reply to a question about step free access between the platforms, he was not sure whether this would happen in Control Period 6 (2019-24) but said, "Bridgwater is high on our list."

Asked whether GWR would stop more fast trains at Bridgwater, he could not be specific but said it was hoped to introduce a more clockface timetable from December 2019, which would at least provide hourly connections via Taunton.

Andrew Wiles, Transport Studies and Projects Officer, Somerset County Council, said the Peninsula Rail Task Force would be responding to the Consultation on the Williams Review of the railway industry. He and Luke Farley were asked by Dave Chapple when would Dave's Diner (the café on the station forecourt) be allowed into the main station building as GWR and Network Rail had promised.

Mr. Farley said some legal work including building consent was required. Mr. Wiles advised that the building contract was out to tender and should be returned by mid March. He added that a café within the station would increase the number of passengers at Bridgwater.

Glen Burrows referred to the "miserable" ticket office opening hours at the station and unfulfilled promises made about extending them. Mr. Farley said he hoped the Station Manager would talk to FOBS.

Sam Harper, Infrastructure Development Manager, Sedgemoor District Council, said an estimated 8,500 new homes were forecast to be built in Bridgwater over the next 15-20 years, "so we are trying to persuade GWR and Cross Country to stop more trains. We want to reduce rail travel times to major cities and compete with the M5. London in two hours from Bridgwater is one of slogans. We also favour improved ticket office and station facilities."

Mr. Harper said he believed the train service planning methodology used by NR and train operators was flawed. It appeared to be based on ticket sales, not on origin and destination surveys which would provide evidence of the need for improved services. EDF had carried out a Transport Assessment which claimed that no workers at Hinkley Point would use the train to Bridgwater, so was providing coaches from Bristol. SDC was pressing EDF to run some buses into the station and wanted to see regular bus routes call there also.

Direct access from the station to Bridgwater College was a major aspiration of SDC. Evidence of potential rail traffic could be assessed from postcodes of students' addresses held by the College.

'Party on the Platform' at Filton Abbey Wood, 22 February 2019

"The lesson of the 1980s is don't take out infrastructure."

Andrew Griffiths, Regional Development Manager, First Great Western, speaking in 2006 at a Severnside Branch meeting.

More than 12 years later, it is good to see that campaigning by Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways (who organised the event to celebrate the recent four-tracking of the main line over Filton Bank) and Railfuture has paid off. FOSBR Chairman Rob Dixon thanked all who had helped to achieve the success. Other speakers included WECA Mayor Tim Bowles, Bristol ASLEF Branch Secretary Bernard Kennedy and Severnside CRP Chairman Keith Walton.

Bernard, who is a Driver with Cross Country Trains, explained that the removal of two tracks had not been in the Beeching era but was an economy carried out in the aftermath of the discredited Serpell Report of 1983. "Many of us said at the time that removing two of the tracks was stupid" but it happened in 1984 nonetheless. He described the newly quadrupled route as the aorta of Bristol's rail network and his point about how it has enabled the segregation of faster and slower trains was well illustrated as two XC Voyagers passed through Platforms 1 and 2 while local and regional services were nearing Platforms 3 and 4.

North Somerset Council approves further steps towards Portishead line reopening

At the full meeting of North Somerset Council on 19 February, Nigel Bray spoke during the public participation session on behalf of Portishead resident and Branch Committee member John Dixon. Points made in the three minutes allowed were the need to reopen the line as soon as possible; the high Benefit Cost ratio (3.6) of MetroWest Phase 1; the availability of rolling stock and strong support from GWR; and the need for good connectivity with buses at Portishead station.

The Council voted unanimously to allocate up to £15 million of regional funding from the Economic Development Fund to reduce the funding gap for the scheme, subject to approval by the West of England Joint Committee; and to request £11.65 million from the Local Growth Fund to complete detailed design. Submission of the Development Consent Order application will require approval by the Council in June.