

We hope you are keeping well and making the most of the fine weather, perhaps enjoying a few trips out by train. The purpose of this mini newsletter is to update you about a few developments in our area.

Your committee is continuing to press for the restoration of rail services to something nearer pre-Covid levels, through direct contact with train operators and via Transport Focus, who have been particularly interested in our detailed evidence about service reductions. We're particularly concerned that overcrowding and poor connections are hampering attempts to develop leisure markets over the summer months.

Alton Line Users' Association

We were sorry to learn, earlier this year, that the Alton Line group had decided to disband after representing rail users from Farnham, Bentley and Alton (plus Aldershot and Ash Vale) for nearly 50 years. We would like to welcome a number of former members of the group to Railfuture Wessex, and also thank those who have long been members of Railfuture for their continued support. We are extremely grateful that residual funds from ALUA have been transferred across to Railfuture, and we will endeavour to use these funds appropriately.

Waterside Line - a chance to support this landmark project!

Network Rail is currently in the process of developing proposals to reintroduce passenger services on the 9-mile-long Waterside Line near Southampton (also known as the Fawley branch line). The plans they're developing would see passenger services restored from Southampton to Marchwood station, which would be reopened, and to a brand-new station in Hythe.

The proposals are subject to a positive review of the project's business case, and NR is still to determine what changes would be needed to the existing railway infrastructure, such as track, signalling and level crossings.

Between **Monday 8 August and Friday 9 September** NR will be running a public consultation to hear views on reintroducing passenger services to the Waterside Line, and any feedback will help decide on the design of the proposed new passenger service. As part of the consultation, they will host events in the Waterside area where local residents can find out more about the proposals.

Do please respond to the consultation as an individual and give the project your fulsome backing. You can also send any thoughts about the project to wessex@railfuture.org.uk and we'll take them into consideration when making our Branch submission.

This short video from the Three Rivers Partnership, introduced by a former Chair of Railfuture Wessex Branch Nick Farthing, is inspirational and well worth watching: <https://youtu.be/LVRQbS84s10>

More information from Network Rail together with the event dates can be found on their website here: <https://www.networkrail.co.uk/running-the-railway/our-routes/wessex/the-waterside-line/>

The public consultation is here: <https://consultations.networkrail.co.uk/communications/waterside-line/>

Further Consultations

We recently submitted our comments in response to Hampshire County Council's consultation on their local transport plan, LTP4. You can read our 4-page response on the Railfuture website here: <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/display3042>.

Next up is the consultation on Transport for the South East's draft Strategic Investment Plan. TfSE covers local authority areas south of the Thames, from Hampshire and the Isle of Wight across to Kent. As most of the TfSE area is "Railfuture London & South East" territory, our colleagues at L&SE Branch will be heading up the response and Wessex Branch comments will be fed in to this.

Again, you can comment as an individual or you can make your views known (before the end of August please) via wessex@railfuture.org.uk. Details and the TfSE survey form are here: <https://transportforthesoutheast.org.uk/our-work/developing-our-strategic-investment-plan/>

West of England Line

Our committee member Bruce Duncan (who is also Chair of the Salisbury-Exeter Rail Users' Group) reports that the level of service and timekeeping on the line has improved considerably since the disastrous cuts at the start of the year, although passenger confidence is bound to take a knock as a result of current strike action. You can read the latest news from the group in their Summer Newsletter which you can download from <https://sites.google.com/view/serug/publications>.

SERUG's meeting at Yeovil Railway Centre in June, had to be postponed due to rail strikes. It will now take place on the evening of Thurs 22 Sept from 17:00, with Claire Mann (Managing Director of South Western Railway) as guest speaker. Details and registration via contact@serug.co.uk.

Unfortunately, the new meeting date coincides with planned engineering work: the line between Axminster and Exeter will be CLOSED COMPLETELY between 19 and 23 September.

Around the Network

If you've travelled on the line between Basingstoke and Reading recently, you will have noticed that the new station at **Reading Green Park** is almost ready to be opened to passengers.

Ryde Esplanade rail and bus station on the seafront is a building site at present and will probably be so for the rest of this year, with the bus station and the pier both undergoing building work.

NR's Orange Army has been seen again carrying out further renovations on the **Hamworthy Branch** near Poole, but we have yet to hear what freight flows are planned.

The **Swanage Railway** has issued a statement that will disappoint visitors: "Due to the ongoing hot, dry conditions, plus a fire near our line, we've decided to run diesel services only until further notice. We'll review the situation and update daily."

Beryl Bikes (for rent) can be seen all over Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole and are planned for the Solent area. Just recently a bunch of them appeared at **Wool Station** as an experimental scheme to see how many get used in a rural setting. Bovington Garrison and Dorset Innovation Park are both within an easy ride, and day-trippers could use the bikes to get to the coast at Lulworth.

Renovations and works to install lifts have begun at **Pokesdown Station** near Bournemouth. The remodelling of **Weymouth Station** forecourt is nearing completion, and work to restore the station canopies is ongoing.

Branch Contacts

Chairman mike.southgate@railfuture.org.uk or **Secretary** tony.smale@railfuture.org.uk

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