

Chairman's Message



Welcome to our Spring Newsletter.

We have made efforts over the last few editions to improve both the content and lay out. Any feedback would be most welcome, we're also happy to publish any relevant letters and answers. My particular thanks to Tony Smale our editor and secretary for his efforts in getting this newsletter together and correcting my English!

We continue with our mission to improve our rail services in the Wessex Region, but it is an uphill struggle. Getting back to an off peak 2019 timetable and rolling stock would be a good starting position. I have outlined below the exchanges I have had with three of our Train Operating Companies: SWR, GWR and XC. My thanks to Alan Mayes for dealing with the fourth (GTR); he reports on their timetable changes later in this newsletter.

It's clear from these exchanges that the Treasury via the DfT is in control and everything must be business-plan driven. I will avoid the politics of whether that is the correct approach. However, my observation is that some operators seem to have more success than others in getting their business plans accepted. Greater Anglia seem to have restored almost a full off-peak timetable, and successfully introduced new rolling stock. They have also won awards for both their local and long-distance services.

We continue to push the message locally about reliability, connectivity and comfort to retain existing and attract new passengers to use rail. I continue to use my legendary yardstick "would it get Mrs S and the rest of my family out of the car and back on the train". Sadly, the answer "no" seems to be even more emphatic now than when my campaign started.

=====

In March, I had a very constructive meeting via a video link with Stephen Morgan MP for Portsmouth, Shadow Rail Minister and past speaker at our AGM. This was a follow up to a letter I sent asking for his support to restore 2019 off peak services for the Portsmouth line. The topics covered included reinstatement of three trains per hour off peak from Portsmouth and Southampton to London. I reflected our view and the experience of other operators that return to rail and growth will come from improvements in off peak travel. I raised poor use of diversionary routes and advice during disruption and the two-coach rolling stock now often used on the Portsmouth to Cardiff service.



Photo: stephenmorgan.org.uk

Finally, I expressed our frustration at perfectly usable new and old rolling stock sitting in sidings when that additional capacity is much needed by many operators notably Cross Country Trains in this area. I agreed to follow up our meeting with a more detailed email.

Regrettably, we have lost another key member of our team. Kevin Kidney sadly passed away earlier this year. Whilst Kevin was not a formal member of our committee, he attended our meetings and was on our correspondence chain. Kevin was instrumental in re-booting our *WessexRailfuture* Facebook page, and as a Fareham resident he actively campaigned for the new station at Welborne. Our condolences to his friends and family.

Our usual plea: we do need more people to help us either by joining the committee or just becoming more active members as Kevin did. Our ability to achieve change is based upon the membership who support but also help us. Refresh is vital for any organisation!



Picture from Kevin's own Facebook page

Train Operator Round Up



I have had a series of exchanges with GWR and I attended via video one of their stakeholder meetings, which I found in the current circumstance realistic and encouraging.

Our constant gripe has been inadequacy of seating capacity on the three routes that impinge on the Wessex branch area: Bristol-Weymouth, Reading-Basingstoke and Cardiff-Portsmouth. For the latter, in 2019 we were promised a service mainly made up of five coach 166/165 units. Due to shortages this was revised in 2022 to four coaches. This is a rarity, and the norm is three coaches or even worse two. Furthermore, when the DfT instructed SWR to stop duplication on the Salisbury to Bristol route we were told the GWR services would be enhanced to compensate, but this has yet to happen.

We've always argued that Cardiff to the South Coast is a great opportunity for both business and leisure given the poor road connections. To achieve this, it needs appropriate rolling stock (perhaps the Nova 3 loco-hauled sets if TransPennine Express don't require them). We can't see GWR growing the recreational or business market using forty-year-old two-car diesel units, air-con faults and all. We were also promised three coaches would be the norm for Basingstoke to Reading, again not always achieved. GWR assured me that they are working with the DfT to source additional compatible coaches to come our way as a result of a general redeployment of diesel units.

Their longer-term aim is to achieve DfT support to develop a new environmentally-friendly rolling stock solution for regional routes such as Cardiff-Portsmouth. We would hope that this will be based on the Intercity Express Trains used on their flagship services ... but with more comfortable seating! Well, that may be some way off!

I asked GWR about ticket acceptance via Reading when there are cancellations and reduced rolling stock on the route via Salisbury. Their response was their control team do put this in place but only when it can be agreed with CrossCountry and South Western Railway. "So while we may often ask, we do need our colleagues to be able to agree." I asked the same question at their stakeholder meeting relating to the impending closure of Westbury for major engineering work. They agreed to pursue and were hopeful to achieve agreement as GWR recognises passengers would rather stick to rail even if it extends the journey time.



I also had a positive discussion with our stakeholder contact at Cross Country in February. He confirmed that the planned refurbishment of the Voyagers is mainly refresh with no extra seats to be provided, adding: “These units are now over twenty years old and the structural changes to provide more seats can't be justified.” Reducing First Class isn't an option

as XC have seen a return in demand for First Class Travel. They are now barring the use of First Class to those with staff passes!

CrossCountry's main short-term aim is to get the DfT to reallocate more of the ex-Avanti West Coast Voyagers to XC. The seven ex-AWC units reallocated to XC apparently just match the HST train sets that were removed, although they do provide more flexibility over a reduced route pattern (compared to 2019). It has now been confirmed that a further five have been allocated to cope with increased demand. This will enable many more trains to be double units and allow them to reintroduce routes that they've ceased running. I was happy to confirm our support but would also like the remaining four ex-Avanti Voyagers sitting idle (two having gone to Grand Central) to also be reallocated so most services can run with double units.

We have just received notification that until these units become available, they will be introducing restrictions to summer Saturday services to discourage the use of CrossCountry for local journeys. From the 2nd June until 7th September five northbound and eight southbound on Saturdays are being designated as pick up or set down only at Winchester and will not call at Basingstoke. I suspect this is due to the timing between the DfT withdrawing the HSTs and agreeing to reallocate Avanti Voyagers which then need refurbishment.

This has been compounded by SWR curtailing their Bournemouth to Waterloo stopping service at Winchester post 2020. We have asked SWR to consider additional stops at Basingstoke to compensate, but this has been rejected, given they will have their own Summer loading challenges. I didn't get very far on suggesting that empty-coaching-stock journeys between Reading and Bournemouth should translate to passenger carrying to provide at least some services between Southampton and the North East. The response was the number of passengers at that time of the morning and evening didn't justify the extra costs.

Out of these exchanges two key points emerged:

- We at Railfuture Wessex and other Rf branches affected by CrossCountry need to lobby for more Voyagers to be reallocated. It's also daft that extra units were not allocated temporarily to cover for stock going off for refurbishment.
- The issue with restoring services between the North East and Southampton is convincing the DfT and Treasury there is a demand and a sound business case. Therefore locally, and in conjunction with the other affected branches, we need to raise awareness of the social and economic opportunities of reinstating CrossCountry services from the North East beyond Reading to Southampton. I would suggest a levelling up criteria worthy of funds saved by cancelling HS2.



First the only good news. I am delighted that my and others highlighting the issue with SWR and the local Council of “hackney carriage” taxis being excluded from the taxi rank outside Winchester station, has contributed to the reinstatement of a traditional taxi rank. It's once again possible to jump in a cab right by the station exit without having to pre-book or search around for the nearest “hackney” rank.

We continue to push the case for full reinstatement of off-peak services on both the Bournemouth and Portsmouth lines but the answer is always the business case doesn't pass the DfT test. This has created connectivity issues and the disruption of the regular interval service introduced by SWT many years ago which effectively provided the core timetable. That can only be corrected by reinstatement in full or a redrawing of the whole timetable.

It's just not good enough that major stations such as Eastleigh and Farnborough now only have one fast train per hour rather than the two under the 2019 timetable. In the 2019 timetable there were three trains an hour roughly evenly spaced between Basingstoke, Winchester and Southampton at xx.49 (SWR) xx.10 (XC) and xx.33 (SWR). The xx.33 was deleted in Covid and never re-instated leaving a very lumpy timetable and putting more pressure on XC to act as a local service. This is why we are arguing that this service should be reinstated at least to Basingstoke. If not it needs a recast of the timetable, so the Bournemouth-Winchester service becomes a through train again in both directions (with a call at St Denys), arriving at Winchester in front of the Waterloo service and leaving behind the down Waterloo-Weymouth. This, together with the Waterloo-Portsmouth service via Winchester, would restore 2 trains an hour to London from Eastleigh albeit with a same-platform connection at Winchester on one of the services.

We suspect that part of the problem relates to the delay in introducing the new Arterios. We hope that this pressure will ease as the Arterios come into service.

=====

My primary communication with SWR recently has been about the lack of passenger information and the use of diversionary routes during both planned and unplanned disruption. I was travelling on the 4th March when the line was closed between Weybridge and Surbiton due to an incident. Established diversionary routes exist via Chertsey, Guilford New Line, and via Basingstoke to Waterloo and Paddington (which was the route I used). These were used in a very inconsistent way. The previous solution in such circumstances of creating shuttle services didn't happen. Other rail operators such as Thameslink publish downloadable details of alternative routes, but not SWR; their solution is don't travel anywhere. Disruption existed far beyond the affected area with services between Weymouth and Poole decimated and even my local Winchester to Bournemouth cancelled. On behalf of passengers, I have expressed my frustration at SWR but have yet to receive a reply.

Another consequence of this was the shortcomings of the Delay Repay arrangements. All the services to and from my local ticketed station at Shawford were cancelled. By getting lifts to other stations, I managed to start and finish my journey. Delay Repay calculates the delay between your intended train and the next actual train to that station, even if that was the next day. So unless you actually sleep on the bench at the station and wait for the next service you have no idea of knowing what that delay is that you can claim.

=====

West of England line is now back up to its pre covid timetable thanks to the activities of committee member Bruce Duncan amongst others. There is still much room for improvement. Bruce and SERUG (Salisbury to Exeter Rail User Group) continue to pursue infrastructure and rolling stock issues with both SWR and Network Rail. The class 158/9 units are now coming up to 35 years old, so there needs to be a sustainable replacement strategy which meets current and future needs.

Mike Southgate

West Coastway Timetable

Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) have revised their original proposals for the new Monday to Saturday West Coastway Southern timetable starting in June 2024 including services from Southampton and Portsmouth to Brighton and London Victoria. The more regular service pattern, with half-hourly trains between Southampton and Brighton and between Portsmouth and London Victoria, instead of the current pattern whereby alternate trains from Southampton (or from Portsmouth) go to Brighton or to Victoria is going ahead. Longer turnaround times at Portsmouth and Southampton should make the service more reliable. They also enable all Southampton-Brighton trains to stop at Woolston (which has a good bus interchange), and enable all Portsmouth-Gatwick Airport-London Victoria trains to terminate at Portsmouth Harbour station, instead of some stopping short at Portsmouth and Southsea, and to call at Hilsea.

However GTR are also now keeping one direct semi-fast train service an hour between Portsmouth and Southsea and Brighton in place of one of the two originally proposed all stops Brighton-Littlehampton-Chichester services. This hourly Portsmouth and Southsea to Brighton service will use the path of the current Portsmouth and Southsea to Littlehampton service and arrive and depart Portsmouth and Southsea at the same time as this Littlehampton service but will take the same route as the current Portsmouth to Brighton service. GTR made this change in response to feedback from customers and stakeholders but it was also found that a combination of one semi-fast Portsmouth and Southsea to Brighton service and one all stops Brighton-Littlehampton-Chichester service each hour would work better operationally than two all stops

Brighton-Littlehampton-Chichester services. Railfuture Wessex Branch welcomes this retention of hourly direct semi-fast train services between Portsmouth and Brighton.

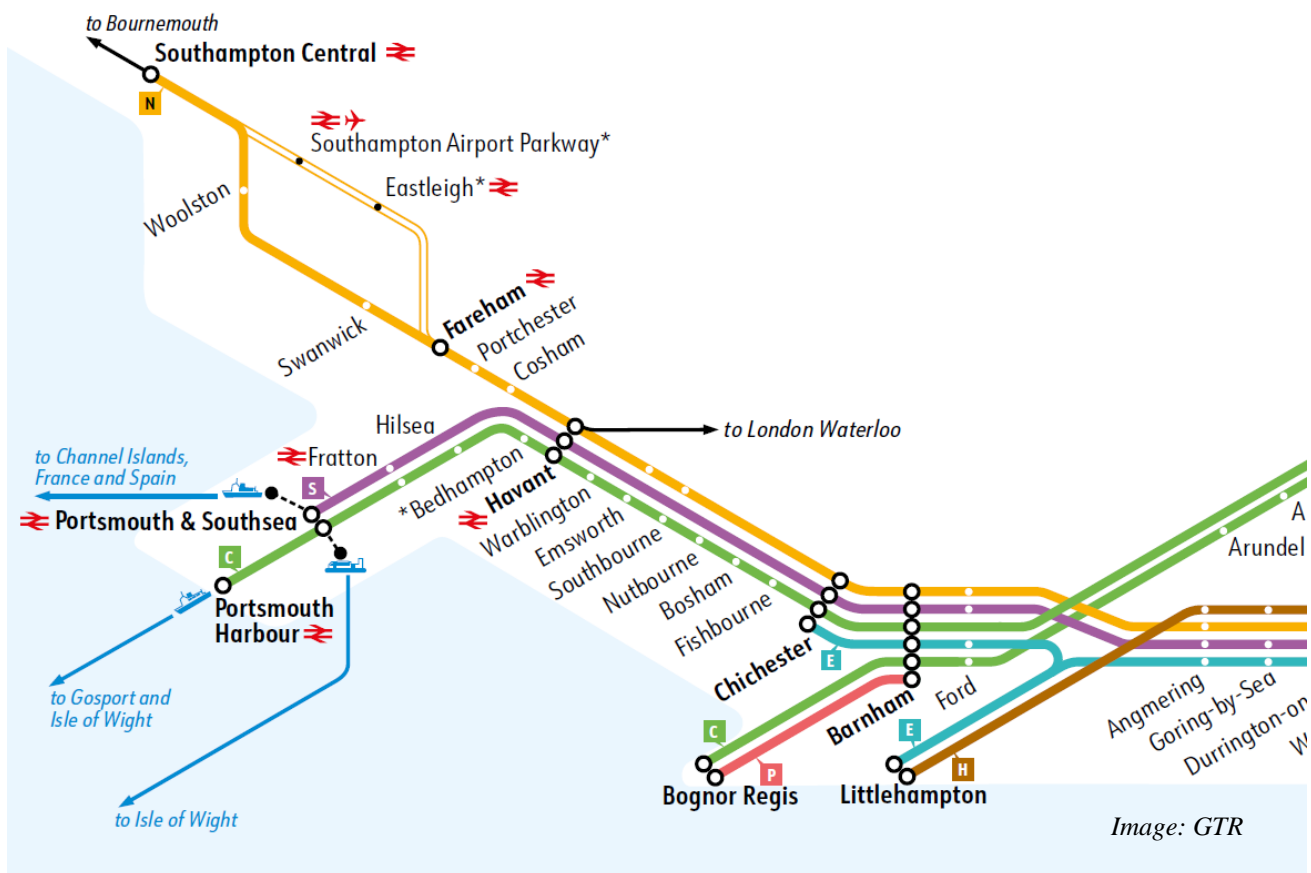
The South Western Railway (SWR) all stops Portsmouth and Southsea to Southampton Central service will be retimed and combined operationally with the stopping Southampton Central to Bournemouth and Southampton Central to Winchester services so whereas at present the Littlehampton train usually shares Portsmouth and Southsea Bay Platform 3 with the SWR four coach class 450 train to Southampton Central, in the June 2024 timetable the two trains will be not be in Portsmouth and Southsea Bay Platform 3 at the same time.

GTR have confirmed that they will not continue to operate a direct train between Southampton and Gatwick Airport as they have found it impossible to run this service reliably and far too frequently have to turn it around at Fareham. Passengers travelling to Gatwick Airport from Southampton and Fareham can join the half hourly train to Brighton and change at Barnham with a wait on the same platform.

Another change is that the two mid-morning weekday Southampton to Brighton trains via Eastleigh to retain route knowledge for diversions which pass through Fareham without stopping are replaced by a very early morning Littlehampton to Southampton Central via Eastleigh train and a very late at night Southampton Central to Littlehampton via Eastleigh train so there will be no gaps in the half hourly service from Fareham to Brighton.

Railfuture has asked whether Southampton PlusBus will be made available with rail tickets to Woolston and GTR promised to look into this. Southampton PlusBus is available with rail tickets to Southampton Central which are also valid for travel to Woolston along the West Coastway route but are slightly more expensive.

GTR also tell us they will look at improving the Sunday West Coastway timetable.



The new Monday to Saturday West Coastway timetable starting in June 2024 will have the following train services...

ORANGE: Two trains per hour Southampton Central, Woolston, Swanwick, Fareham, Portchester (1tph), Cosham, Havant, Emsworth, Southbourne, Chichester, Barnham, Ford, Angmering, Worthing, Lancing, Shoreham-by-Sea, Southwick, Portslade, Hove, Brighton.

GREEN: Two trains per hour Portsmouth Harbour, Portsmouth and Southsea, Fratton, Hilsea, Havant, Warblington (1tph), Emsworth, Southbourne, Nutbourne (1tph), Bosham (1tph), Fishbourne (1tph), Chichester, Barnham, Horsham (where it joins another train from Bognor Regis which calls at Barnham, Ford and the Arun Valley stations), Crawley, Three bridges, Gatwick Airport, East Croydon, Clapham Junction, London Victoria.

In a change to the original timetable proposal, in response to feedback received, the same train each hour will call at Warblington, Nutbourne, Bosham and Fishbourne to keep a direct train between these stations. At school times, both trains each hour will call at all stations between Chichester and Havant.

PURPLE: One train per hour Portsmouth and Southsea, Fratton, Havant, Chichester, Barnham, Ford, Angmering, Goring-by-Sea, Durrington-on-Sea, West Worthing, Worthing, East Worthing, Lancing, Shoreham-by-Sea, Southwick, Portslade, Hove, Brighton.

To provide attractive journey times this train will not call at Fishersgate or Aldrington.

BLUE: One train per hour Chichester, Barnham, Ford, Littlehampton, Angmering, Goring-by-Sea, Durrington-on-Sea, West Worthing, Worthing, East Worthing, Lancing, Shoreham-by-Sea, Southwick, Fishersgate, Portslade, Aldrington, Hove, Brighton.

RED: Two trains per hour Bognor Regis to Barnham.

BROWN: Two trains per hour Littlehampton, Angmering, Goring-by-Sea, Durrington-on-Sea, West Worthing, Worthing, Lancing, Shoreham-by-Sea, Portslade, Hove, Preston Park, Hassocks, Burgess Hill, Haywards Heath, Gatwick Airport, East Croydon, Clapham Junction, London Victoria.

The full route map for the June 2024 timetable and a summary of the feedback and changes made as a result of the GTR engagement with customers and stakeholders are on the following webpage...

<https://www.southernrailway.com/westcoastway>

- Alan Mayes

Unintended Consequences

Folklore recounts that when Mrs Thatcher met the members of the British Railways Board she said “if any of you were any good you would be working in the private sector.” Whether this is accurate or not, it does reflect the view held by many politicians that the nationalised railway was run by a group of second-rate managers and that a good dose of thrusting young people from the private sector would transform the quality of the railways in Britain.

Rail privatisation and the fragmentation of the unified structure resulted in a number of unintended consequences. One that has gone largely unnoticed was the destruction of the industry management training arrangements and succession planning processes. Private firms, often with limited time horizons, were simply not going to invest in people development when they might not be around to reap the benefits, so cross industry management training and development withered on the vine. To be fair, some parties did recognise the issue and bodies like the Institution of Railway Operators tried to fill the gap, but this was a poor substitute for what existed previously.

In the meantime, there was an influx of people from outside the industry, many in senior positions, who had little if any understanding of how the railway actually works, or how to manage the many interfaces which privatisation brought about. Whilst there are one or two notable exceptions, I think it is fair to say that most of these people have added little if any value to the quality of the rail product and have been party to some very poor decisions. This is not their fault as individuals, they simply do not have the underpinning knowledge to make informed judgements about what to do. Management buzz words are no substitute for understanding. The proof of the pudding is in the eating and if one looks objectively at the railway today, it costs a lot more in real terms than it used to and the quality of delivery is far from good. As Chris Page pointed out in his excellent article in the April 2024 “Railwatch”, industry structure and alignment of incentives are important. **However, unless you can populate the railway organisation (whatever that might be) with good, competent, knowledgeable people, then whatever a future government decides in terms of industry ownership and structure it will not deliver for rail users.**



A new government, of whatever political persuasion, needs to recognise this as major inhibitor to improving our railways and must take the long-term decisions that are necessary to reverse the decline in management training and development in the rail industry as an integral part of any future industry structure.

- Stewart Palmer, Railfuture Vice President.

Island Line Report

Stuart George, Chair of IoW Bus and Rail Users Group, reports...

Island Line continues to struggle to provide a reliable service. The latest problem on the class 484 units is that the wheels are wearing out five times more quickly than expected and have to go to the mainland for replacement. As a result of this, combined with two units still being unserviceable after the December floods, an emergency hourly timetable has been introduced on all days other than peak holiday dates.

It's expected that a standard 40 minute interval service will be introduced from 2nd June, subject to DfT agreement, which should improve reliability although connections with the FastCat service from Portsmouth Harbour will be worsened. We've reluctantly agreed to this in the interests of reliability, as Island Line trains will in future be able to wait a few minutes for late-running ferries, although still demanding a half-hourly service be restored as soon as practicable.

Railway Recollections

Alan Mayes represented our branch at the unveiling of two information boards in Platform One Coffee House in the old ticket office at Shawford station, one commemorating the remake of the classic film “Brief Encounter” at the station and the second headed The History of Platform 1 (pictured right) showing a series of historic railway tickets and photographs. Railway guard Andrew Lamport, himself a descendant of the first Shawford station master shown in three of the photos, performed the unveilings. The local MP, rail managers and a few Railfuture colleagues were present at the event.

The Lamport family has also been busy facilitating the restoration of Liphook signal box, which was removed from Liphook station to its new site at the nearby Hollycombe Steam Museum a few years ago. Andrew’s grandfather Matt Lamport was a signalman at Liphook, and Andrew’s father Mike Lamport put up the money for the signalbox restoration. There will be a grand opening of the restored signal box during Hollycombe museum’s Railway Weekend on July 20th and 21st.

We’ll be hearing more from Mike Lamport in the coming months as he’s closely involved with planning the 200th anniversary celebrations in 2025 of the birth of public railways in Britain.

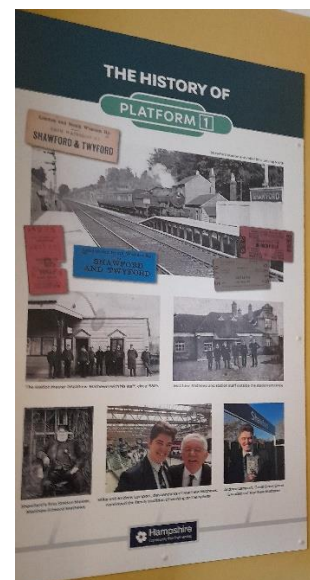


Photo: Alan Mayes

Our Chair Mike Southgate, a Shawford resident and founder of the Shawford Rail User Group, has his own tale about events at Shawford station. As you may recall, it was the location for filming the nighttime demise of Victor Meldrew in the final episode of “One Foot in the Grave”. Mike’s wife had driven to the station to meet him off the last train that night and the two of them got mixed up in the proceedings. There ensued something of a marital contretemps in the car, due to Mrs S being stopped by a police roadblock in her dressing gown! Mr S had foolishly assured her no one would be around at that time of night (the film crew alone comprised 60 people). Ironically, Mike was himself a seasoned Head of Production for a TV company. For a few months afterwards, a sign in the nearby Bridge Pub about the filming also waggishly referred to Mrs S's displeasure with our Chair.

Other News in Brief

In our Autumn newsletter, we reported on a pioneering scheme at the **Port of Southampton**, designed to encourage intermodal logistics customers to switch their loads from road to rail. In his speech at the George Bradshaw Address in London on 20th February, rail minister Huw Merriman cited Southampton’s groundbreaking scheme, saying that he wanted to see it rolled out across the whole of the UK.

Funding of £350,000 has been secured for step-free access to the down (westbound) platform at **Totton station**. A new footpath will link Platform 2 with Totton High Street, avoiding the need for people to climb up and over the footbridge. The major part of the cash for the project is from the DfT’s Access for All fund with extra contributions from SWR and Hampshire County Council. Work was expected to take four weeks and is nearing completion.

Sadly, the **Swanage Railway** will not be running into Wareham station using their heritage diesel units this summer. Their experience of operating the Swanage-Wareham service last summer was that it's not possible to break even let alone make a profit on running onto the main line ... and the £2 single fare on the competing bus service didn't help matters. However, visitors to the Swanage Railway can still look forward to a packed programme of heritage steam and diesel operations over the coming holiday season. Alternatively, rail enthusiasts can enjoy a trip on the other brilliant heritage railways in our area: the Mid Hants railway at Alresford and the Isle of Wight Steam Railway at Havenstreet. *Go on! ...you know you want to!*

It comes as no surprise that the ever-resourceful **Hampshire Community Rail Partnership** walked off with another First Prize, this time at the Community Rail Awards ceremony held in Swansea during March. The award (in the "Small Projects Award" category) was for their "Winter Warmers" project in which volunteers ran pop-up shops at three stations including Petersfield, giving away over 1,000 items of pre-loved clothing to people in need. HCRP hope that their Winter Warmers project will establish the rail network and its stations as places that are warm, welcoming, and inclusive, and exist to serve the whole community.



Construction work continues on the pedestrian route linking the two railway stations in **Dorchester**. Fairfield Road, picture left, previously had cars parked both sides with no footpaths, making it difficult for pedestrians to negotiate.

In the new setup, there will be a wide, well-lit footpath the whole length, together with a safer road crossing and a pedestrianised zone at the end nearest the camera.

Photo: M Lloyd

...and finally...

Railway services in **Poole** were suspended in February for the foreseeable future following yet another derailment of a train carriage. Fortunately, the catastrophe didn't involve main line services. The carriage in question named "Howard" has an irritating habit of coming off the tracks at the Poole Park miniature railway, so BCP Council ordered a temporary closure of the popular attraction to allow the carriage manufacturer to come up with a safe and permanent resolution.

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

Secretary's address: 63 Church Lane, Wool, Wareham BH20 6DD tel 01929 462116

Follow Railfuture Wessex on Facebook. We're also on X(Twitter) @RailfutureWessx

Railfuture Ltd is a (not for profit) Company Limited by Guarantee. Registered in England and Wales No. 05011634.
Registered Office: Edinburgh House, 1-5 Bellevue Road, Clevedon, North Somerset, BS21 7NP (for legal correspondence only).