



campaigning by  
The Railway Development  
Society Limited

**THAMES VALLEY BRANCH**  
**Newsletter 82                      July 2013**

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**Next event for members: Visit to Network Rail's Swindon Control Centre**

We have arranged a visit for branch members to Swindon Control Centre on the evening of Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> September, meeting on Swindon station at 18.15 and finishing by 21.00 for the latest. Any member interested in attending this rare opportunity to see behind the scenes at a modern control centre is requested to contact the Branch Secretary (preferably by email) by Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> August. Further details including time and place to meet etc & the programme for the evening will then be supplied.

**Summary of the Annual General Meeting held at Bicester on Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2013**

The Secretary reported that during the past year we had organised two members' events; a joint meeting with OBRAC in Bletchley at which Patrick O'Sullivan of the EWR Consortium spoke about the latest progress on EWR. Unfortunately only a few of our members were present, due, no doubt to the difficulty of reaching the venue without the EWR line open! The other was a visit to Reading depot at which we not only learnt about their present operations and given a tour of the site, we were also shown plans of the new depot and given a talk about the forthcoming move to it.

The Secretary also reported on membership; numbers were up from 101 to 106 over the year, an increase of 5% which is welcome at a time when many membership organisations are finding it hard to recruit new members. Three of the most recent six new members are women, which is a most welcome move to address the gender imbalance but they are still only 10% of our members. Younger members are still hard to recruit.

The Treasurer distributed the accounts which were accepted and he reported that our branch finances were in a healthy situation.

The Media Officer reported that he has gained exposure on a wide range of issues regularly with the Oxford Times, Oxford Mail, BBC Oxford and increasingly with the Newbury Weekly News and the Bucks Press, the latter being harder to reach.

The officers and committee members were all re-elected.

Our guest speaker was **Richard Harper, Head of Network Development for Chiltern Railways.**

He gave a wide ranging talk extending beyond the bounds of Chiltern Railways and covering the growth of rail travel since the era of Beeching looking at the reasons people travel by rail. The growth of affordable inner city housing, popular with young people who increasingly do not own a car, on "brownfield" sites often within easy distance of a station is one factor, for

example. In other areas larger car parks bring growth from housing developments in more rural or suburban areas. A service industry economy taking over from heavy industry is another factor. Rail travel growth, at 5% p.a. is faster than any other national industry. Taking the example of Bicester North station, in the 1980s it was a passing loop on a single track line with one train every two hours. Now it has frequent trains on a 100mph main line with a busy multi-story car park.

Chiltern's growth of 140% from 1996 to 2011 compares with an industry average of 72% over that period and their growth in 2011 – 2012 alone was 27%.

Numbers of trains to London on weekdays from Banbury and High Wycombe, to give two examples, have grown as follows:

	1987	1993	2012
Banbury	10	20	45
High Wycombe	30	50	90

Looking ahead, he said Chiltern have plans to lengthen the platforms to accommodate 8 coach trains at Bicester North, Haddenham & Thame Parkway, Princes Risborough, High Wycombe and Beaconsfield.

Looking further ahead he made the observations that electrification could increase capacity and that once Great Western electrification is completed, Marylebone will be the only un-electrified terminus in London.

### **Chairman's Report to the AGM**

At last year's AGM, I was pleased to report that after 50 years of limited progress, things were starting to look better and Transport was being taken more seriously by policy makers; this has continued in the last 12 months in the Thames Valley Branch area.

The publication of the HLOS was a welcome surprise to all of us, promising electrification of branches, electrification of East - West Rail and Oxford remodelling and, as I suggested last year, the Heathrow Western Curve.

In addition the Secretary of State asked Network Rail to look at Newbury – Bristol options for upgrading. The Branch was just starting to get involved in this before the announcement; the skills we have all learnt in GRIP studies and creating a business case are invaluable and it is clear in the present climate that it is not good enough just to want something, it has to be evidenced, proven and turned into a cost benefit ratio. Nothing less will do.

Rail's share of containers from Southampton is today 36%; it was 18% 3 years ago. That is a spectacular return on capital spent and should go higher on completion of the "Electric Spine".

The Branch Committee has had to look at out longer term objectives and I have asked for your views; the following seem most popular.

- 1) Wantage – Grove Parkway re-opening.
- 2) Investigation into options for Witney/Carterton re-opening.
- 3) High Wycombe – Bourne End re-opening.

Oxford Station Site may have been overtaken by events.

I suspect they are all viable and in Germany would have been sorted years ago, but we need to evidence the facts.

We must always be aware of the wish to downgrade facilities and I was pleased with the compromise Chiltern came to in the end at Kings Sutton, it is better to compromise than enter megaphone diplomacy.

In the last year there have been various meetings and I would urge members to attend if they can. We were guests of First Group at Reading Depot in November and learnt a great deal not only about the DMUs but also of the transition to the new depot; we hope to go back when they have settled into the new depot.

Chris Phillimore gave us a good insight into the Go-op scheme for open access services from Birmingham to Westbury; what struck me was the incredible amount of work needed. Progress is now somewhat slower than planned.

Our Autumn meeting was a joint one with OBRAC with Patrick O'Sullivan of the East – West Rail consortium. The Branch has kept up regular contact but I suspect we shall need to change liaison as the Scheme becomes a Network Rail project.

I have tried to attend as many user group meetings as I can; I feel it is crucial all the user groups are affiliated to Railfuture, as it ensures a consistent approach.

The Branch has continued to get press coverage and I must thank Hugh Jaeger for this. I must also thank **all** the Committee, led by Andrew McCallum our Secretary, without which I could not do my job and of course my predecessor, Chris Wright, who continues on pushing East – West Rail.

In addition I must thank our affiliated user groups, who do so much on the ground, and all those who in their day jobs are committed to developing Rail.

In the next year the Branch looks forward to hosting the National Rail User Groups Conference on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2013 in Oxford Town Hall. This is fitting as Oxford is rapidly becoming the centre of the Rail Resurgence that seems to be taking place; at least we are all being listened to now, what a contrast from 20 years ago.

### **Appeal for committee members**

The committee would welcome some new members particularly from the southern part of our area which is all of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire. The present committee are from the following places: Oxford (2), Banbury (2), near Bicester, Chipping Norton, Abingdon, Berinsfield & Winslow. Thus south Buckinghamshire and Berkshire are unrepresented on the committee so if any member from those areas is interested in helping to redress this imbalance please contact the Chairman or Secretary in the first instance.

### **Chairman's Comment**

Since the last newsletter, the Judicial Review on the Oxford – Marylebone scheme has been defeated; it's worth reading the decision. Needless to say it seems to have cost a lot of money. The good news is work should commence properly in February 2014.

Nigel Rose, Hugh Jaeger and I have been looking at the "Witney Issue", and are keen to set up a Transport Lobby Group. During this process we achieved a front page splash on the Oxford Times, which was good if unexpected; however what was heartening is that 94% of people in an online poll support a study looking at the idea of a fast transport link. This suggests Railfuture is in tune with mainstream thinking. (A full report is to be found in this newsletter).

The Branch Committee is preparing for the National Rail Users Conference on 2<sup>nd</sup> November at Oxford Town Hall, and I urge all members to come along to find out what is going on; in addition I am seeking volunteers to help with it.

## **Chiltern Railways news**

### **Bicester-Oxford**

On 17 May the High Court dismissed the judicial challenge to the Secretary of State's making of the Transport & Works Act Order for construction of the new rail route to Oxford. The deadline has now passed for the objector to request the Court of Appeal to grant leave to appeal the High Court's decision. Therefore the TWA Order remains intact and is now clear of any prospect of a further challenge.

A number of agreements with Network Rail, DfT and ORR should be concluded during June and July and this will enable Network Rail to commence a tendering exercise for the construction works. More minor enabling works will be undertaken during this time to keep the project on track for completion in 2016. Full details of the works' programme have yet to be finalised, but Chiltern is still committed to giving at least 12 weeks notice of any disruptive works that would result in a period of bus substitution while the route is reconstructed.

The construction plan is likely to include building the chord line first, before closing Bicester - Oxford, so that direct rail access can be maintained at all times to Bicester MoD depot without freight workings having to go via Aylesbury & Claydon Jct. Preliminary work started in the spring on clearance of embankments, 22km of new fencing, relocating newts etc plus embankment clearance on the CR main line where the chord to EWR will be constructed.

### **Banbury East Side Multi Storey Car Park**

Legal agreements between Network Rail and the construction contractor will shortly be signed that will enable work to commence on the construction of the new 707 space multi-storey car park and link bridge. Preliminary enabling works have already been started with site clearance now completed. By 31st March 2014, three separate enhancement projects are expected to be completed at Banbury: 1) The new car park, (2) installation of ticket gates and (3) enhancement of the concourse areas all of which should significantly improve the station environment and parking accessibility.

## **East West Rail news**

Environmental survey work is now being carried out along the route. Network Rail lead the EWR project board and Chiltern Railways attends meetings although not actually a member. Completion to GRIP 8 is currently costed at £450m/£500m. Reading/Oxford to Milton Keynes/Bedford services are now being proposed to start back from Paddington. Possibly the new station at Water Eaton will be named 'Oxford Parkway'. Land clearance work has started at site of new chord construction at Bicester. Winslow station car park is now being planned to offer 370 spaces including 1 storey deck holding 170 cars; extra decks can be added when needed. EWR services should not require a subsidy after 5 years and will create 2.5million additional rail journeys by 2021. Milton Keynes Council plan to press for a new station entrance at Bletchley (on the town side) as part of the forthcoming 'master plan' for regeneration of the town.

## **Oxford – Witney – Carterton re-opening**

The Branch have been invited to join in and help the local group in Witney, West Oxfordshire, starting to campaign for the re-opening of part of the old Fairford branch from Yarnton on the north Cotswold line to Witney and Carterton. There is considerable congestion on the A40 between Witney and Oxford and road improvements would not be sustainable, as the jams would merely move further into built-up Oxford. RAF Brize Norton has recently expanded significantly following the closure of RAF Lyneham, and is now the centre for all RAF transport and flight refuelling operations. The nearest town, Carterton, will see major expansion of housing as a result. The West Oxfordshire Local Plan envisages a continuation of major housing expansion in Witney, making the town one of the largest in the country without a rail link. This major growth was recognised in the ATOC 2009 report on potential re-openings. The local bus company, Stagecoach, operates very frequent (every 10 minutes through much of

the day), high quality, services between Carterton, Witney and Oxford. However they are frustrated by the impacts of the congestion and would encourage development of additional public transport alternatives.

Witney branch re-opening has been on the Branch's development list for many years. We are very supportive of and welcome the local campaign. We should be able to help in a number of ways, based on experience elsewhere, including the development of a web site and contacts with local authorities.

Oxfordshire County Council commissioned a report on options for the route in 2001 which is a helpful reference for engineering and technical issues, although many things have changed since then, including the additional housing developments. Much of the old track route outside built-up areas is still accessible but consideration will have to be given to how best to access the town centres. The site of the closed Witney station is on the wrong side of town, as is the route around the airbase. It may be an opportunity for a "tram-train", using part of the Cotswold line into Oxford station and possibly part of the old LNWR line to link with East-West Rail at Water Eaton Parkway/P&R. We will be watching the first tram-train trial between Sheffield and Rotherham – if successful, this could add weight to our campaign arguments. Coincidentally, Stagecoach are the operator of the Sheffield Supertram, which will be extended to Rotherham under the trials.

### **Cotswold Line News**

The Branch was represented at the funeral of Cotswold Line Promotion Group founder member and long time Railfuture member, Oliver Lovell who sadly died on Platform 2 of Moreton Station on 2<sup>nd</sup> June.

There is now a strong likelihood that the Car Park at Kingham will be expanded in the near future, in addition it is understood a new disabled access footbridge will replace the current structure, which is in poor order.

The Rail Link bus service from Kingham to Chipping Norton (X8) is now operated by Pulhams.

Hanborough station car park has now been opened, after some delay.

### **Footbridge folly**

Oxford City Council has refused planning permission for a new footbridge across Hinksey sidings, on the footpath between New Hinksey and South Hinksey, because it would not be accessible for disabled people and mothers with buggies. The bridge needs to be raised to provide clearance for overhead line electrification. Network Rail say that constructing sloping ramps would add £750,000 to the cost and that they are under no obligation to replace the bridge. Removing the bridge without a replacement and closing the footpath would benefit no-one.

Some years ago, when the Virgin Voyagers were introduced on Cross Country services, Cherwell District Council refused planning permission to replace three footpath crossings between Wolvercote and Banbury with footbridges on the grounds that they would not comply with Disability Discrimination Act regulations. No evidence was given of how many disabled people, if any, regularly used these field paths, having to climb over stiles and pick their way across the railway tracks. At Hampton Gay an ingenious solution was found, by constructing a cantilevered walkway under the railway bridge over the River Cherwell. On the footpath between King's Sutton and Twyford Bridge walkers still have to pick their way across the tracks with no other protection than the "Stop Look Listen" notices.

### **Couple of links**

<http://www.railfuture.org.uk/Railfuture+Needs+Your+Help>

[http://www.go-op.coop/workspace/uploads/files/go-op\\_newsletter6.pdf](http://www.go-op.coop/workspace/uploads/files/go-op_newsletter6.pdf)

## **Photos**



*Photo: John Elvin*

The 11:41 departure from Islip to Oxford on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2013 just beyond the Kidlington Road bridge, Islip, showing how the embankment has been totally cleared of trees and bushes etc.



*Photo: John Elvin*

Work commences at the site of the new chord at Gavray, Bicester, seen from a train on the Chiltern main line on 17<sup>th</sup> July 2013.



*Photo: Andrew McCallum*

Work on restoring the Oxford north down goods loop near Wolvercote, seen from the 0946 Southampton - Newcastle on 11th July 2013

Edited by Andrew McCallum with contributions from Richard Stow, John Elvin, Nigel Rose & Martin Smith.

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