

Chairman's Message

The Branch is moving forward slowly but surely, but we do need more members to help with running things.

We could do with assistance with gathering factual information to help our lobby groups to improve rail services. Feedback about what's happening on your line is always welcome - please, drop me or Tony Smale (our secretary) a line anytime.

Here are some of the issues that have come up recently and we would appreciate your views...

- **Staff shortages on the trolley services.** There have been several instances this summer even though SWT are obliged to offer this as part of their franchise contract. How important is this to your journey?
- **Luggage on the seats taking up passenger space.** Often there is no luggage space left, so do we need to ensure new trains have more luggage space?
- **Quiet coaches.** It appears that offenders are rarely asked by staff to keep quiet – do you think more should be done?
- **New SWT website.** Christian Roth the SWT MD said at a stakeholder meeting in September that they appreciated it was not at its best but asked for more time to get it efficient. We've already made various suggestions about this.

There's been a number of signal failures this year, the worst was at Basingstoke. The question now must be "is Network Rail pro-actively maintaining the Signal system"? Track circuits must be difficult to support, and when one goes down in the default/stop mode this can lead to all sorts of operational issues. The problem of West of England line trains being terminated at Basingstoke still causes real troubles. Long distance travellers, especially those with heavy luggage, hate it.

The Waterloo upgrade work planned for next August is fiendishly complicated. However, South West Trains are endeavouring to present information to travellers in an easily digested form. Those with internet access may like to have a look at the advance information – a good example of planned information to assist passengers: <https://www.southwesttrains.co.uk/plan-your-journey/planned-improvements/wswupgrade/>

I attended the Railfuture Branches conference in Birmingham on 29th October. The 40+ attendees split into groups and enjoyed lively debates on a number of policy issues. Their group conclusions were shared and the final agreed policy matters will be put to the Railfuture Board later in the year.

It is surprising how the geographical locations of Branches can result in extreme views on some issues. For example, on the subject of improving the rail network, those in the South West and North West especially know they have to fight hard for basic improvements when such a large share of resources are allocated to London and urban conurbations. Because of the Barnett Formula for distribution of public money, Scotland too benefits from a disproportionately large slice of the cake. However, there was agreement that we must fight for more funding all round and that Network Rail must deliver better value for money.

HS2 was another area for argument, although it was acknowledged that there are limits to the extent that Railfuture can influence major political decision. There was agreement that the Railfuture website must be improved fast, and that communication between the Board and Branches must also be used more efficiently for important information gathering and dissemination of requests for help.

Bruce Duncan

News from South West Trains

The wait for the award of the South West franchise continues but in the meantime SWT have made a number of really helpful changes to the December 2016 timetable.

The improvements in our area include:

- An additional two trains per day between London Waterloo and Castle Cary, Bruton and Frome – bringing the total to three
- A new Friday Night train to Yeovil Junction departing London Waterloo at 11.40pm serving Tisbury, Gillingham, Templecombe and Sherborne
- A Sunday evening service from Frome, Westbury and Warminster to Clapham Junction and London Waterloo
- A new Saturday morning service for Weymouth, Dorchester and Wareham to London Waterloo
- A later last train on Saturdays evening - the 8.20pm Waterloo to Yeovil Junction is extended to Crewkerne and Axminster
- On weekdays the 6.15am Yeovil Junction to Exeter will start from Gillingham
- The 7.25am Exeter St Davids to London Waterloo will be extended to six carriages for its entire journey

These improvements to the timetable are the latest enhancements to services provided by SWT over the last 12 months, which has included Summer Special services to Dorchester and Weymouth, extending a weekday morning service to link Gillingham with Exeter, and free WiFi on all trains between Salisbury and Exeter.

News from the Department for Transport

The TransWilts Line was designated as a community rail service by the Department for Transport (DfT) in September 2016. The designation covers passenger services between Swindon and Westbury. The stations at Chippenham and Melksham fall within the designation, but Westbury and Trowbridge do not because they are the responsibility of the existing Heart of Wessex Community Rail Line. During a consultation earlier this year, both Wessex and Severnside branches of Railfuture gave their support to the designation proposal.

The DfT announced on 29 Sept that Arriva Cross Country will continue to run train services across Britain under a new contract which runs to Oct 2019. Cross Country run trains in our region between Bournemouth, the Midlands and North.

ACoRP Community Rail Awards

This annual event took place in Stockport on 29 September 2016. Station adopters and Community Rail Partnerships in the Wessex area did particularly well...

- Best Community Engagement Event, 2nd prize: Three Rivers CRP for Netley Station 150th Anniversary Event.
- Best Marketing Campaign, 1st prize: TransWilts CRP & Great Western Railway for The Weymouth Wizard summer service.
- Passengers Matter, 2nd prize: Nick Farthing of the Three Rivers CRP for *No Train - No Worries* (scheme where rail ticket is valid on buses). Nick is a former Chairman of Railfuture Wessex.
- Passengers Matter, 3rd prize: Haslemere Station Community Partnership for turning a redundant station frontage shop into an information point.
- Station to Station – Queen's 90th Birthday Celebration Projects – Special Award, 3rd prize: Sarah Reeves of the Blackmore Vale CRP for Gillingham Station's Pop-up Birthday Event.
- Outstanding Teamwork Award, 3rd prize: Templecombe Station Friends, South West Trains & Partners for joint preservation of the station footbridge.

So ... congratulations to all of them! Do take a look at the full list of awards on ACoRP's website – it may inspire you to have a go at your own local station.

ACoRP = Association of Community Rail Partnerships

Templecombe Station was voted Best Small Station in the National Rail Awards ceremony held in London on 22 September 2016, and the Friends of Templecombe received a special mention for their hard work.

TravelWatch SouthWest Conference in Taunton

Although much of the TravelWatch SouthWest conference on 8th October was devoted to bus matters, our representative, David Brace, reports on a number of interesting points. He tells us that the Head of Communications from Cross Country spoke about developments planned for their directly-awarded 3-year franchise ... although it appeared that service improvements would mainly benefit passengers between Birmingham and the South West. Other speakers presented the case for additional double track on the West of England line beyond Salisbury, and the case for reopening the Andover-Ludgershall branch.

Every delegate at the Taunton conference was given a copy of the second newsletter from SERUG, the Salisbury-Exeter group affiliated to Railfuture (our branch had helped with the cost of production).

Jottings from our Treasurer

John reports that a relative of his was travelling on an early weekday morning Thameslink train to London in October. At one point the train slowed then driver made an announcement that a warning light was showing in one of the toilets and he would have to stop and investigate. The train stopped at a signal, the signallers were informed and the driver walked through the train to investigate. Fortunately the problem was quickly resolved and the train restarted, but with a 7 minute delay and services backing up behind.

John suggests that, if there had been a second person such as a guard, then maybe that second person would have investigated whilst the train continued on its way. Something to consider in the current industrial dispute!

The latest round of industrial action on Southern has seen a welcome replacement bus service between Havant and Chichester (in previous strikes there was no service at all). John comments: "We would, of course, like the dispute resolved as quickly as possible so that a full service runs each and every day!"

John collated the Wessex Branch comments on Govia Thameslink Railway's draft timetable for Dec 2018, when the full Thameslink service is due to start. The changes will affect Southern services into Portsmouth and Southampton.

Fareham Blockade

Major improvement works, which included the replacement of nine sets of points, meant that buses replaced trains in the Fareham area between 22nd and 30th October.

Brian says: My trip up to Basingstoke went well during the closure of Fareham station, with bus to Eastleigh then normal train service up to Basingstoke from Eastleigh, all on time. There were staff there to help at Fareham and Eastleigh but none at Botley and Hedge End.

Alan says: I avoided using Fareham Station and all the feedback I've had from others is that they drove to stations such as Havant to avoid the rail replacement buses. A nine-day shutdown is better than six months of weekly closures, but unfortunately there are buses again on 6 Nov and 11 Dec. Also the road works outside the station make the whole experience of walking there just so painful!

Charles says: I was involved in pointing folk in the direction of rail replacement buses at Portsmouth & Southsea on Saturday night after Oktoberfest - including trying to sort out something for a man with a return ticket to Botley who was standing in the wrong place when the 23:31 bus left for Eastleigh (he gave up at 01:00 and went off for a curry!)

Salisbury Depot

The Traction Maintenance depot at Salisbury, where they maintain the fleet of diesel units used on the West of England main line, will be celebrating its 25th anniversary in 2017. We had fixed a date for a group visit to this interesting site but the Fleet Depot Manager has just asked us to postpone our visit to the summer of 2017 at the earliest for operational reasons. We hope to announce a new date in a future newsletter.

Dates for your diary

The Annual General Meeting of Railfuture Wessex will be held at Brockenhurst Village Hall on the afternoon of **Saturday 1 April 2017** from about 13:30. We hope to have a guest speaker from British Transport Police.

On **Thursday 6 April 2017** from 16:00 at Yeovil Steam Centre, there will be a talk and visit by Christian Woolmar your President and Nigel Harris the Editor of Rail magazine. These debates and talks are always lively affairs. We should have a speaker from the operator awarded the South Western franchise, due to be announced in February 2017.

Railfuture's national AGM will be held in Peterborough on **Saturday 20 May 2017**.

Branch contacts

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