



THAMES VALLEY

campaigning by  
The Railway Development Society Limited

## THAMES VALLEY BRANCH Newsletter 91 December 2016

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### **Advance notice of our 2017 AGM.**

**Please note that our Annual General Meeting for 2017 will be held on Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2017 at 10.30 at the Hub, Easton Street, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, HP11 1NJ.**

**Our guest speaker will be Stephen Barker, Strategic Development Engineer, Chiltern Railways, who will give us a presentation reviewing the reopening and start of services between Oxford and London Marylebone and also Chiltern's future plans, covering the remaining years of the franchise, as well as the proposal to extend some services to link with Crossrail at Old Oak Common.**

The Hub is a very short walk from High Wycombe station and we are holding our AGM there for the first time following the start of through trains from Oxford.

Please note the date in your new 2017 diary now and we look forward to seeing many of you there.

### **Branch Meeting on 20th September 2016 at Bicester Town Council.**

**Our guest speaker was Martin Tugwell, Director, Heartland Strategic Alliance Strategic Transport Forum.**

The Strategic Alliance's area covers 9 local transport authorities, and 4 LEPs with a combined population of 3,450,000, 175,000 businesses and 1.6 million jobs with 20,000 new homes per year, an economy the size of Wales' and 30% of London's. In addition to being on this strategic transport forum and working for Bucks CC, he is also included in high level DfT meetings on transport policy.

He confirmed that EWR is classed as an 'economic infrastructure project' leading to growth - it would not have attracted Treasury funding had it been put forward as just improving transport links and it will generate its economic return in the lifetime of a Parliament. He said that orbital routes avoiding London have a benefit for London. He said to watch out for an announcement in October from NIC and listen to the Chancellors' Autumn Statement in November for updates.

The proposed Oxford-Cambridge expressway did not have priority for funding over EWR.

In response to a question, he suggested that after EWR, Railfuture should campaign for infrastructure enhancements to increase line capacity between Didcot & Oxford. He added that a strong economic case would be needed for High Wycombe – Bourne End reopening and that Ruislip to Old Oak Common should also be a priority.

*Andrew McCallum/John Elvin*

### **Witney Oxford Transport Meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> November at Oxford Town Hall.**

On 10th November the Witney-Oxford Transport group (WOT) which is supported by Railfuture held a well-attended meeting in Oxford Town Hall, with three speakers presenting different points of view.

Raymond Hall, an architect and planner, proposed a futuristic plan for an elevated light rail line, similar to the Docklands Light Railway, with feeder bus services connecting with transport hubs along the line. It would terminate at the A40 junction east of Witney with bus services into the town, but could be extended at a later date to Carterton, Cirencester and Cheltenham.

The next speaker, Railfuture director Roger Blake, brought us down to earth. He proposed an incremental approach to rail reopening, citing the Borders Rail to Tweedbank; next stop Hawick. He warned against underestimating future traffic growth, for example on the Ebbw Vale line where it has proved necessary to extend double-track on some sections.

The third speaker was Stephen Joseph, executive director of Campaign for Better Transport. He highlighted the British failure to connect development planning with transport, for example the simultaneous decision of two Government departments to build a new city at Milton Keynes and to close the Oxford-Cambridge railway line. The main problem in opening new lines and developing new railway services is funding, but two potential sources are Section 106 charges on developers and workplace parking levies as in Nottingham. (*Oxfordshire County Council is currently proposing workplace parking levies in Oxford, to pay for public transport infrastructure works.* - Ed.). Hopefully, public transport is being given greater importance in some new developments, such as Kilnwood Vale (Crawley), Ebbsfleet and the "Devon Metro". He mentioned the URBED scheme for an Oxford Metro, "Swiftrail", and compared it with the development of light rail in Grenoble, Oxford's twin city. It is hoped that some good will come from the Bus Services Bill which proposes to give more powers to local government.

There was a lively Q and A session, with discussion on cycling including the lack of a cycle lane between Haddenham & Thame station, disabled access, and the disadvantages of guided busways.

The meeting had good coverage in that week's *Witney Gazette* on the front page and editorially.  
*Martin Smith*

### **Branch Meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2016 at Jericho Community Centre, Oxford.**

Rob Mashford and Amy Harland of Network Rail gave us a detailed presentation on current and planned works in the Oxford area and this meeting took place after the deferment of electrification to Oxford announced by the Rail Minister earlier in the month. However, Rob said Oxford electrification is funded in CP6 (2019-24).

NR would like to 4-track all the way from between Oxford and Didcot but in reality it might not be all the way.

Platforms 1 & 2 will be open for 6 car trains on 11<sup>th</sup> December with the Aristotle Lane bridge opening on 21<sup>st</sup> November to replace the former foot crossing to the allotments.

Track will be relaid at the southern end of the station but with the existing signalling in summer 2017. Also during the summer of 2017 the up carriage sidings will be renewed with a blockade between 22<sup>nd</sup>-31<sup>st</sup> July. In August 2018 there will be a 16 day blockade during which remodelling at the north end of the station is completed, including the works to allow parallel moves into the station by trains from the north and the Chiltern route, the new down north loop will open and the signalling will be transferred to the Thames Valley Control centre at Didcot. In anticipation of doubling on the Cotswold line as far as Hanborough, Wolvercote Junction will be future-proofed for a double junction. Rob said NR are keen to work with Oxfordshire County and Oxford City Councils on rebuilding Oxford station and that a new down platform on the west side (platform 5) could be open in CP6. He also confirmed that platform lengthening will take place at Radley, Culham & Appleford to allow for the new Class 387 EMUs.

Track plans for the Oxford area can be downloaded here:

<http://www.networkrail.co.uk/great-western-route-modernisation/oxford/>

*Andrew McCallum*

### **Chairman's Comment**

Campaigners have been pushing for the Oxford – Cambridge reopening for 40 years; I recently met John Yellowleas, from Scotrail, who said he met Chris Wright (my predecessor) at Milton Keynes in 1986 and set up the Oxford Bucks Rail Action Committee. 40 years later, with 27 Studies (all positive) and overwhelming political support, in September this year, things had changed little but it became very apparent that our members, politicians and the public were losing patience.

I suggested we delay this newsletter until after the Chancellor's Autumn Statement on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2016. We actually had four announcements in short order.

It may be helpful to review the events: 1) Paul Maynard, Rail Minister announced delays to electrification to Oxford, freeing up resources; 2) National Infrastructure Commission produces the interim Oxford – Cambridge report asking for £110 million for the Rail option;

3) Philip Hammond's Autumn Statement grants the £110 million in full; 4) Chris Grayling, Transport Minister, announces Special Purpose Vehicle to deliver and run the EWR Scheme.

The Branches and User Groups now need to keep up pressure on all the parties and politicians to get on with this scheme and make sure it, with its 11-1 Benefit Cost Ratio, is a priority over the Expressway

(which seems not to have a business case). The Branch will have a meeting with the various parties, in the new year when the dust settles. In the meantime I have liaised very closely with Railfuture's East Anglia Branch.

### **Buckinghamshire County Council meeting**

Three members had an interesting and productive meeting with officers of Bucks CC in November which took place after a gap of several years. It is hoped that when the county rail strategy is adopted it is aligned with our branch objectives for the county and we hope to have further meetings in the future.

### **Cotswold Line News**

Newt fencing now surrounds the Worcester Parkway Site, so that must indicate progress as this stage seems to take longer than actually building infrastructure.

Platform lengthening: IET trains will need platform extensions along the line; work to be done by 2018. At first 5 car or 9(10?) cars only will operate. 2 X 5 cars will not be allowed till after the work is done.

### **Wantage – Grove**

During our Jericho Meeting, (see above) a member of the public mentioned that quadrupling Didcot – Swindon, may be brought forward for CP6 and this was confirmed. For our Branch, this means Wantage – Grove Parkway goes from a "pipe dream" to a very serious objective.

It is expected that footfall may be 750,000 to 1,000,000 per year in year one (with new housing).

### **Reading Green Park Station gets the green light**

Berkshire Local Transport Board have confirmed that this new station will proceed with work due to start in April 2017 and a proposed opening date of December 2018. It is funded by LEP and local authority contributions including Section 106 payments. This scheme, which includes the station, multi-modal interchange and access road, would significantly improve accessibility and connectivity of the existing Green Park business park and surrounding area and would help to enable delivery of the Green Park Village mixed use development. Engagement with Madejski Stadium has been initiated and operational discussions will follow at the appropriate time to ensure maximum accessibility for the station and connectivity with other public transport services.

*Richard Stow*

### **Bicester-Oxford construction**

Network Rail has continued construction work from Oxford Parkway (OXF) into Oxford (OXF) that included demolition of the former parcels bay buildings and construction of two 6-car bay platforms for the new service. Between OXP and OXF, track work was completed in September and the signalling installation started a week ahead of schedule and was commissioned over the 19th/20th November weekend with full driver training commencing the following Monday.

Oxford City Council had to consider ongoing objections from home owners near the line who raised concerns about the rebuilt line so Network Rail modified their track plans. At one stage, the council sought to place limits on the number of trains using the line and also sought the use of 'SilentTrack'.

A total of £3.5m was spent on mitigation measures.

Following planning delays over noise and vibration issues, the new service was due to commence on December 12<sup>th</sup> 2016 although public trains would actually start running the previous day.

### **New Banbury Depot**

Construction work is progressing on the new Banbury light maintenance and stabling depot site where the reception and departure roads are now open and each can accommodate a locomotive hauled rake or a seven car DMU. From 12 December, an additional two 4-car DMUs can be stabled in the depot and phase 1a construction is forecast for completion in April 2017 that will allow a total of 38 DMU units to be stabled there.

### **EWR Stage 2: Bicester - Milton Keynes & Bedford**

Network Rail has been working on completing GRIP 3 with reportedly £53m being allocated to develop the plans. Concerns about the specifications of the scheme re-opening and value for money were, however raised. The rail press claimed costs had risen from £400m to £700m to £1bn due to higher specifications. GRIP3, due for completion in December 2016, will show various costed options for the DfT to consider.

Work on the Transport Work Act Order (TWA) has also continued with further consultations being planned. Some of this work has been incorporated into the HS2 Act that will include a planned blockade at Claydon from 2020 where construction work will realign and raise the EWR route with a bridge over the HS2 route.

Following further appraisal work, plans to undertake major improvements to the single track Princes Risborough - Aylesbury line have been dropped. Studies showed the line's existing infrastructure and signalling could cope with one hourly (each way) EWR service. However platform extensions at Little Kimble and Monks Risborough and a bridge at Marsh Lane crossing are likely to happen while further discussions continue with the HS2 project team where the latter will pass under the branch.

Bucks CC, have continued to work with Network Rail on rights of way and footpath diversions. Detailed assessment of proposed works, bridges, gates, diversions, signing was undertaken while legal work on the Diversion Orders in Swanbourne and Little Horwood has progressed.

September saw Bucks CC complete the purchase of land at Winslow for the new station. The 2.5 acre site cost £900K. The site will include station buildings, parking and a bus interchange area. An associated cycleway from Winslow to Buckingham is also under construction. Bucks CC Cllr Martin Shaw, vice-chair of the EWR Joint Delivery Board felt it was "a significant moment" and Cllr Martin Tett, Bucks CC Leader, said the station was a fantastic opportunity and would transform local rail travel.

### **Oxfordshire**

Oxfordshire Rail Strategy continues to support EWR and the extension to Cambridge. It suggests the planned Heathrow service to Reading should be extended to Oxford and EWR. (2.3 m people use Heathrow from Oxford). It supports the re-opening of the Cowley line to passengers and notes Chiltern Railways' estimate 2500 passengers per day on weekdays. It looks forward to the redevelopment of Oxford station. A station at Grove is supported and it has been resolved to see if a fast service from Bristol to Milton Keynes is feasible.

### **HS2 Delay?**

The target to open the first leg of HS2 by 2026 is already at risk after the Government admitted that it would fail to achieve a key target to push the plans through parliament by the end of 2016. The DfT said that a timetable designed to ensure HS2 was given royal assent by Christmas would no longer be met. It is feared the legislation needed to build the first phase of the high speed line could be delayed by a further three months.

*John Elvin*

### **Marlow Branch**

We were represented at a joint Network Rail, GWR, Maidenhead Marlow Passengers' Association meeting recently at which it became clear that the future branch frequency of 2 tph, in return for only one through branch train to London from January, is certainly not confirmed so we'll continue to press for this frequency once the necessary infrastructure upgrades have been completed. We also intend to lend our support to the MMPA's campaign to improve the passenger experience at High Wycombe for users of the bay platform where due to signal sighting issues following the new footbridge construction trains only enter the very far end of the platform, resulting in a long walk and an even longer one for those changing from an up train.

*Andrew McCallum*

### **Editor's Footnote: Oxford – Marylebone**

Having delayed publication for the Autumn Statement it was worth waiting for the reopening of Oxford – Oxford Parkway and to include recent photos of the work and operations at Oxford (see below). I sampled the service in the off-peak on the first Tuesday and it was satisfying to see trains reasonably full already. At Oxford Parkway a new footpath directly from the station to the bus stops on the Banbury Road saves those arriving from the Kidlington direction on local buses a long dog leg of a walk. Of course, at Oxford much work remains to be done on the platform areas before work is completed and at the time of writing Oxford Parkway was not available to select on the ticket machines. But quite apart from the extra capacity and choice of operator for Oxford – London, the much reduced journey times from Bicester and Oxford Parkway into Oxford will hugely improve local travel on that corridor.

**PHOTOS - FOCUSING ON OXFORD**



Bucks County Council have erected this sign on the land they have purchased for the new station at Winslow. It includes a route map!  
*John Elvin*



The view north from the new Aristotle Lane bridge on 30<sup>th</sup> Nov 2016. The rear car of the Chiltern train is on the site of the former foot crossing to the allotments.  
*Richard Stow*



Martin Smith, Richard Stow & Andrew McCallum at The Oxford Green Fair on 3<sup>rd</sup> December.  
*John Elvin*



The bay platforms at Oxford a sea of mud as recently 16<sup>th</sup> November.  
*John Henderson*



The same view as above right on 3<sup>rd</sup> December.  
*John Elvin*



Looking south on platform 2 of Oxford station also on 3<sup>rd</sup> December, a stopping service from Banbury having just arrived.  
*John Elvin*



Two days later, on 5<sup>th</sup> December, the same train from Banbury has come the whole way into the platform; a Chiltern train waits on platform 1.



6 days to go; the platform ends on 5<sup>th</sup> Dec.

*both Andrew McCallum*



The 07.20 from Oxford to London Marylebone on 12<sup>th</sup> December, departing from platform 4 as it is too long for the bays.

*John Henderson*



Oxford on the departures screen (and a large banner) at Marylebone station on 13<sup>th</sup> Dec.

*John Elvin*



A pair of Chiltern trains on the bays at Oxford on 13<sup>th</sup> December.



Passengers alighting from the 13.07 Marylebone – Oxford on platform 1, on 13<sup>th</sup> Dec. *Both: John Elvin*

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