

Here are a few items of interest for those members of Railfuture Wessex Branch on our e-mailing list. There will be further news stories from us in the Wessex column of your December edition of Railwatch.

SUB NATIONAL TRANSPORT BODIES

You've heard of "Northern Powerhouse" and "Midlands Engine". Now the whole of England is to be split into SNTB regions. The Wessex Branch of Railfuture finds itself straddling two of these transport planning areas: **Transport for the South East** (stretching in an arc around London from Berkshire via Hampshire, IoW and Sussex to Kent) and **Western Gateway** (stretching from Dorset up to Gloucestershire). Both authorities are busy on their draft Transport Strategies...

Transport for the South East



The draft Transport Strategy consultation launched by **Transport for the South East** can be read online here: <https://transportforthesoutheast.org.uk/transport-strategy/>. Follow the link to 'Have your say' and take a look at the consultation questionnaire.

You can, of course, fill in this questionnaire yourself as a private individual but you should not purport to represent Railfuture when doing this.

☞ In the photo, Railfuture Board members Roger Blake and Chris Page chat to Wessex committee member Charles Burns at one of the Transport for the South East roadshow events.

Railfuture will be submitting its own response, and some of the topics to be included in this are presented on our website here: <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/article1842-South-East-Rail-Strategy>. If you have any further points you would like to see included in the Railfuture response, please let us have them before Christmas by emailing us at wessex@railfuture.org.uk.

Western Gateway

We don't expect a Transport Strategy consultation from the **Western Gateway SNTB** until mid 2020. Worryingly, the information they've published so far on their website shows that they're heavily focussed on making improvements along 15 highway corridors. We intend to counter this by submitting our own list of railway corridors early in the new year, showing the potential of rail to solve transport problems for a good deal less public expenditure. We'll be working on this document in collaboration with our colleagues in Severnside Branch.

WELBORNE BREAKTHROUGH

Railfuture representatives attended the planning meeting in Fareham on 16th Oct and made a strong case for a new station between Fareham and Botley to serve the planned housing development at Welborne.

We made useful contacts both with councillors arguing for the station and with representatives of Buckland Development Limited. This has led to further meetings with the Buckland managers – it transpires that, far from being anti-rail, they're keen to explore mechanisms for funding a new station. So ... some very encouraging progress to report after all the time and effort we've devoted to the project!

WEST OF ENGLAND LINE

Bruce Duncan reports that performance on the line has been dropping continuously over the past three months. On a typical day, only around 65% of services meet the Public Performance Measure. SWR has promised some additional train drivers to meet a shortfall, but alas there are no plans to replace the 30-year-old (and increasingly unreliable) Class 159 units.

Salisbury-Exeter Rail User Group members have been working with Network Rail to identify infrastructure upgrades, including some line redoubling, which could be delivered under NR's "Continuous Modular Strategic Planning" programme. A draft plan for consideration is due to be published early in 2020.

RAILFUTURE INFRASTRUCTURE DATABASE

David Brace represented Wessex Branch at a recent meeting of Railfuture's Infrastructure and Networks Group in London. The group is in the process of updating its database of infrastructure upgrades needed around Britain. The database comprises three categories: new stations, new routes and pinchpoints.

We will be making sure all major projects on our Development Plan for the Wessex Branch area are copied across onto the national database, but in the meantime please let us know of any pet schemes of your own that you think should be included, especially any which would alleviate delays caused by pinch points on our local railway network.

Hampshire County Council's Economy, Transport and Environment Select Committee is looking at initiatives that would make a positive impact on climate change. We discussed this at a recent meeting of our Branch committee held in Basingstoke, and decided to put forward three projects: a new station at Welborne which Railfuture is actively pursuing (see above), and the Waterside Line and Solent Metro schemes where we're supporting the work of Three Rivers Community Rail Partnership.

STRIKE ON SOUTH WESTERN RAILWAY

It's a great concern that SWR managers and the RMT union have failed to reach an agreement - passengers in our area will again be hugely inconvenienced by strike action. What is particularly galling is that the new trains which are at the centre of this dispute are destined for suburban services around London, but the places which will suffer the most on strike days are at the "country" ends of the SWR network. Chandlers Ford, for example, will be without a service for the whole 27 days of the dispute.

Although industrial action will not take place on 12 December, the amended timetable will still be in place. So, there's no let up for rail users then either!

Uniquely, the Isle of Wight is promised a normal service during strike days. But ... what is "normal"? Island Line users have recently experienced days when only one of the two units needed to run the timetable has been operational, and the odd day when no trains have run at all. The planned replacement of these 80-year-old trains with more modern stock can't come soon enough!

We're calling for SWR passengers to be adequately compensated for the disruption and overcrowded conditions they will suffer on strike days during December, but above all we want to see an end to this long-running and damaging dispute.

If you do have to travel on SWR services during December, the advice is to avoid peak hours and to check departure times before setting out.

Firstgroup has just announced that the current Managing Director of SWR, Andy Mellors, is to take up the newly-established role of Managing Director, Non-Franchised Businesses. He will oversee open access operators such as Hull Trains plus the company's tram services. Great Western Railway Managing Director Mark Hopwood will become Interim Managing Director at SWR pending the appointment of a permanent successor for Mellors; his role at GWR will be covered by current Deputy Managing Director Matthew Golton. [Mark Hopwood is well respected by rail user groups on the GWR network - Ed].

Tony Smale, Wessex Branch Secretary