

Dear members,

We had a very useful Branch meeting via Zoom last Thursday (15 Apr 2021), with some interesting presentations from our guest speakers and ample time for participants to contribute comments and ideas. Thanks to all involved, particularly of course our three guest speakers: Allison Cosgrove (Railfuture Passenger Group Director), Ian Brown (Railfuture Policy Director) and Roger Blake (Railfuture Infrastructure Director).

Special thanks are due to our illustrious Chair, Mike Southgate, for wrestling with the technology and managing to get the essentials up and running on the day. Mike apologises that it wasn't possible to present documents on screen using the version of Zoom at our disposal. For that reason, we've attached the "Chair's Notes" which he had prepared for the meeting. This, as you will see, is a run-down of the main activities which the Wessex Committee has been involved with over the past year.

Nick Farthing of the Three Rivers CRP was on hand to give us the latest news about Waterside Rail, and we heard about their exciting plans for a combined 1-day rail/ferry/bus ticket. Bruce Duncan updated us about developments on the West of England Line while lamenting the time it takes to get anything done!

The topics covered in the Zoom meeting ranged from the need to attract passengers back onto rail (the Passenger Group has a 10-point plan!) to practical tips when submitting schemes for "Restoring Your Railways" Government funding (important to focus on outcomes esp. reconnecting cut-off communities). We looked at ways to progress our campaign for a new station at Welborne, and that led to discussion about whether additional station calls significantly deterred passengers making longer rail journeys.

We thought the rail industry needed to get on with fares reform, although we were warned to "be careful of what you wish for" (some cheap fares could disappear). There's a need to lobby MPs etc. about "Covid" service cutbacks which, if we're not vigilant, could become permanent - we have an immediate concern about CrossCountry's pared-back summer timetable.

In conclusion: we agreed the "Zoom" meeting format works well and should be repeated, hopefully with full functionality. That said, many of us cannot wait to get out and about by train again and we look forward to meeting up face-to-face. We hope more members will want to become actively engaged in the work of Wessex Branch, even if it means simply contributing ideas via email. Don't hold back!!

Regards,

Tony

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