

NEWSLETTER No 3 RAILFUTURE

WESSEX Branch 2011

Chairman's Introduction

This annual newsletter aims to bring our branch members up-to-date on local matters to supplement the information in 'RAILWATCH'. Our branch membership remains quite steady at around 100 but we urgently need to recruit new, and preferably youngish, members if the Wessex branch is to remain active in future. Please try to recruit at least one of your friends over the course of the coming winter.

Visit to SWT Training Simulator at Basingstoke

Some 24 members, on three separate days, were able to experience a two hour driver training session during the spring. South West Trains' simulators are among the best in the country and, apart from being fun, we can now appreciate how vital the drivers' training and experience are in maintaining good train services. Chris Lemon was an excellent instructor and I thanked him on behalf of everyone for giving up many hours of his off-duty time to look after us.

Heart of Wessex and West of England Lines

We held an informative and interesting joint meeting with our Severnside branch colleagues in Yeovil last May. With no guest speakers, the 30 or so Railfuture members present were able to express their opinions on all aspects of these two important rail lines. We plan to hold a similar joint meeting, probably in Salisbury in May 2012, to include the equally vital Portsmouth-Cardiff route. With reference to the First Great Western (FGW) services which operate in our area we are involved in forthcoming consultations over the new GW franchise, which are being ably led by Christopher Irwin of Travel Watch South West.

South West Trains

The main operator in this area, SWT, continues to receive mixed reviews. Some aspects of the company's services are good and passenger satisfaction levels in comparison with other south coast operators reflect this; but they mask pockets of low marks – for example over the continuing use of class 450 'suburban' rolling stock on the Portsmouth main line. 'Fares' and 'Information in Event of Disruption' also compare unfavourably. At a recent 'Stakeholders' Forum' the managing director, Andy Pitt, explained the steps being taken to improve the latter in conjunction with Network Rail. In recent months lines into Waterloo have suffered abnormally high levels of suicides and cable thefts.

McNulty

At the same meeting SWT said that no proposals had yet been made with regard to staffing levels at stations – a feature of the recent McNulty report into rail finances – as the Government's response is awaited. However we will scrutinise and oppose any unreasonable plans to make reductions in booking office opening hours.

Local Campaigns

The Wessex branch of Railfuture will support any group of rail users which launches a campaign over an issue affecting one line or station. An example of what can be achieved by a vigorous campaign is the 'No 450' group which successfully inspired Portsmouth area MPs and councillors to raise the issue at meetings with ministers, so raising the profile to national press and TV. It is hoped that the new managing director of SWT, Tim Shoveller, will take some action to address the problem as the Portsmouth direct line is one of the few in this area which is losing passengers due to a poor service.

Future Developments

Over the course of the winter the branch committee will be revising our 'wish list'. As the name of our organisation implies, Railfuture's primary object is to secure better rail services. Please let any member of the committee know of particular ideas and proposals you wish to have taken into account. A new paper will be published, and posted on the website, early in 2012. Please also let us know of any other relevant comments or copies of correspondence relating to rail issues as it helps to reflect actual experiences when we meet train operators.

Plans for 2012

We hope to arrange a visit next spring to another rail infrastructure facility. We will also plan a meeting or visit of some sort to the Isle of Wight. Details to follow.

Station Surveys

Earlier in 2011 a small group conducted pilot surveys of Burseldon, Swanwick and Fareham stations. The results were given to SWT and were apparently of some use. We might expand the scheme in 2012, depending in part on our members' response to the simple questionnaire enclosed with this newsletter. I would be very grateful if everyone could respond, either by post or email, before Christmas.

AGM

The next branch Annual General Meeting will be held in Winchester on the afternoon of Saturday 17 March 2012. We are inviting a senior representative of Network Rail to be our guest speaker (*in recent years SWT, Southern, Cross Country and FGW have been the guests*). The agenda and other papers will be sent out in February. Please mark the date in your diary and try to attend. Only if rail engineering work seriously affects the Wessex main line will there be a change of plan. The hall is 5 minutes walk from Winchester station and is suitable for disabled people.

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Wessex Branch Members' Survey Autumn 2011

Name: Local Station:.....

How often do you travel by train:.....

How do you buy your ticket:....Ticket office.....
Machine.....
Internet.....
Telephone.....

Which phrase(s) best describes this station:...Good/Reasonable Condition
(delete those which don't apply) In need of major maintenance
Unstaffed
Friendly staff
Poorly lit/threatening in dark

Suggestions for improvement:.....
(e.g. more car parking/bicycle racks/disabled access/re-painting/signs/information)

Is there a station support group:.....

Would you be willing to help committee members take part in a more detailed survey of this, and other local, stations: ...yes/no.