

CrossCountry Campaign Success



Arriva’s contract for running CrossCountry services is up for renewal in October 2023, and the Government announced that it is minded to place a Direct Award for a further four years. The looming deadline prompted Railfuture branches covering areas in which CrossCountry operates to discuss priorities for the future contractual term and arrive at a coordinated position. At the top of everyone’s list is restoration of services to something nearer

pre-Covid levels.

As rail travel picked up, particularly the leisure market, our Branch has repeatedly challenged the failure to restore the Manchester service to hourly and to reinstate our direct trains to Newcastle. We’ve argued that trains are becoming overcrowded and that journeys now take longer due to poor connections, making rail travel much less convenient. Last year, managers at CrossCountry did make some minor but very welcome improvements, urged on by our tenacious Chair, Mike Southgate.

Well, at long last it seems the message has got through. The operator has published draft timetables for May 2023 and it would appear that the full hourly Manchester to Bournemouth service is to be reinstated, with all trains calling at Winchester.

There are improvements for other Railfuture branches to celebrate too. But it’s clear that we’ll have to continue our campaign for all the trains to call at Brockenhurst and for the restoration of the five-trains-a-day Newcastle to Southampton service.



*Photo & map:
CrossCountry Media*

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Chairman's Message

Welcome to our latest Newsletter. As you will see we continue to campaign on a number of fronts for improvements to our rail services. The real power and ability to change rests with the DfT and ultimately the Treasury who are directly funding the railways. Writing to rail operators is not going to change much, it's out of their control, or so they tell us. The only way to get change is via the political route with your MPs.

I appreciate many of you lobby your MPs on rail matters. **Can I urge all members to seriously think about sending an email on a personal basis to your MP.** This is the easiest way to contact them, although the odd one still insists on a letter. I would be cautious about bombarding them with multiple emails that can dilute the effectiveness and serious consideration of the subjects which really matter. Normally it needs a local focus ... in my case at Shawford the continued lack of off peak direct trains to anywhere north of Winchester.

“The only way to get change is via the political route with your MPs”

Hook Landslip - We acknowledge the speed and effort of both SWR and Network Rail into restoring services both in the week and subsequently. We have expressed disappointment that more use was not made of the normal diversionary route via Havant and providing more services to Reading. We also believe there could have been more advice offered at stations about alternative routes, using other SWR and other operators' services, ticket and car park easements, etc.

We are continuing to push for a full restoration of the SWR off peak timetable. I have raised this again with SWR and Transport Focus. I am also concerned about the impact the increase in penalty fares will have on passengers travelling from unstaffed stations such as Shawford where there is just one unreliable TVM. At Shawford I am bombarded with announcements telling me the perils of not buying a ticket but no advice about how to buy a ticket or permit to travel if the Ticket Vending Machine fails. Btw my advice is, if that happens to you, please take a picture of the failed TVM for proof.

I continue to be concerned about the continuing issue of railcard tickets not being accepted by the ticket gate at Waterloo. On a recent visit my wife got a right battering by the gate paddles and the irony is the railcard was never checked anyway. Once again it's about good customer focused communication. Maybe a simple poster pointing out “manual checks are being carried out - please head to this gate and have your railcard ready for inspection”?

Chair, Mike Southgate

Quick Wins for Rail Reform and Recovery

Quite often, we're asked by the Railfuture Board to provide a “Wessex branch” viewpoint on an important issue, or in advance of a top-level meeting. Anticipating a meeting with the Rail Minister, Board Chair, Chris Page, recently asked branches for “quick win” ideas focusing on customer experience, marketing and operations. After some debate, we narrowed it down to these three policy areas...

- Restore all off peak (but not necessarily Peak) services to pre-Covid levels to maintain key connectivity between major conurbations.
- Amend ticketing rules to reflect changed travel patterns (Remove evening ticket restrictions leaving only morning ones in place to spread demand and reduce confusion. If passengers are unable to travel on advance purchase tickets, offer a fair refund to encourage them to cancel reservations and free seats for others. In the event of disruption, all tickets should automatically be valid on any reasonable route. Passengers should be offered the cheapest fare available including split ticketing).
- Ensure better contingency plans to deal with emergencies and planned engineering works. Cooperative working with other transport providers and diversionary train routes should take precedence over bustitution. Unwarranted "do not travel" warnings should be replaced by helpful advice and assistance.

Much of what we came up with was used by Chris in his final “top 10 quick wins” document which he planned to hand to the Minister.

Railways and Politics, a Personal View

Railfuture is very firmly a non-political organisation and we must be careful to be seen to be even handed in our public dealings on matters such as strikes, public ownership etc. That said, of course members have their views on a whole range of issues that affect the rail industry and we need to be thinking about these matters in the context of the reality that in less than 2 years there will be a General Election. The Railfuture Board have been giving some thought to this matter and is seeking to engage with all political parties to influence what goes into the party manifestos on rail issues. Whilst of course we all know that what goes in a manifesto is no guarantee that it will happen, we can be very sure that if it is not in the manifesto, it certainly will not happen!

This is where you come in. Members need to be thinking about what they want to see from the railway in Britain going ahead and to feed this into Branch discussions and to the Policy Director, Ian Brown. These ideas need to be specific and user focused. All party manifestos will contain motherhood and apple pie statements about carbon reduction, modal shift to low carbon transport etc etc but we need to get beyond that to what are they going to do? Purely as an example, could we persuade a party to commit to say 50 route miles of electrification every year, or a commitment to move to CPI as the basis of calculating fare increases instead of RPI? Get your thinking caps on!

We must not delude ourselves that railways will be a key election battleground issue, they wont. But we do have an opportunity to try to put an end to the policy drift that the industry is suffering from and get some specific ideas on the way ahead into the public domain, regardless of who wins the next election.

Stewart Palmer
Railfuture Board Member

Swanage-Wareham Heritage Train Service

The Swanage Railway has now confirmed that it intends to run a trial service using its own heritage diesel units onto the main line at Wareham from 4th April 2023 – see <https://www.swanagerailway.co.uk/news/> SR's Wareham-Swanage service via Corfe Castle will operate on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays until 10th September. It will be possible to buy tickets as an add-on to your journey from any South Western Railway station to destinations on the scenic Swanage branch line.

At a time when all heritage lines in the UK are suffering from lower passenger receipts and the high cost of fuel, the decision to proceed with the Wareham service this year is a significant leap of faith for the Swanage Railway management, and they will be hoping for a good level of support from those keen to see that the experimental service is a success.

Govia Thameslink Railway's Class 313s

Railfuture has been critical of the use of 50-year-old Class 313 units on some of the longer-distance services along the south coast due to their lack of toilets and many of the passenger facilities we now take for granted. GTR has now announced that these units will be withdrawn as from the introduction of the Summer 2023 timetable, so we should see their more modern and spacious Electrostar units on services such as Portsmouth to Littlehampton and Portsmouth to Brighton. There will be fleet maintenance cost savings for GTR and an end to guard control of door opening on their network (the 313s were never equipped for driver controlled opening).

The Branch Line Society, which runs events for rail enthusiasts, is hosting a charity rail tour to give people one last chance to ride on the Class 313 trains. The day-long tour on Saturday, April 29, will run as follows: Brighton - Preston Park - Portsmouth Harbour - Bognor Regis - Barnham - Littlehampton - Hove - Three Bridges - Lewes - Eastbourne - Ore - Eastbourne - Lewes - Newhaven Marine - Lewes - Haywards Heath – Brighton. For more information and to buy tickets visit <https://www.branchline.uk>

Brighton/Portsmouth to Cardiff

When Great Western Railway withdrew their service between Cardiff and Brighton, they told us that this would release diesel units so that they could strengthen their busy trains on the Cardiff-Bristol-Portsmouth service to five carriages. However, we're currently seeing most of the GWR trains on this corridor with only three carriages. Not surprisingly, there's anecdotal evidence of overcrowding and passengers being left behind, unable to board.

Analysis of statistics about train formations early in March via the Real Time Trains website has confirmed that around two thirds of the nearly 240 GWR trains on the Portsmouth-Cardiff route over a typical seven day week were indeed 3-car with only around one train in five on average being 5-car and around 15% being 4-car trains. The average number of carriages per train appears to be about 3.5.

It's apparent that GWR is short of diesel units after their decision to hand back all 19 of the Class 769/9 "Flex" units which were to be used on the Reading- Gatwick service, and to retire their "Castle" class HSTs early.

The Cosham Curfew: Railfuture Wessex Branch has asked GWR if they will review the long-standing policy of their Portsmouth-Cardiff trains not calling at Cosham Station in North Portsmouth after 20:00 each day, widely known as the "Cosham curfew". For passengers travelling home in the evening to North Portsmouth from places such as Exeter changing at Salisbury, Salisbury, Bristol and Cardiff, it is clearly inconvenient that the direct GWR train does not call at their local railway station.

West of England Line

As well as being adversely affected by strikes and all the other problems on Britain's railways, passengers on the line between Waterloo and Exeter have had to endure the additional disruption caused by landslips and the line's ageing infrastructure which is in need of wholesale upgrade. Users complain that publication of revised timetables during disruption has been poor, with just two or three days' notice of changes. This makes it difficult to plan journeys and obtain the best value tickets.

Devon County Council and the Western Gateway regional body are funding the studies necessary to arrive at a Strategic Outline Business case for line upgrades, and some progress has been made. At the East Devon end, this should provide fully costed options for passing loops at Honiton and Whimble which will facilitate "Devon Metro" service enhancements. Further east, the aim is to extend the existing loops at Gillingham and Tisbury to improve resilience. It is now clear that signalling upgrades in the Exeter and Salisbury areas will also be necessary, and it's hoped this work can be dovetailed into the overall investment plans for the line.

SWR's aim is to replace the Class 158/159 units "by the early 2030s", but they have yet to decide what type of motive power will be used. The company has declared a target of net-zero emissions by 2040, so the problem will be how to achieve this on the 121-mile unelectrified section between Basingstoke and Exeter.

A possible solution would be to use the Stadler Flirt electric/diesel bi-modes that have proven to be successful in East Anglia. With these units, it would be possible to convert the diesel power car in the centre of the train to an alternative energy source (battery or hydrogen) at a later date when the technology has been proven. But there's another snag: the DC electric power supply between Waterloo and Basingstoke is running at near full capacity and could need further investment if more trains in total are to run off the 3rd rail supply.

Certainly, any train operator still running diesels well into the 2030s is going to look very flat footed. National Express plans to electrify its entire fleet of road coaches by 2035!

New Class 701 Arterio Trains for South Western Railway

South Western Railway is replacing all the different classes of trains used on its metro services with 60 new ten-carriage and 30 new five-carriage Class 701 Arterio trains. These trains will all have guards but the drivers will operate the doors. The map on the SWR website shows that the new Class 701 Arterio trains will be used for all SWR metro services in and around London, including London Waterloo to Reading and Windsor, and also for SWR services between London Waterloo to Alton. The SWR website states that the 90 new Class 701 Arterio trains "can carry more people, accelerate and brake more quickly to reduce the journey times between destinations, whilst larger, driver operated doors can allow more customers to board and alight to reduce dwell station times" ... so when the new trains are introduced we shall be looking for timetable changes which shorten journey times such as Alton to London Waterloo.

The new trains were supposed to be introduced in 2020 but their introduction has been delayed. As they are replacing rolling stock which SWR is giving up, this is clearly causing problems with trains being overcrowded due to not having enough carriages. Railfuture Wessex Branch members have noticed that some Class 450 trains in the Wessex Branch area getting overcrowded as they are running with fewer carriages presumably because some of the carriages are diverted to SWR metro services which were supposed to be operated by now with the new Arterios. SWR have said that they plan to start bringing in the new trains but they acknowledge that will have to run some short-formed trains until the Arterios come into service later this year.

Clearly it is in the interest of rail passengers on the SWR network that the new Class 701 Arterio trains are brought into service as soon as possible.

Open Access in the South

In February, the Secretary of State for Transport reaffirmed his support for more competition on Britain's railways in the form of "open access" passenger services.

Extract from the Transport Secretary's "George Bradshaw address" Feb 2023:

"...we will support more open access services where it benefits passengers and taxpayers. We've seen this work well with Hull Trains and Grand Central as well as with Lumo on the East Coast Mainline. All offering passengers greater choice and more direct links. Open access operators will play an important role in the industry's future, especially as we grow new markets and make best use of spare capacity on the network."
- Rt Hon Mark Harper MP

As the Transport Secretary highlights, there are several examples of commercially-successful open access services running between London and the North of England, but we have yet to see any south of the River Thames. This does seem strange given the relative affluence of the South and the number of popular destinations that are poorly served by direct trains.

After some discussions on the topic, our Branch committee arrived at this policy position:

"We note the success of the current open access operators in raising the profile of rail. As a result we are broadly supportive of open access operators in the South who can demonstrate proposals to grow the overall rail market and travel opportunities. We believe there are many cross country opportunities such as the South Coast to Devon and Cornwall, Bristol and destinations in Wales which may be attractive to such operations - historic and popular direct routes which have been abandoned by current regulated operations. However, every case has to be considered on merit to protect existing services. We welcome discussion with any potential operators."

Other News in Brief

On 9 February 2023, the Dept for Transport formally awarded a maximum extension of South Western Railway's National Rail Contract (NRC) from 28 May 2023 until 25 May 2025. NRCs are a bridge to competitively-awarded Passenger Service Contracts (PSCs) as envisaged under the Plan for Rail.

A new Community Rail Partnership has been established in the north of our region: the [Wey Valley CRP](#) covering Guildford, Wanborough, Ash Vale, Ash, Aldershot, Farnham, Bentley and Alton. It's part of the

umbrella organisation, the Hampshire Community Rail Partnership CIC, which already includes the Three Rivers, Reading-Basingstoke and East Hampshire CRPs.

Hampshire County Council is considering the construction of an £80m dual carriageway as part of the A326 (South) **Fawley Waterside** road improvements. A phase of the project involves road widening which would affect part of the New Forest. Meanwhile we await the outcome of Network Rail's business-case study which will hopefully see the return of passenger services on the branch line to Marchwood and Hythe.



Dorset Council has drawn up plans to part-pedestrianise the walking route between **Dorchester South** and **Dorchester West** stations. The section along Fairfield Road through the market site currently involves walking in the roadway amongst traffic and parked cars. A safe walking route between the two stations is long overdue!

Work has begun on the south side of **Southampton Central** station to create an “International Gateway” as a point of access to the port and cruise terminals. The £5.5m scheme comprises a new art-deco-style cruise passenger waiting lounge, an improved taxi rank and car drop-off point, new bus facilities and better pedestrian access.

Hampshire County Council is working on plans to improve access to the station at **Andover** for both cyclists and pedestrians. In addition to creating a new public realm, there will be better signposting to and from the town centre. The scheme is to be funded through contributions from nearby developments.

Much needed improvement work to enhance **Alton** station forecourt is due for completion in the next few weeks. The jointly-funded £1m scheme will see the area transformed into a fresh, attractive and accessible gateway to the town, with easier access for buses, pedestrians and cyclists. The inclusion of planters and bollards will prevent vehicles from parking on the pavement, obstructing pedestrian movement.

Dorset Council completed the remodelling of **Weymouth** station forecourt last year. The original funding was also meant to cover the cost of creating a “pocket park” along a short section of the former Weymouth Quay tramway, from the forecourt across to nearby retail outlets. Ambitions for the linear park have had to be scaled back now the money has run out.

More than a year after the design for lifts and other accessibility improvements at **Pokesdown** station were approved and funding of £5.7m was committed, the Pokesdown Station Action Group is frustrated that works have yet to begin. BCP Council was accused of siphoning off the money for other purposes, but a spokesperson was quoted as saying “There has been no change in position on funding. We are committed to the project and we understand our partners are busy progressing with detailed design.”

A car had to be removed from the railway line near **Brockenhurst** station in January after the driver had turned left a bit too soon while using the level crossing. Such occurrences are all too common, and slavishly following Satnav instructions is often the cause. Well, it couldn't have happened in the days when gates swung sideways and blocked access to the railway for both pedestrians and motor traffic. How many of us thought “surely this can't be right” when our traditional gates were taken away and replaced by lifting barriers?

Tip: Remember to check split ticket availability if using CrossCountry Trains. A day return Winchester to Banbury, then Banbury to Birmingham can be significantly cheaper than Winchester to Birmingham.

Island Line Update

SWR promise to restore two trains an hour throughout the day once the pier works have been completed, although this may not now be until “late spring” according to our Network Rail source. One train per hour will run to Ryde Pierhead to connect with the hourly ferry, while the other will terminate at Ryde Esplanade. We’re told this uneven timetable is the best that can be achieved, but nevertheless we’ve challenged the assertion that one train per hour for Pierhead meets SWR’s contractual commitment, which was for two trains per hour for all stations (apart from Smallbrook Junction, which is seasonal).

Robin’s Freight Roundup

Robin Attwood keeps abreast of freight movements in the South, and sent us this summary:

- Container traffic to and from Southampton Western Docks remains steady with the traffic using the Basingstoke – Reading route.
- Southampton Eastern Docks: Traffic amounting to 1400 tonnes from Morris Cowley M.A.T. appears to be running Mon to Sat with a return working of 800 - 1000 tonnes. There are also workings from/to Halewood but the Castle Bromwich traffic appears to be non-existent now.
- The Hamworthy Branch remains out of use.
- Ludgershall MoD sees very occasional traffic these days.
- Marchwood MoD: Apart from the irregular movements to/from MoD Bicester, MoD Kineton and Eastleigh East Yard, there have been several movements recently of Class 701 Arterio stock from Eastleigh to Marchwood for storage pending introduction to traffic.
- Winfrith Siding (Dorset): There has recently been a working from Crewe Coal Sidings, returning to Crewe with radio-active waste.

Railfuture Annual General Meeting

Railfuture’s national AGM takes place on Saturday 15th July 2023 at a venue in central London, so most Wessex members should be able to get there by the start time of 11:00. There’s no fee to attend but you can book lunch in advance at £10. Details here: <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/conferences/>

Our Growing Membership

We welcome several new members who have joined Railfuture Wessex Branch since our last newsletter. We hope you find this Spring Edition interesting will want to participate in branch activities. Please get in touch if there’s anything you want to know or any important issue you think we need be aware of.

Tony Smale, Secretary

If you received this newsletter by post and have since acquired an internet connection, please let us know your email address as this will help us to reduce the cost of sending out newsletters – thanks.

Branch Contacts

Chairman mike.southgate@railfuture.org.uk or **Secretary** tony.smale@railfuture.org.uk

Secretary’s address: 63 Church Lane, Wool, Wareham BH20 6DD tel 01929 462116

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