



OUR BRANCH NEEDS YOU TO SURVIVE!

Chairman's Message



Following the general election and various policy statements from the incoming government, it's clear that there is much which needs to be done nationally and at local level if we are to achieve our goals of a bigger and better railway. I would draw your attention to the many excellent campaigns being run by Railfuture; see <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/News-and-Views> and [/Campaigns](#). It's worth a look - there is much going on!

There are initiatives coming to us at branch level from the Railfuture Board. Locally we continue to pursue:

- Reopening of the Waterside and station provision at Welborne.
- Working with other stakeholders on other development opportunities which should include rail.
- Improving capacity on Cross Country Trains South Coast to the Midlands and the North and GWR Cardiff to Bristol. We are in regular correspondence with both TOCs and whilst there is no immediate sign of improvements it's important to keep the pressure on.
- GTR (Southern) evaluating the impact of their new timetable.
- SWR we continue to express concern that, despite off peak passenger numbers being back to and in some cases in excess of 2019 levels, we still have a reduced off-peak timetable. We continue to monitor and express our frustration with matters on the Island Line. We are concerned about problems with the very old diesel units operating on the West of England line. Whilst it's clear that SWR are constrained (they say) by DfT finances it's important we keep up the pressure including political lobbying. To ensure that change may occur perhaps post SWR under the government's new rail operation arrangements.

Pursuing such matters has always been very time consuming for your volunteer committee. In addition to routine matters such as attending meetings and keeping you, our valued members, up to date. However, with the loss of so many committee members we are struggling.

When I was first involved with the committee some fifteen year ago we had quite a large committee. When I agreed to my second term as Chair, we still had a strong committee of 8 or 10 members. Sadly, through natural causes and other pressures we are now down to a committee of six. Bruce Duncan is the latest to stand down although he will continue to pursue West of England issues through his chair of SERUG (<https://sites.google.com/view/serug>) I would like to thank him for all his hard work, support and contribution to Railfuture Wessex.

As I hit a big number birthday this year I am currently considering whether I can and should continue. I was leaving in October 2022 but agreed to stay as Chair 'Lite' hoping new members would come forward. Based upon my experiences in business and the charity sector, refresh is vital

for any organisation. We need fresh ideas and experience. Yet despite repeated requests to our 100+ members no one has come forward. **We can't carry on delivering the above without additional help from you, our members.**

Can you help to reduce the load in some way? - obviously joining our committee would be the most useful. It is not too onerous as most of our work is undertaken by email. We do try and meet up socially from time to time which is a good chance to exchange views with likeminded people.

If you are interested, please feel free to contact me or Tony Smale (our secretary) or any other committee member for a no commitment chat about how you can help. If not, who knows what will happen next?

Mike Southgate

Back of the Net!

Our Chair, a keen Southampton FC supporter, has been haranguing management at SWR to reinstate special stops at St Denys station which had been so much appreciated by fans in the past. He pointed out that they were well used as they provide a good alternative route to the St Mary's ground instead of via Southampton Central - same distance but flatter. The stops at St Denys also helped to keep home and away fans apart at both Central station and in the town itself.

Happily, the reply from SWR is that the additional stops at St Denys during home games would be reinstated for the 24-25 season.

End of Line for Franchises

We don't yet know the dates when individual National Rail Contracts will be taken back into public ownership under the current Government's plans for the passenger rail network.

In the table below, the full-term contract end dates for the four rail operators in the Wessex area are shown in red. Dates shown in black represent the end of the core term, ie the earliest date the Secretary of State could choose to end the contract. Contract extension remains a possibility.

May 2025 for South Western Railway	Jun 2025/ Jun 2028 for Great Western Railway
Apr 2025/ Apr 2028 for GTR (Southern Railway)	Oct 2027/ Oct 2031 for Cross Country

Opportunities for Rail Investment

With the public finances in a parlous state, any station or line re-openings in the coming years will probably have to be funded by the private sector, or through developer levies to support new employment areas or substantial housing growth. In recognition of this, the Railfuture Board asked branches to identify opportunities in their areas for suitable developments. The three categories identified by the Board were:

- *Opportunities for rail links which will enable substantial private investment in industrial development*
- *Opportunities for substantial property development around existing or potential stations*
- *Opportunities for New Towns of 10000+ properties around new rail stations or links*

Currently, there are few development schemes in the Wessex area that would fulfil any of these criteria precisely. Perhaps the closest we have is the major development at Welborne, north of Fareham – but even that is for only (only!) 6,000 homes.

In the past, there have been proposals for substantial new towns at Micheldever and at Bramley, both in north Hampshire and both near existing railway stations. As the Government presses on with its Growth agenda, perhaps these schemes will be revisited. And those currently in development could be given the green light to add further industrial units or houses.

More recently there's a proposal for a large business park on the former Bushfield Camp site south of Winchester, which our Chair has been pursuing with local councillors as it has the potential to be rail served.

In response to the Board's request, we compiled the following list of projects where rail re-openings might be contemplated in support of commercial developments:

TOP THREE

- 1) **WELBORNE.** New station between Fareham and Botley. Low cost station on single track line. Supports Welborne Garden Village, a development of 6,000 homes now under construction. Passive provision for a new station included in developer's plans. Outline Business Case study for the station has been commissioned by Fareham Borough Council.
- 2) **WATERSIDE.** Re-introduction of a passenger service on the Fawley freight branch line with new stations at Marchwood and Hythe. Rail service would call at Totton and extend at least to Southampton Central. Trains could be dual powered: battery/electric. Initial feasibility studies completed and much local support. The Solent Gateway project at Marchwood, part of the Solent Freeport, will create 1,100 new jobs. Fawley Waterside recently withdrew their planning application for a 1500-home development, but there remains scope for substantial development on the site of the demolished power station.
- 3) **WHITEHILL-BORDON.** New town under construction in East Hampshire taking the current community of 14,000 to 23,000 people, with new town centre and leisure complexes and the creation of 3,000 new jobs. Bus connections are promised to Liss and/or Alton, but Railfuture proposes a rail connection to Bentley along the former rail alignment, perhaps using dual-powered battery/electric trains. The Guildford to Farnham service could be extended to Bentley and Bordon to provide the service.

ON THE BACK BURNER (problems over funding, service provision, etc)

- 4) **CHINEHAM.** A new station on the Basingstoke-Reading line would support the proposed 900-home development to the north east of Basingstoke, as well as homes recently built.
- 5) **WILTON.** A new station would act as a park & ride for Salisbury and act as a gateway to Stonehenge. A modest housing development is planned nearby.
- 6) **LUDGERSHALL & WEYHILL.** Re-introduction of a passenger service on the MoD freight branch would support around 2,000 new homes and some commercial development.
- 7) **RINGWOOD.** Re-instating the line to Brockenhurst was included in the top 10 priorities in ATOC's Connecting Communities report of 2009, and was mentioned in Network Rail's Dorset Connectivity Strategic Study of 2021. Land earmarked for around 1,000 new homes.
- 8) **HAMWORTHY.** Re-introduction of a passenger service on the Hamworthy freight branch would support plans for 830 new homes on the former power station site. Dorset's LTP3 envisages the branch as an integral part of a light rail transit scheme across the Bournemouth conurbation.

If you know of any we've omitted or hear plans for major developments that could be served by rail, please let us know.

So, what now for Britain's railways?

It was inevitable that expectations on railway issues would be high with the arrival of a new Labour Government and we have seen a rush of both proposed legislation and ministerial announcements. Whatever your personal politics are, Railfuture has always striven to be politically neutral, because as an influencing body we have to work with whoever the people of Britain elect and the focus of our efforts should be directed towards what existing and potential rail users want regardless of who is in power.

It is my view that those fundamental passenger "wants" do not change, and have not changed over many decades. They are these:

1. A reliable railway where the train actually turns up, i.e. not cancelled, and when it arrives at its destination it is on time, or within an acceptable margin of on time.
2. A train where I have a good chance of getting a seat and room for my luggage, in other words enough suitable coaches.
3. I can get a ticket where I know that I have got value for money. This is not just about the price, it is about knowing I have got the best deal for the journey I want to make.
4. A railway which is clean and where I feel safe.

My personal experience leads me to believe that if you get those things right consistently then people will use the railway by choice, rather than because they have to. Revenue will grow organically, as it desperately needs to in order to reduce the cost of the railway to taxpayers. I think it would be fair to say that at present the railways in Britain are a very long way from meeting these four basic requirements on a consistent basis.

The key question for users is whether the changes proposed by Labour will improve the railway for passengers? The latest industry performance data published by ORR shows that ownership of the various parts of the railway seems to have little relationship to train service delivery. Network Rail, which has been run by the government for 21 years, yes 21 years, is responsible for 60% of all train delays. Of the train operators, four of the worst eight performing train companies are in the hands of the Operator of Last Resort (OLR), in other words the government. The best performing train operator, Greater Anglia, is at present in private hands. I am not trying to score political points, but the numbers do not lie and these are the facts.

The new government is in a very difficult financial situation and there is going to be little money for new rail projects, large or small. All the more reason to focus on the day to day railway and getting the fundamentals right. So don't let us judge Labour on what they say in the early months of power, or what they do in terms of industry structure and ownership, but judge them in just under 5 years by applying the test of the extent to which they have improved the railway against those 4 key customer requirements.

To misquote a former Conservative Prime Minister, it is time for "back to basics" in how the railway delivers for users, regardless of who owns what.

Stewart Palmer

Railfuture Vice President and former Board Member

Parliamentary Appointments

Labour ministers appointed to the **Department for Transport** are: The Rt Hon Louise Haigh MP, Secretary of State for Transport; Lord Hendy of Richmond Hill CBE, Minister for Rail; Simon Lightwood MP, Minister for Local Transport. Also MPs Lilian Greenwood and Mike Kane.

The Shadow Secretary of State for Transport is Helen Whately, the Conservative MP for Faversham and Mid Kent.

The new House of Commons **Transport Select Committee** Chair is Ruth Cadbury, Labour MP for Brentford and Isleworth.

Robin's Freight Roundup

Robin Attwood sent us this summary of freight movements in the South:

MoD Ludgershall: very occasional movements.

MoD Marchwood: several workings per month to/from MoD Bicester and Kineton.

Southampton W. Docks: Wimbledon - Marchwood (Class 701) movements; also Donnington and London Gateway.

Southampton E. Docks: regular car traffic between Morris Cowley MAT; also Halewood.

Southampton MCT/Southampton W. Docks: container traffic remains buoyant, with recent flows from/to Barry Docks, Dow Corning and Portishead Car Terminal. Some gypsum traffic from/to Mountfield.

Eastleigh yard: remains busy.

Aggregate traffic is regular from the Mendip quarries to Eastleigh, Woking, Botley, Fareham and also Southampton (formerly Bevois, St Denys).

Hamworthy branch: remains out of use.

Winfrith siding: very occasional low level radio-active waste to Crewe Coal Sidings.

Community Rail Update

Most of the stations across the SWR network have now been adopted by volunteer groups. If you want to be involved in the growing Community Rail movement, contact the "Friends" group at your local station or see the Community Rail pages on SWR's website:

<https://www.southwesternrailway.com/other/about-us/community-and-rail-station-adoption>

The company recently identified several of its stations which have spare rooms which could be taken over for community use. The ones in our area are:

- **Hilsea** – a small station building
- **New Milton** – a former retail unit
- **Portsmouth & Southsea** – a large room, formerly a ticket office
- **Portsmouth Harbour** – a former retail unit
- **St Denys** – former waiting room and WCs
- **Yeovil Junction** – former workshop

Do you use or live near any of these stations? If so, then why don't you make local enquiries and see if there is an organisation who might be willing to make use of these redundant facilities?

Other News in Brief

Works to transform the forecourt of **Salisbury station** are now well under way, with completion expected by the middle of 2025. In the meantime, car parking will be severely limited. Alternative parking will be temporarily available at Central Car Park, with existing short-stay parking being changed to long-stay parking to support rail customers until the opening of the new station car park on Fisherton Street later this year. Subway refurbishment has just been finished.

Work is also underway at **Dorchester South** to improve the approaches to the main station building, and new waiting shelter has been installed on the Up platform in place of the demolished parcels building. A separate project to facilitate step-free access to both platforms is still being evaluated.

Ryde Railway Pier will be closed until May 2025 while life extension work continues on the pier structure. One train every 30 minutes will operate between Ryde Esplanade and Shanklin from Monday 7 October to early May 2025. A rail replacement minibus service will operate along the road pier during the closure.

Design work and the construction tendering process for the lifts at **Pokesdown station** have now been completed, but estimates indicate a final cost that exceeds the total available budget for the project. But we're assured that all parties remain fully committed to delivering the scheme and are now working at pace to review the options available to progress the project in the most efficient, timely and cost effective way.

Plans to reinstate passenger services on the **Waterside Line** have been thrown into uncertainty amid cuts to government spending. In 2022, Network Rail consulted on plans to reinstate trains serving stations at Marchwood and Hythe but soon after the Labour Government came to power, Chancellor Rachel Reeves unveiled billions of pounds of cuts, including the scrapping of the Restoring Your Railway fund. A Hampshire County Council spokesperson said: "We await further detail from the Department for Transport around implications of the Chancellor's announcement relating to funding for railway restoration." Despite some recent negative press reports, the campaign for a passenger service goes on!

Marchwood residents are fearful that a new bus priority scheme on the **Marchwood bypass** will further reduce the bus service through the village. So maybe the prospect of a rail service has gained a few more supporters!

Dorset Council and Western Gateway STB are funding a Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) to investigate the feasibility of an hourly all stations **Wareham – Brockenhurst** service, infrastructure changes around Bournemouth, and a more even Waterloo - Weymouth service. Back in 2010, local authorities proposed the idea of a Dorset Metro by 2040, with Boscombe station reopened and a new Talbot Heath station.

Last Word from the Branch Secretary



Please take a few moments to consider how you might contribute to the activities of Wessex Branch. It might be just keeping in touch about developments in your area affecting stations and train services. Perhaps you would be willing to help organise meetings or spearhead campaigns? Our current, rather diminished, committee is just about managing to keep the train on the tracks. Ideally, we need several members expressing an interest to serve, then we would be able to reinstate general meetings and organise an election for branch officers – all the normal processes that ensure our membership organisation has a sustainable future.

Tony Smale

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.

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