

Joint meeting of Railfuture Wessex and Severnside Branches held at Salisbury, 26 May 2012

17 members were present. John Friedberger, who was in the Chair, explained this event was a return match for a similar joint meeting held at Yeovil on 28 May 2011, a report of which was on the Railfuture website.

1. Great Western Franchise

The meeting heard that two of the shortlisted bidders had contacted Railfuture, soliciting its views on the franchise. John Friedberger reminded all present that the unified Railfuture response to the DfT's GW Franchise Consultation was now official Railfuture policy. He had composed some comments to send to Stagecoach concerning GW routes in the Wessex Branch area but these were consistent with the unified response.

It was noted that all four shortlisted bidders had received a copy of the Railfuture response to DfT. After discussion it was agreed that Nigel Bray would write to First Group asking whether it was interested in learning more about Railfuture's aspirations for the new franchise.

2. Exeter- Waterloo route

John Friedberger said he had helped write the former Rail Passengers' Committee report, *Westcountry to Waterloo: The Real Alternative*. Its contents had been partly overtaken by events such as the new Axminster loop but the conflict between the interests of London commuters and longer distance passengers on the route remained.

Mike Southgate spoke of the need to reinstate services west of Exeter, at least during the summer peak. John Walker said more double track was needed west of Salisbury.

During a discussion on devolution of rail powers, John Friedberger expressed concern that the result might be more fragmentation of train services and inferior inter-regional services. Salisbury station needed to develop more as a rail interchange and also as a rail / bus interchange. Nigel Bray mentioned the very positive views of Councillor Richard Gamble, Wiltshire Council portfolio holder for public transport, who was guest speaker at Severnside Branch AGM.

John Friedberger asked whether there was still local interest in opening a station at Wilton. It was noted that the town once had separate stations on the Westbury and Exeter lines but any new station was likely to be east of Wilton Junction, serving both routes. David Redgewell said the former Salisbury District Council had considered it with a view to reducing road traffic in the city. He suggested an approach be made to Wiltshire Council and the Local Economic Partnership for their views on this and a potential station at Porton.

3. Cardiff- Portsmouth route

John Friedberger commented that five-car trains were needed, with First Class accommodation and more luggage space. There might be a business case for a new build of trains. Mike Southgate considered that refurbishment of the Class 158s might be feasible and that five-car sets were the priority. Charles Burns said it was important to have stock of InterCity standards.

During a discussion on whether through services between Cardiff / the West of England and Brighton should continue, John Friedberger noted that the GW Franchise Consultation had asked this very question. He read out the relevant paragraph (2.18) of the Railfuture response:

“Great Malvern / Cardiff- Brighton trains must continue to offer through journey opportunities between Western England and South Wales and the South Coast. Many people connect from Devon and Cornwall into these trains at Westbury now that South West Trains no longer operates west of Exeter. The essential point is that what the passengers want is more important than optimising stock utilisation. Through trains are a great asset and it is well known that passengers, especially older people and those with luggage, dislike changing trains.”

During discussion John Friedberger suggested retiming of the 16.59 Brighton. Mike Southgate said that most passengers using the service east of Cosham were making short journeys and that the stock could be redeployed to strengthen Cardiff- Portsmouth. It was noted that Brighton had lost its Cross Country services and its SWT service to Reading in recent years.

The possible effects of GW electrification on Cardiff- Portsmouth services were also discussed. David Redgewell noted that the West of England Partnership (the joint transport authority for the unitary authorities of Greater Bristol) favoured retaining the present hourly frequency.

The question of whether Cardiff- Portsmouth services should be rerouted to serve Southampton Airport Parkway was discussed at length. A reversal would be necessary in order to continue serving Southampton Central and because Network Rail had rejected the idea of a new chord to the Botley line south of, and avoiding, Eastleigh station.

Mike Southgate noted that the Airport was very interested in having through trains to the West of England and South Wales. John Friedberger questioned whether there was sufficient demand to justify the additional journey time for other passengers. John Dixon suggested rerouteing only some of the trains. David Redgewell favoured extending the existing Bristol- Southampton Central stoppers to Southampton Airport Parkway. John Friedberger considered that Transport for South Hampshire ought to lead on this matter. Mike Southgate explained that turning trains round at Southampton Airport Parkway would be difficult because of conflict with Freightliner services, although this might be possible if more of the latter were routed via Redbridge and Laverstock.

4. Bristol- Weymouth route

John Friedberger noted that Railfuture's response to the GW Franchise Consultation had highlighted the massive growth in passenger numbers on the route and had called for additional rolling stock, regular interval services, some track redoubling and a new chord at Yeovil to allow trains to serve both Pen Mill and Junction stations.

John Dixon suggested replacing the two existing Yeovil stations with one at the point where the Weymouth line passed under the Exeter line. John Friedberger said he believed this would be too expensive because there was no road access at the site. David Redgewell commented that Julian Crow (FGW) had told him the number of cross- Yeovil rail journeys had tripled since the introduction of the Yeovil station bus link.

Mervyn Lloyd was concerned that the recent withdrawal of Channel Island sailings from Weymouth Quay, which was in a state of disrepair, would reduce passenger numbers on the line. There was no prospect of sailings being resumed before 2013 if at all.

The lack of step free access to Dorchester West up platform was noted. Tony Smale added that better signage was needed from Dorchester South to the West station. It was noted that many connections were made via the two Dorchester stations or via Upwey. John Friedberger suggested a meeting was needed with Catherine Phillips of the Heart of Wessex Rail Partnership.

Mervyn Lloyd added that there was no functioning help point at Dorchester West in the event of disruption. David Redgewell suggested a joint letter from the two Railfuture Branches to Mark Hopwood (FGW). Nigel Bray replied that he wrote to Mr. Hopwood in 2010 regarding unsatisfactory announcing systems at Cheltenham and Gloucester which FGW had inherited from Wessex Trains. These had now been replaced. David Redgewell believed the situation remained unresolved at Dorchester West because the line south of Castle Cary was administered by Network Rail's Wessex Route, which had less involvement with FGW than did its Western Route.