

Railfuture Newsletter No 5
WESSEX Branch Spring 2015

Branches and Groups Day 2014

On 11th October I represented our branch at the annual Railfuture Branches and Groups Day, which this year was held in Birmingham. Unlike previous years, we weren't allowed to sit back and listen - we were organised into table groups for brainstorm and workshop sessions. The challenges and opportunities for Railfuture are clear: our core of active members will shrink unless we campaign and recruit new members, whilst the current popularity of rail travel gives us the unique opportunity of an independent voice to represent rail users.

We found a lot to agree on - we are a nationwide organisation that also delivers successful national and local campaigns, we are well-informed and well-respected in the rail industry, and that we successfully deliver high profile campaigns. We are independent and open minded, campaigning on the issues that affect rail users. We stand for better and more integrated rail travel.

The national groups, for example the Passenger, Freight and Infrastructure & Networks Groups, can help us to campaign locally - they have a wealth of experience of what makes a campaign successful which we can draw on. If you would like to help Railfuture campaign nationally, volunteers are always welcome!

Through the workshop sessions we identified our stakeholders, the people and organisations that can benefit from our activities. We need to interact with them so that they appreciate the value of what we do; for example we must engage with MPs, councillors and council officers to help them understand transport issues.

We also brainstormed our hopes and fears for the future, identifying the issues that we have to address as an organisation and the areas where we can grow. These formed the basis of a 90 day action plan to which I and all the other delegates committed.

My immediate actions are to brief you, the branch members, on the outcome of the meeting and to set you the target of each introducing a friend, colleague or relative to Railfuture as a new member by 31st March 2015. As part of the normal budgeting exercise at this time of year I will also identify our objectives and the campaigns we plan to run next year. Then with the branch committee we will identify whether we need any training to help us campaign effectively, and re-engage with the stakeholders that we identified in the workshop.

The article in Railwatch 142 will tell you more about the day. For me it was a thought-provoking, rewarding, enjoyable and successful experience. My job now is to inspire you to work with us to campaign for a bigger better Railfuture and a bigger better railway!

Our particular concerns are:

- Membership that does not represent typical rail users
- Typical members are white males over retirement age and who are not regular frequent rail users
- Declining membership that means income is less than expenditure and could lead to shut-down within 5 years if income does not increase. Declining membership is inevitable given the current age range
- A perceived split between activities at branch level and headquarters.

Other Activities to Come

We will be required to produce a development plan for 2015 that highlights what we want to do including, in particular, any reopening campaigns as well as campaigns to improve current services. Your suggestions for areas to look at would be very welcome.

We want to identify both the users and the non-users of our railway services and what their key concerns are. We want also to know why many regular rail travellers are not members of RailFuture. Do we not advertise ourselves and our successes enough?

We need to ensure better contact and liaison with our key stakeholders. Who are they? Obviously South West Trains, First Great Western and Southern are the primary ones. In particular we are experiencing great difficulty in getting SWT to include us in discussions. Other stakeholders include local authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships and local transport boards as they are an essential part of localism and may have access to funds to spend on our rail system. For all our stakeholders we have valuable knowledge about the rail system and are keen to help.

For the next 5 years there are three key objectives:

- To be a respected voice in the rail industry with particular emphasis on our key stakeholders.
- To have a bigger, broader, more active membership base.
- To widen our use of communication channels particularly through Railwatch, with social media and through industry shows.

Specialist and Affiliated Groups

As well as the branches that cover the whole of the country and in which we concentrate mainly on local issues, Railfuture also has a national structure that include a number of specialist groups that look at particular topics. These groups include:

- Passenger Group
- Freight Group
- Infrastructure & Networks Group
- International Group

If any of you have a particular interest in any of these subjects then I am sure you would be welcomed to take part. The Group leaders and contact details are shown in the Railfuture web site (Railfuture.org.uk).

If you wish to help us more locally then you are more than welcome to join our committee. We meet four times a year plus the AGM. If you have a specific interest in any of our campaigns you would be equally welcome.

Recruiting New Members

To help you recruit a new member, we are offering a discount on normal and retired/unwaged rates in the coming year for the first year only. You may wish to give the membership as a birthday present. To qualify you need to send our Branch treasurer a cheque for the appropriate amount and give the enclosed form to your chosen recipient. More forms can be obtained from our Branch secretary (if you are feeling really generous!). Your recipient just needs to submit the completed form. This offer is not available nationally nor through the Railfuture web site

The discounted rates are Normal £15 Retired/Unwaged £10

What we are Doing Currently

At the moment your committee is heavily involved in reviewing two long term route studies – the Wessex study that covers all services into Waterloo plus cross-boundary services and the Western study for cross-boundary services into our area.

The studies have been prepared by Network Rail and the rest of the rail industry and try to look at what is needed to meet the predicted demand for rail services from 2019 to 2043.

For our Wessex area the continued growth of both the passenger and the freight markets that we have seen in the last 10 years is predicted to continue right through to 2043. This will completely overload the current network unless some drastic increases in capacity are created. This includes electrification with 25,000 volts overhead wires, many more,

faster longer trains and new destinations such as Heathrow airport and Old Oak Common to link with the planned HS2. The International platforms at Waterloo will be taken over for our services and the ideas of building flyovers and the running of double decker trains are all included.

Eventually there could be an additional hourly service between Brighton and Bristol via Southampton and Salisbury. We support this idea especially if the service is speeded up and more capacity provided.

Your committee are reviewing all of these ideas and are putting forward our own ideas where we think that the studies fail to reflect our local needs.

Services on the West of England Line (Salisbury to Exeter)

One of our committee members – Bruce Duncan – is actively involved in a campaign to improve services on this route. This is a mainly single line route and we are trying to ensure that the line is doubled and eventually electrified so that a more frequent service can be run with greater capacity. The line is also used as a diversionary route from Yeovil to Exeter for trains from Paddington to Exeter and the rest of Devon plus Cornwall.

2015 AGM

Just to give you advance notice for your diaries, the 2015 AGM of Wessex Branch will be on the afternoon of Saturday 21st March and the location will be Fareham. The location has good rail services from much of our area and should not require more than one change. It is also close to the M27 with easy access from the M3 and the A3.

Best wishes and from your Railfuture Wessex Branch committee who look forward to greeting you at the 21st March meeting and hopefully welcome any recruits you can bring along.

David Brace

January 2015