

THAMES VALLEY BRANCH Newsletter 97 March 2020

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Editor's Note: Most of the content of this newsletter was prepared before the coronavirus outbreak. Also, we had arranged an AGM in May for which *Vivarail* had accepted an invitation to address us; when we are able to reschedule this we will, of course, inform you. Meanwhile, we sincerely hope that you are all well and stay safe. Railfuture's briefing: <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/Coronavirus+COVID-19>

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Chairman's Comment

I am writing this in the midst of the Coronavirus outbreak; it is clear that this is awful for the Railway Industry. I have just come back from Oxford Station and it is very quiet. It shows great dedication that services have continued at this difficult time.

I am disappointed that meetings planned, including the Branch AGM, have had to be cancelled but clearly that is the best course of action at this time to ensure safety of everyone.

However Railfuture Thames Valley Branch needs to look forward, as we have done for over 30 + years, and use this time to develop new plans, for this crisis will end and when it does we must go back to campaigning for a Bigger Better Railway. *Richard Stow*

Joint branch meeting with the Chipping Norton Railway Club

Tuesday 5th November 2019, Chipping Norton Town Hall: "Cotswold Line Task Force"

A talk by rail development consultant and former Cotswold Line Promotion Group Chairman, Ian Baxter

Ian is Strategy Director, SLC Rail and Secretary of the North Cotswold Line Task Force, having previously worked at Chiltern Railways for about 12 years. He gave us a stimulating overview of the future prospects for the North Cotswold line, placing it firmly in the context of its economic benefits.

He began by pointing out that SLC Rail have been involved in the opening of Stratford upon Avon Parkway, Coventry Arena, Bermuda Park, Kenilworth and now Worcestershire Parkway stations.

The Task Force (NCLTF) consists of 5 County Councils, 5 LEPs and 6 other bodies (CLPG, DfT, NR, GWR, WMRE & SLC Rail) which Ian described as like trying to "herd cats" but they got all these bodies to work together with "unity of purpose" and the Outline Business Case was received in October 2019 and is now going to the DfT.

Recently the South Worcestershire Development Plan Review was released showing 40,000 more homes in the area which is equivalent to another Worcester and would be around Worcestershire Parkway

station. At the other end of the line the Eynsham Garden Village would be about 14,000 new homes close to Hanborough station.

The Class 800s on the line provide the opportunity for growth of traffic including from the west Midlands area.

Ian stressed that the NCLTF's is "an output driven scheme" to transform and extend the role of the NCL in supporting sustainable population and economic growth across five counties from the Welsh borders to the Ox-Cam arc's western end but he reminded us that the railway cannot do everything.

The outcome of modelling various different scenarios led to the following proposed timetable objectives:

An hourly Paddington – Great Malvern service with 5 trains per day to/from Hereford (as now) which would skip Charlbury and Kingham.

An hourly Paddington – Kidderminster service with some possibly to/from Stourbridge Junction which would skip Pershore and Honeybourne.

An hourly or half hourly Hanborough – Oxford - Didcot or Cowley local service.

Once these priorities are in place then attention would turn to re-opening from Honeybourne to Stratford upon Avon line with trains from Stratford to Oxford or Didcot and the West Midlands Railway's Stratford - Birmingham – Worcester services joining up to form a circle via the new route. This latter option would greatly improve connectivity between Evesham and the west Midlands.

Thus the basic off peak service would see 2tph on the NCL and anticipated growth over the next 40 years is about 100%.

In order to deliver this it would be necessary to re-double from Wolvercote Junction to Hanborough with a second platform at the latter and from Norton Junction to Pershore with a second platform there too. A "nice to have" but not essential would be to extend the new Oxford Down Line as far as Wolvercote Junction so that NCL bound trains can run totally independently of those bound for Banbury.

A projected 14% growth in population by 2030 means big change will be needed on the NCL and the NCLTF are working hard with England's Economic Heartland to support improved benefits of regional rail services such as easier commuting into Oxford, required due to the high house prices. The NCL Transformation Business case has a BCR of 4.46. The next steps are the Outline Business Case then the Full Business case. The target for delivering this is 2024/25. All the MPs along the line are hugely supportive and they'll continue to report to MPs.

To conclude, Ian showed us slides of how Worcester Shrub Hill station will look after the redevelopment of the area as part of the City's Shrub Hill Masterplan and what the new station to be built at Kidderminster to replace the present inadequate structure will look like.

In answer to a question Ian said that SLC Rail are also currently working on new station plans for the West Midlands including University, Perry Barr and the Moseley line and Willenhall line stations as well as working with Oxfordshire on strategy including stations for Wantage/Grove and, further west, Wotton Bassett.

Andrew McCallum

TWA Order for EWR Western Section Construction Approved on 4 February 2020

On 4th February the Secretary of State for Transport approved Network Rail's Transport and Works Act Order application, granting permission for construction work to begin on the Bicester- Bletchley-Bedford/Milton Keynes section (EWR Phase 2) of East West Rail. The new railway will also connect the Great Western main line, Chiltern main line, West Coast main line and Midland main line – providing passengers with much-improved cross-country rail links from East to West. The reopened link will deliver significant improvements to local travel, with the phased introduction of new rail journeys between:

- **Oxford and Milton Keynes:** with trains stopping at Oxford Parkway, Bicester, Winslow and Bletchley. 2 per hour.
- **Oxford and Bedford:** with trains stopping at Oxford Parkway, Bicester, Winslow, Bletchley, Woburn Sands and Ridgmont. 1 per hour.
- **Milton Keynes and Aylesbury:** with trains stopping at Bletchley, Winslow and Aylesbury Vale Parkway. 1 per hour.

The Information provided to the 2019 Public Inquiry revealed that EWR (Western Section) is estimated to cost £1,085 million and services are currently programmed to commence in 2024 with the Aylesbury line following in 2025. Bicester-Bletchley line speed will be 100mph (freight 75mph), Aylesbury link 90mph (freight 75mph) with Bedford-Bletchley remaining at just 60 mph.

An East West Rail Alliance of Network Rail, Volker Rail, Laing O'Rourke and Atkins have been awarded the contract for rebuilding the line. It is anticipated construction work will be in four phases; Bicester –Claydon; Claydon-Bletchley; Bletchley-Bedford and Claydon-Aylesbury.

Preparatory work has been underway since 2019 including removal of Chartridge Road Crossing (Bicester) barriers and the EWR connection at Bicester Gavray Junction. In addition, track was lifted west of Launton crossing, west of Claydon Junction (where HS2 will pass under EWR) and on Bletchley Flyover where some WCML overhead masts, previously attached to the flyover decks, were relocated enabling the decks to be removed and examined. Subsequently, the flyover bridge parapets have been removed while planning permission has been requested to close the Buckingham Road while two flyover spans are renewed.

Also in 2019, environmental compensation schemes for protecting or moving newts, bats, birds and badgers were put in place and, in December, councils received pre-planning applications for flood risk assessments, drainage and culvert work along the route.

HS2 and EWR

EWR work in the Claydon area has already been authorised using HS2 construction powers and working sites have been set up with HS2 and EWR staff co-ordinating their work to avoid unnecessary costs of duplication. In April 2019, the Secretary of State authorised construction of Greatmoor Railway Sidings as part of HS2. This involves replacement of the existing waste transfer facility at Calvert to a new facility further south on the Aylesbury-Claydon line. It is designed for two gantries and to cope with up to eight trains a day

The EWRC are campaigning for a Northampton/Milton Keynes service to Old Oak Common where the design plans for the HS2 station include space for new terminal platforms for the Chiltern Line using the former 'Wycombe route' from South Ruislip.

EAST WEST RAIL PHASE 3 – Bedford to Cambridge

On 30th January the DfT announced that 'Route E' (Bedford Midland – south of St Neots/ Tempsford area – Cambourne – Cambridge) was selected by EWR Co as the route of the scheme's 'central section'. EWR say this route option would represent the best value for taxpayers while returning the most benefit for every pound spent, was the most popular option with people who responded to the 2019 consultation and would deliver the best opportunities for supporting and enhancing the environment.

Key benefits of the Preferred Route Option would include:

- A new station for the growing population at Cambourne
- A new station in the area around Sandy and St Neots connecting with services to towns including Edinburgh, Peterborough and Doncaster
- Easy access to Bedford town centre, supporting plans to regenerate the town and enabling connections to communities across the midlands
- Simple access to Cambridge city centre and connections onto communities across Anglia and Norfolk.

John Elvin

Chiltern news

High Wycombe Bay Platform - signal sighting issue

Ever since NR constructed a new footbridge that obscured the bay platform starter signal, most trains terminating in platform 1 have to stop well short of the buffers resulting in a longer walk for passengers to the exit or to platform 2. Although this issue is still unresolved after several years, it is hoped NR can eventually come up with sufficient funding to install a repeater signal enabling all terminating trains to stop next to the buffers. This issue is raised by stakeholders at every meeting with CR and we were informed in January this year that 'conversations were still ongoing' with NR and it is hoped funding can eventually be allocated to undertake this work.

Car Parking Charges

The price of parking increased at six stations from January (Aylesbury, Bicester North, Bicester Village, Dorridge, High Wycombe & Solihull). However, more importantly, at nearly all Chiltern stations; the

reduced off-peak Mon -Fri parking charges now don't start until 12:00 or 16:00 that is bound to discourage potential off peak car drivers from travelling by rail. This has not proved popular with off peak travellers and it was also claimed by some stakeholders that the new prices and time restrictions were not sufficiently publicised in advance.

End of Chiltern's 20-year Franchise

Although CR's current 20-year franchise finishes at the end of 2021 (with the possibility of a 5 year extension at the DfT's option), We are not aware of any discussions on renewing/extending it pending publication of the forthcoming 'Williams Report' that is currently expected to be released later this year. This branch will be coordinating responses to any franchise extension/renewal proposal if and/or when the consultation period is announced by DfT.

PRM Vehicle Compliance

With the exception of one loco hauled train of slam-door Mk 3 carriages that is only used for one daily return journey from Banbury - Marylebone (Mon-Fri), all Chiltern's rolling stock was modified by the 31st December deadline to comply with Persons of Reduced Mobility legislation. Chiltern have a derogation (to July) to keep using the 'Banbury Congestion Busting set' until PRM compliant Mk3 carriages can be released from Greater Anglia, once the latter has sufficient new Stadler Intercity trains of its own in service.

John Elvin

Oxfordshire Corridor Rail Study

The conditional outputs were reported at the end of January to Stakeholders. This study is key to most of our campaigns, be it Cowley, Wantage Grove Science Parkway or Cambridge services. It is clear that to meet aspirations, capacity through Oxford has to be increased, broadly by 100%. The conditional outputs are pretty much in accordance with the branch's aspirations; however we despair at the lack of ambition to get work done sooner. Grove Station, 2028, is 9 years away and Cowley, 2024, Cambridge 2033. Our challenge is to lobby for faster progress.

	Enhancement	Source	Tph	Origin	Destination	Refinement
2024	EWR Western Section	EWR	2	Milton Keynes	<i>Didcot Parkway</i>	Extend to Didcot in path of GW shuttle; Culham call in each service
	EWR Western Section	EWR	1	Bedford	Oxford	
	Oxford Phase 2	Chiltern	0.5	Birmingham	Oxford	
	Cowley Branch	ORCS	2	Cowley	<i>London Marylebone</i>	Formed by extension of 2 Marylebone trains
	Hanborough	NCLTF	2	Hanborough	<i>Didcot Parkway / London Pad</i>	Extend 1 to Didcot & 1 to London; Culham call in each service
	North Cotswolds	NCLTF	1	Paddington	Gt Malvern	
2028	EWR Central Section	EWR	2	Cambridge	<i>Bristol / Southampton</i>	Extend 1 to Bristol and 1 to Southampton
	Coventry corridor	Midlands Engine Rail	1	Birmingham	<i>Bristol</i>	Extend to Bristol
	Solihull Corridor	Midlands Engine Rail	1	Birmingham	Oxford	
	Banbury shuttle	ORCS	0.5	Banbury	Oxford	
	Grove new station	ORCS	~	<i>Hourly call in EWR CS service</i>		
Begbroke new station	ORCS	~	<i>Hourly call in Banbury shuttle</i>			
2033	EWR+	EWR	2	Cambridge	Oxford	

Cotswold Line

The new Station at Worcestershire Parkway opened on 23rd February 2020, and offers quick interchange between the Cotswold Line and The Cheltenham - Birmingham Line. The station is constructed to a very high standard and although lacking seats and retail outlets on day 1, these are to be fitted shortly. This opens up many new destinations for users north of Oxford, increasing northerly traffic flows, hopefully. One of the most interesting historically is the Kingham - Cheltenham service restored to a 1 hour journey. This is set out on the Timetable Sheet at Kingham. (see photo below) *Richard Stow*

Other news

The Branch was represented at the GWR Stakeholder conference in October where, as usual for such events, some useful contacts were made during the breaks. In answer to two of our specific questions to the panel: they recognise that Oxford station needs to be re-built and would like to see work start in two to three years time and they would support a GWR branded connecting bus link between Chipping Norton and Kingham but it would require some external funding.

The new northern gateline at Oxford station came into use in the new year and should help relieve the serious congestion that can occur at the main gateline and on platform 3 at busy times. It will probably mainly be used by passengers arriving off trains on platforms 1,2 & 4 and when photographed was set for three exits and one entry (see below). At other times it has been set for exits only.

Your committee was represented at a GWR stakeholder timetable review meeting on 25th February. Key changes for May 2020 mentioned were: overlay of the remaining new "superfast" services, which don't stop at Reading, onto the current service and the introduction of three trains per hour on the North Downs line, on Saturdays from May and on weekdays later in the year, the extra train being a limited stop service to Gatwick. The new Reading - Basingstoke timetable already allows for calls at the new Green Park station. In answer to questions we were told that the 09.59 Oxford - Paddington can be used by Network Card holders (usually valid from 10.00) and that GWR are bidding to Network Rail to reinstate the call at Kings Sutton in the 19.05 Didcot - Banbury. Other matters raised included the longer and variable connecting times at Didcot and the long dwell times at Reading for certain up Didcot - Paddington trains. The new Class 769 bimodes (ex Class 319) are due to be introduced on the North Downs line where they'll be faster on the electrified sections but slower on the other sections than the current stock used. They may be used first on the Basingstoke line, however. Being 4 car trains they will provide more capacity which combined with the 3rd train per hour is a significant improvement. Part of GWR's presentation covered station improvements too such as: Reading West re-build to include staffed office at street level; new 600 space secure cycle racks at Didcot; expanding Twyford car park; forecourt, cycle storage and other improvements at Slough, Maidenhead, Newbury and Thatcham; improved footpath connecting Dorking's Deepdene and Town stations and lifts for Kingham's new footbridge (Network Rail funding dependent).

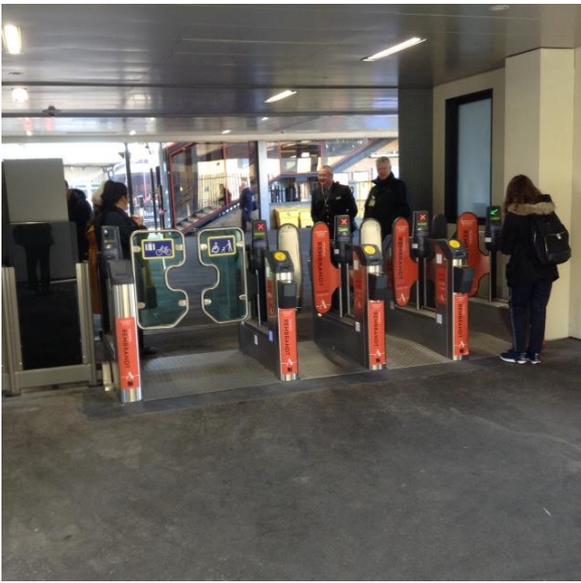
PHOTOS



Oxford Green Fair, Oxford Town Hall, 1st Dec 2019. *Richard Stow*



Railfuture Thames Valley's Dave Richardson on BBC Oxford news with Geraldine Peers on 2nd January 2020.



The new northern gateline at Oxford, looking into the Station on 20th January 2020. *Andrew McCallum*



EWR progress: works under way on the flyover at Bletchley on 19th February 2020. *Richard Stow*



Reading Green Park station site with works under way on the northbound platform (left) and southbound platform (right) on 25th February 2020. *Both: Andrew McCallum*



arrive	15 11	16 11	17 11	18 11	19 11	20 12	21 11	22 10	
Sundays									
depart	09 08	09 59	10 59	11 54	12 58	14 01	15 04	16 04	17 03
arrive	09 16	10 11	11 11	12 02	13 06	14 09	15 12	16 12	17 11
depart	18 04	19 05	20 04	21 05	21 46				
arrive	18 12	19 13	20 12	21 13	21 54				
CHELTENHAM SPA (CNM) 									
Mondays to Fridays									
depart	07 19	09 11	10 12	12 15	13 12	14 12	16 12	18 46	18 14
arrive	09 14	10 16	11 14	13 14	14 14	15 14	17 18	18 18	19 14
depart	18 51	19 18	21 12						
arrive	20 14	21 59	22 21						
Saturdays									
depart	07 15	09 13	10 12	12 14	14 14	16 13	18 12	17 12	19 13
arrive	09 14	10 14	11 14	13 14	15 14	16 14	17 14	18 18	20 14
depart	20 12	21 14							
arrive	21 14	22 53							
Sundays									
depart	09 19	10 09	11 09	13 10	15 09	17 10	19 09		
arrive	10 58	11 50	13 14	14 14	16 14	18 14	20 14		
a Change at Worcestershire Parkway									
b Change at Worcester Shrub Hill									
Produced using by Fabrik Communications Ltd									

Worcestershire Parkway station opened on 23rd February 2020, seen left, from the Birmingham bound platform with a GWR train on the high level Cotswold line. Right: Cheltenham features on the departures sheets at Kingham with an approx one hour journey time changing here. *Both: Richard Stow*

Edited by Andrew McCallum with contributions from Richard Stow, John Elvin.