

Minutes of the branch committee meeting held on Tuesday 23 March 2021, by Zoom, beginning at 18.05

PRESENT: Alison Cosgrove (AC), Dennis Fancett (DF), Patrick Rice (PR), Dave Shaw (DS), Keith Simpson (KS), Tony Walker (AW), Peter Walker (PJW) and Peter Wood (PRW)

Keith Simpson, in the chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

APOLOGIES: Malcolm Chainey and Ian Walker (IS)

NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING: The notes of the 19 January 2021 meeting had already been circulated and were agreed to be a correct record. DS asked for an extra copy for the website.

MATTERS ARISING:

- (i) **Update on branch website:** DS explained that the content on each of the campaign pages had grown too long for comfort and that he was proposing to rewrite them all using a common template with the aim of making them somewhat easier to read. He thanked Chris Page for his advice and help on both the content and layout of the pages. The detail on the pages would not be lost because he would add a separate page with a “timeline” setting out the various important events in the campaign. He had started with the A,B and T and Leamside pages and would be doing further work on these pages before moving on to the rest of the website. The wide support for the reopening of the (whole) of the Leamside line was welcome. DS was thanked for all his work.
- (ii) **Creation of branch Facebook page:** Progress awaited a meeting IW would hold post-pandemic.
- (iii) **LNER compulsory reservations:** LNER’s compulsory reservations policy was roundly criticised. It was reminiscent of Virgin West Coast policy but whilst it might work for long-distance journeys (which could be pre-planned) on busy trains it did not make sense for shorter, commuter-type journeys. It was agreed Railfuture needed a clear national policy on the issue.

BRANCH MATTERS:

- (i) **Next branch meeting (AGM):** Philip Meikle (NEXUS) has been invited to speak; his response is still awaited.
- (ii) **Meeting of branch chairs (by Zoom):** KS reported that Chris Page had recommended such a meeting take place and he was supportive.
- (iii) **A,B and T/Northumberland line:** DF reported that all was going ahead. The money so far made available was being used for land acquisition and planning applications had been made. More public money would be needed in October. He was not happy with

station design and their large car parks which suggested they would not cater properly for passengers without cars. AC asked about lifts. DF commented that there should be a standard platform design which guaranteed step-free access to trains. Metro and Merseyrail were held up as examples of good practice.

- (iv) **Date of next meeting and appointment of note taker:** Tuesday 18 May at 18.00 by Zoom. AW to be note taker.

RAIL IN THE NORTH EAST/LOCAL ISSUES:

- (i) **North East Joint Transport Committee transport plan:** DS reported there had been many changes to the original draft plan (trains to Crook and a Belford station had not been referred to before) some of which we had asked for. The question for the branch was “Where do we go from here?”. He thought it important we should be a “quasi-statutory” consultee for such purposes. We would need to ask questions about points (apparently) missed out – e.g. Ferryhill station and the reopening of the Derwent Valley line and should seek to promote rail-based alternatives. There was concern that DfT interest may be in reopening simply the southern end of the Leamside line whereas our view was that the whole line was needed.
Points made during the discussion included the need for a 4 track ECML from Northallerton to Newcastle and what this required, links with Northern Powerhouse rail, Weardale re-instatement and Metro access to Washington and north of Tyne. DS suggested he prepare a paper for the next meeting addressing our next steps was welcomed and agreed.
- (ii) **Northern Powerhouse Rail response:** The previously circulated document from KS was discussed, with general agreement. The ECML was near to capacity. Space was needed for local services on the main line which could be provided by more long-distance use of the Durham Coast route. PJW referred to the possible reopening of a Harrogate to Northallerton line. The document would be despatched to Chris Page with an amendment about local services.
- (iii) **North East Freight Partnership meeting (24.3.21):** It was likely that KS and AW would attend as well as Trevor Watson and Lee Davies. Greater clearances for bigger containers, especially across the Pennines with the increasing importance of Teesport, would be needed. AW said greater clarity about freight was needed in the North East transport plan.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS:

- (i) AW expressed thanks to DS for his work on the North East Transport plan and agreed we needed to be pro-active.
- (ii) DF asked for any TransPennine Express comments for a presentation he was due to make.
- (iii) KS argued for better cooperation between TOCs as DfT control of the railway system tightens.
- (iv) PR outlined the current pandemic/lockdown regulations.

The formal meeting ended at 19.50 with members continuing to discuss informally rail issues.