

1. **The Chair welcomed members** to the meeting.

2. **Minutes from the previous AGM (21 January 2012)** were **accepted** without amendment.

Proposed by Lionel White and Seconded by Bernard Kennedy.

3. Chair's Report (Bernard Lane)

FOSBR has been involved with a large amount of campaigning and other activities during 2012. This has been itemised in the '**Roundup of 2012**' and includes:

- Re-franchising process (currently on hold) – we have lobbied hard for important service provisions to be incorporated into the new franchise
- Greater Bristol Metro Campaign – many of FOSBR's aims have been incorporated into the Campaign (such as 30 minute provision on the Severn Beach line, opening of Portishead line for passenger traffic)
- We have been working with other local rail groups (such as Portishead Rail Group, Saltford Station Campaign) to improve local rail services
- After a lot of lobbying by FOSBR, a new evening service started last autumn – and we celebrated this at Temple Meads station on 17 September 2012
- However there are continual concerns about the non collection of fares on some trains – this reduces the revenue collected for the service and also lowers the passenger numbers (as estimated from ticket sales)
- We hold monthly Committee meetings
- There have been a considerable number of FOSBEER meetings – usually held in pubs along the Severn Beach line on Sundays. These have found to be a useful way of updating members on rail matters in a convivial atmosphere.

Other comments from the floor were:

- The Evening Post has been very supportive of FOSBR and pro-rail; we thank them and urge members to buy the paper whenever possible
- Eric Wildman does a great job as Newsletter editor – please can all members send him any articles, etc. which could be included in future newsletters.

4. Treasurer's Report (Tony Lloyd)

- 2012 was the first year since at least 2007 when our income exceeded running costs. The main reason was due to the increase in subscriptions in 2012 (the first since FOSBR started). Donations (paid as an addition to the subscription) have also slightly increased compared to 2011 – indicating that increased subs have not dampened financial support for FOSBR.
- Printing and postage costs (mainly for the newsletter) increased substantially in 2012
- We contributed about £200 to Transport for Greater Bristol Alliance towards (a) 'Stop the BR2 campaign', (b) a report 'Growing Bristol's Railways' and (c) Greater Western Franchise Forum, held on 18 May. These were all activities which were in line with FOSBR policy.
- The balance at the end of 2012 was +£743, up from 2011.
- 205 private members and 10 organisations gave money to FOSBR in 2012. 24 new members and 1 organisation joined us in 2012.

5. Cat Hobbs' talk:

Lessons from her campaigning in Bristol about 5 years ago (for improved rail services on the Severn Beach line):

- Communicate very well: making sure that everyone, including Councils, knew that things needed to be improved. This could mean giving negative publicity to Councils and other bodies who were doing nothing.
- Make politicians accountable: always take time to spot opportunities to make politicians more accountable for things that go wrong or are not being done. This involved such turning up at Council meetings to put forward our views, etc. However, at the same time, praise those who support the cause.
- People Power: try to get the public (especially the train users) on our side. Get them to protest when necessary, postcard campaigns, etc
- Staying Power: Basically the Council and others were trying to flummox her with technical details – to show why things could not be changed. However the answer to this was to be totally bloody minded and to keep hammering away.

Question from the floor: would the approach you used 5 years ago work today?

Answer: Yes but it would be more difficult with the current austerity period but we should push forward the strategic argument. (She thinks in fact there is a lot of money available should the political will be there)

Her new role is working for a charity that seeks to promote public organisations. The Government message seems to be that privatisation is always more efficient than public ownership and that outsourcing work to private consultants will give the public more choice. This is not true and she is using negative publicity to show that private organisations are not providing what is required. She is trying to shift the debate – away from the mantra that private is good and public is bad.

6. Resolution on Rebuilding Rail Report

Bernard Kennedy reminded us that once there was a plan to close the Severn Beach line but now, thanks to the efforts of FOSBR, it has become a successful line. This report, published June 2012, puts the case for a more public ownership of the railway network and he wants FOSBR to adopt the report. Rob Dixon noted the excessive costs arising from the franchising process and suggests that it needs to go back into public ownership; also at present no single body is in charge of the railways. The following resolution was proposed by Rob Dixon, seconded by Bernard Kennedy:

‘Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways adopt the report ‘Rebuilding Rail’ and support its conclusions. We agree that the financial cost of the current complex model of franchised railways is high in comparison with other models. We note that £1.2 billion could be saved by returning the railway to some form of public ownership. Contrary to the arguments of some, it would not cost money since franchises could be awarded when they expire to a publicly owned company. Money could then be reinvested in the railway. In accordance with the findings of the report, FOSBR will campaign for a publicly owned railway, with commissioning, funding and accountability for local services devolved from central to local government’.

The resolution was carried: 16 for, 1 against, 3 abstentions.

Other comments from the floor:

- NR does not have first hand knowledge of running trains – they should not take over the rail system
- The report suggests that a new body takes over both track and trains – after a minimum separation to satisfy EU law
- We should ask for feedback on the report from the powers that be – too often reports are just filed and forgotten

7. Resolution on rail alternatives to Bus Rapid Transport

Rob Dixon explained that the idea behind the resolution was to put pressure on the Council to carry on pushing for the Greater Bristol Metro scheme. After discussion the following amended resolution was put to the vote:

‘Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways welcome the statements by the Mayor of Bristol about the inadequacies of Bus Rapid Transit and his support for rail alternatives. We urge the Mayor, the City Council and its officers to pay attention to the rail alternatives identified by the South West Transport Development Community Interest Company in their document ‘Realising the Potential of Greater Bristol’s Railways’. Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways urge the Council to act to ensure ‘quick wins’ are achieved during the period before the rail franchise is renewed and that time and money are invested in achieving longer-term goals, and draw their attention to the ease with which services to Bedminster and Parson Street and stations promoted as interchanges with other modes of transport could be improved’.

The resolution was carried: 19 for, 1 against, 2 abstentions

8. Any Other Business

Thornbury Line

The line from Yate to the Quarry is no longer required for freight and it is thought that NR is able to take up a track 60 days after freight traffic ceases. In Ireland, disused lines have to left down for at least 10 years before dismantling – does it apply here? There is confusion about the state of play.

Action: We must approach Councillors to find out what we can do to keep the track intact; we should also write to NR to ask them not to dismantle the track until the situation is resolved.

Meeting closed at 9.15 p.m.