

What's on

Wednesday 8 October

10.00am Severn Beach Station for a 10 mile circular walk led by Bristol Ramblers

Saturday 11 October

10.40am at Lawrence Hill station. This 5/6 mile walk led by Bristol Ramblers goes over Troopers Hill with majestic views then along River Avon to Temple Meads Station and a pub lunch. Call 0117 9428637 for more information

Saturday 11 October FOSBR meeting 6 - 8pm

The transport, economic and environmental case for a publicly owned railway will be made by Bristol RMT Regional Secretary, Alex Gordon, and Bristol branch ASLEF secretary, Bernard Kennedy. This will be followed by plans to make a 10 minute film * showing the local network and the people who are making it happen. The meeting is open to the public.

To get to there, walk from Temple Meads Station down Approach Rd to metal rail on right, Great Western Staff Club, then down steps to the lobby.

The FOSBR Stall has been to Yatton, Redland Green, Easter Compton, Severn Beach, the East Routes Festival (on the disused part of Stapleton Road Station) and others in 2008 ... Rush details of suitable events in North Somerset and South Gloucestershire to Lionel White 0117 944 5687 or email patrickhulme@blueyonder.co.uk

Christmas events: Would anyone like to help arrange fun events for the festive season? Singing, mince pies or maybe decorate a local station, pending appropriate permission. If you have any ideas or would like to organise any events then please get in touch.

Also taking place in 2009 ...

Film Show hosted by Pilning and Severn Beach Parish Council: FOSBR is delighted that the Parish Council has agreed to hire their community hall for a film show. We feel a Saturday afternoon in the spring with a picnic and game of rounders followed by a film * in the evening would fun. We will have a FOSBR film, a DVD on the Severn Way Launch March 1998. Ken Loach's film "The Navigators" has also been suggested. As always, help with tracking down a projector at a reasonable cost would be welcome.

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Newsletter

Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways

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Regional Funding Allocation 2 - the South West autumn challenge

Government guidance on Regional Funding Allocation 2 now allows local decision makers to apply for capital funding for rail schemes. Informed by the Campaign for Better Transport (CfBT) nationally and encouraged locally by the CfBT (Jenny Raggett), Julie Boston made the permitted 3 minute presentation at the South West Regional Assembly (SWRA) on 4 September in Taunton arguing that they & the South West Regional Development Agency should include a cross-Bristol passenger route linking the Portishead and Henbury freight lines with frequent stops at local stations in this bid. The SWRA Transport Board had a meeting on rail on 23 July 2008 & the minutes might be on their website.

SWRA must submit advice to Ministers by the end of February 2009 on a transport strategy which meets the demands of transport, housing, skills, and economy. This demand needs the support of the 12 Assembly Members. As Cllr Dennis Brown shook his head throughout Julie's speech, we can guess that was a NO. The Transport Board consists of 4 Conservatives, 4 Lib Dems and 1 Labour; there is no hope without your help. No doubt a similar demand could be made from somewhere else in the South West to add to the case.

We urge individuals to contact councillors and political parties to ensure the Regional Assembly Transport Board members support an improved and expanded rail network in Greater Bristol. Similarly, we urge people to contact the West of England Partnership (WEP) to let them know the importance of local rail services and to ask that they urge the Regional Assembly to provide funding for rail projects. The email address for WEP is transport@westofengland.org.

FOSBR campaigner, Rob Dixon, said: "The Regional Assembly is about to decide the bid for the next round of funding (RFA2) and that it will be dominated yet again by road transport, with no mention of rail investment. We would like to ensure that, at the very least, there is discussion of the Portishead line and Bristol Parkway via Henbury [line] with a view to funding being sought. Since the government have already refused investment in the Portishead line, the regional funding allocation is the only way forward and without it there will be no rail re-openings, and possibly no investment at all in local rail."

Community Rail Conference - Plymouth

It is estimated by the West of England authorities that traffic congestion costs the local economy £350million per annum. Portishead's current population is expected to increase by almost 7,000 in the next five years. This highlights the urgency of the case for investment in rail services to Portishead.

At the meeting on 4 September, the SWRA finalised a letter to the Office of Rail Regulation in which they called for the Great Western Mainline Core High Speed Route programme to be fully implemented along with the enhancement of Reading station, a key bottleneck affecting long-distance trains between London and the South West.

Locally, the SWRA also called for schemes which would improve services into and across Bristol, which could facilitate a "Bristol Metro" service. Bristol City Council is celebrating the 27% increase in passengers on the Severn Beach line since May. FOSBR argue that this success supports the demand for investment in a passenger service on the Portishead line as a priority.

Montpelier Park

Just a stone's throw from Montpelier Station lays a pocket-sized green oasis called Montpelier Park. It can be found near the bottom of St Andrews Road, and has an attractive children's play area complete with slides and swings, a concrete games surface and lots of wildlife.

Talking of wildlife, in autumn you might see Robins, Wrens, Blue Tits, Jays and Chaffinches feeding busily in the trees. Also at this time of year, summer visitors like Willow Warblers and Chiffchaffs visit the park to feed before continuing their long journey to Africa where they spend the winter. Lots of Hawthorn bushes around the park are laden with red berries which the Blackbirds and Woodpigeons love to eat, and Horse Chestnut trees are absolutely weighed down with conkers! Speckled Wood butterflies bask in the dappled autumn sunshine and bees are out and about on warm days. You may find toadstools and other fungi at this time of year but don't eat them as they may be poisonous! Autumn is also the best time to see Garden Spiders sitting upside down in the middle of their webs, waiting for unfortunate insects to get caught. Grey Squirrels scamper up and down the trees and you may even be lucky enough to spot a Fox!

There are now plans to refurbish the park, adding more games and skateboarding features. So why not visit and explore the wildlife right here in the heart of the city?

- Des Bowring

FOSBR vice-chairman Joe Patrick was lucky enough to be able to visit Plymouth for the annual Community Rail Awards and Conference held on Friday 19 September.

It was encouraging to see in other parts of the country schemes such as rural station re-staffing, station gardens and interchanges being completed and being as a success.

In the local area, Nick Monks who is employed by First Great Western and maintains suburban Bristol stations won first in the Outstanding Railway Staff Contribution category. Also Sarah Collins, Partnership Officer for Severnside Community Rail Partnership came third in the Outstanding Community Rail Partnership Officer Contribution category.

Fare simplification

On Sunday 7 September the names of all single & return tickets across the country were changed in an attempt to simplify the fares structure. Travellers were promised that no fares would increase as a direct result of these changes however this has turned out not to be true, with some fares rising by significant amounts.

The hardest hit will be students and under 26s travelling on Railcards travelling before 10.00am. Under the old system, a Railcard holder travelling from Filton Abbey Wood to Taunton on the 07.47am service paid £12.50 for a 'Business Saver Return.' If the same journey were to be repeated now, it would cost £16.00 for an 'Anytime' ticket with the same validity.

In addition, the terms and conditions remain largely unchanged. An 'Off-peak' ticket for one route does not necessarily share the same restriction as one for another. For example; if travelling from Temple Meads to Filton Abbey Wood you can travel with an 'Off-peak' at any time after 9.30am. If, however you're travelling from Temple Meads to London Paddington, an 'Off-peak' is valid after 9.00am and is also not valid between 5.00pm and 6.45pm.

What was promised as a "simplification" has not turned out to be true. There are still multiple tickets for each journey and without using on-line journey planners or asking for advice from railway staff it will still be difficult to work out validity for each ticket.

