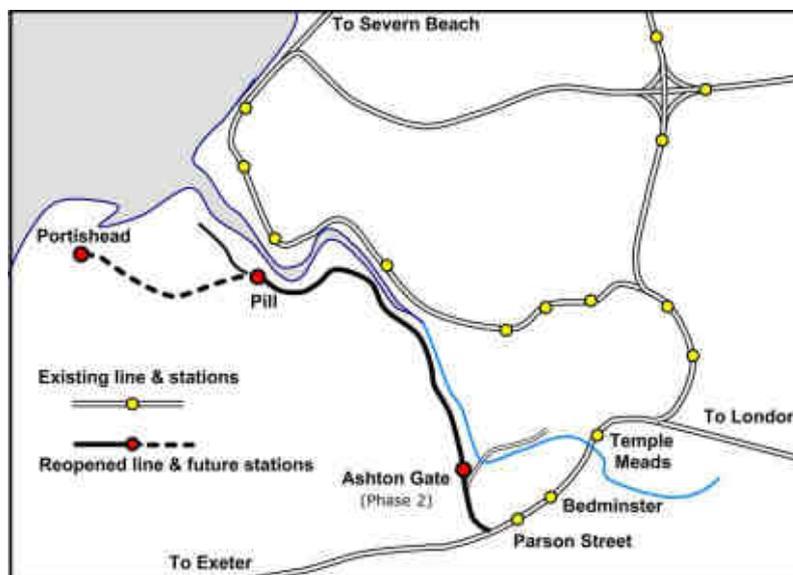


Reinstatement of a passenger service to Portishead - what could possibly go wrong?

There has been talk for many years about re-opening the old Portishead railway line, the 10 mile branch line from Parson Street Junction on the main Bristol to Exeter mainline to Portishead, which had been mothballed since closure in 1981.

Things started to really happen in the late 1990s when talks took place between Railtrack and the Bristol Port Company (BPC) about opening up the line for freight to the Royal Portbury Dock. Railtrack was then funded by BPC (via a Freight Facilities Grant) and DETR to re-furbish this 6.5 mile section of line, install a new signalling system and provide a long running-loop to pass trains in the Bedminster area. The work cost £21M, the work being completed by the end of 2001. This left some 3.3 miles (5.5 km) of mothballed track leading to Portishead.



Map is courtesy of Paul Gregory, Portishead Railway Group

A serious proposal for re-opening the Portishead line to passenger service came in the form of the MetroWest scheme in 2008. Phase 1 of this proposed scheme aimed to provide a re-opened Portishead line, with stations at Portishead and Pill - as well as a half-hourly local service for the Severn Beach line and for local stations on the Bath to Bristol line.

A feasibility study (GRIP stages 1 and 2) was carried out by Network Rail in 2009 to look at potential engineering problems, any conflicts with the freight-only service which operates along the first part of the Portishead route to Portbury Docks and the cost of re-opening a full passenger service. This came up with a figure of £58.2M (for the whole cost of Phase 1). The preliminary business case (2014) deduced that the scheme was affordable and deliverable by 2019. Virtually all of this budget was subsequently obtained from the City Deal and topped up from the local Councils and the West of England Local Enterprise Partnership's Local Growth Fund. **THINGS WERE LOOKING GOOD!**

Then Network Rail started carrying out a more detailed (GRIP 3) study of the Portishead line re-instatement. It became apparent that significantly more work was required to

enable the desired passenger service and some increase in the £58M cost was expected. However when the final report came out in March 2017, **the estimated cost had risen to a staggering £145-£175M - a three-fold increase!**

Just to add to the concerns about this cost increase: re-opening the disused section of the line from Pill to Portishead is classed as a 'Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project' and requires a 'Development Consent Order' (DCO) - this is a 6 stage statutory planning process done by central government which takes about 18 months to proceed. The application for this DCO will also include the upgrading of the existing freight line from Ashton Gate to Pill as it is an associated development. Apparently everything has to be in place (including the funding) before the Secretary of State will even look at a DCO. This means a further delay even after the revised scheme is agreed - of approximately two years - before work can proceed! *[Luckily the remaining works required at Parson Street Junction and at Bedminster, which are required to provide passenger train services all the way from Bristol Temple Meads to Portishead, will be undertaken by Network Rail under their permitted development rights].* So instead of opening in 2019, the timetable seems to be slipping further and further away - towards maybe 2024!!

Just after the story broke, there was a WEP Stakeholder Meeting on 10th March in the Brunel Boardroom (Isambard would have thrown a fit if he had been given such cost escalations when he built the Great Western line!). Representatives from FOSBR and Portishead Railway Group attended. We had not seen the Network Rail report but, at the meeting, were given the key points.....

Why have the costs escalated so much?

- The original Budget (£58m) was based only on a desk study – this was two-dimensional and did not take account of the topography of the Gorge! The subsequent GRIP 3 study was based on a much more detailed approach - with site visits, detailed technical work and consideration of the three-dimensional state of the Gorge. GRIP 3 cost around £7 million, compared to the £164,000 paid for GRIP 2.
- In order to meet the aspiration for a 2 train per hour service from Temple Meads to Portishead, it would be necessary for the trains to run at 50 mph along part of the Avon Gorge which at present has a 30 mph speed limit (also to run at 75 mph on the re-opened Pill to Portishead section). Apparently increasing the line speed from 30 to 50 mph has a large impact on the way the track should be laid; the camber would need to be changed and the tunnels re-modelled - apparently as the track is at present, at 50 mph, the trains would sway around too much and hit the tunnel walls! There are also other engineering works needed on the track, such as repairs to the retaining walls, especially between Clifton Down No.1 tunnel and Pill tunnel.
- Doing the necessary engineering works is complicated by the lack of highway access along a 5 km stretch of the Gorge, together with the environmental considerations (protected species such as Greater Crested Newts, Bats, Whitebeam trees, etc.).
- It is an active freight line and so Network Rail says the works can only be done at weekends. Because of this, they estimate that the necessary engineering works would need 50 (repeat 50!) weekend closures, with rails put down again at the end of the weekend to allow the freight to run in the week. However Terry Miller (of FOSBR) has

found that, looking at the freight paths that the Port actually used, so far in 2017 only about a quarter of available paths were used - so not as busy as one might have thought. But, as the Port has paid for the freight paths, some negotiation will need to be done to persuade the Port to allow longer closures.

- A passenger train frequency of 2 trains per hour plus the freight traffic on the level crossing at Ashton Vale crossing would cause unacceptable effects on rail safety, highway safety and traffic accessing the industrial estate. This particular problem has been known for some time and WEP had already consulted on the options for an alternative access from the A370 near the entrance to the Long Ashton Park and Ride site. If an hourly train is envisaged it may not be necessary to provide alternate road access into the Winterstoke Business Park.

Some thoughts on the above explanation for the escalated costs :

- ❖ The fact that a desk study does not get costs exactly right is understandable but the scale of the cost escalation suggests that somebody has not been doing their job correctly. Surely the problem with track architecture should have been flagged up during this initial desk study - even if accurate costs had not been given?
- ❖ And if the desk exercise is only expected to give an extremely rough estimate, why was it used as the basis for the budget requirement?
- ❖ There was a suggestion at the meeting that NR did not know, at the time of the desk exercise, what the service frequency would be - and presumably thought that the trains would not need to travel at greater than the existing speed limit - in other words that WEP had moved the goalposts.
- ❖ Ref. the Ashton Vale level crossing - yes, having 2 passenger trains per hour along the line will mean that the crossing will be closed for significantly more time. But the access to the industrial estate on to Winterstoke Road has been poor for some time now and as time goes (even without the new passenger service) traffic onto the estate is likely to increase with new developments. It begs the question - why should the cost of providing an alternative access fall solely on the MetroWest rail scheme, rather than with some input from the owners of the industrial estate? Portishead Railway Group have also suggested that it is also possible that Network Rail's Level Crossing Closure Fund could finance the closure of the level crossing at Ashton Vale Trading Estate, or at least make a contribution.

A staged approach?:

The new cost of some £145M-£175M had obviously blown the original Portishead re-opening scheme out of the water - that sort of money will simply not be available. However all is not lost! We were told that MetroWest has proposed alternative, **staged approach** to MetroWest Phase 1:

- A. Upgrading Keynsham and Oldfield Park and the Severn Beach line stations to a half-hourly service (although hourly from Avonmouth to Severn Beach).
- B. Providing an "initial frequency" service to Portishead – probably hourly, though we think that a 40 minute service could be delivered for the same track speeds.
- C. Providing a half hourly service to Portishead at a later date.

This was agreed at a meeting of the West of England Joint Transport Board on 17 March.

What the proposed staged approach means:

- ❖ The non-Portishead line part of Phase 1 should be implemented as soon as possible (Stage A). *The costs for this are not affected by the NR GRIP 3 report and are well within budget. Also the works required (Avonmouth signalling for the Severn Beach line frequency upgrade and the Bathampton turn back for the Bristol to Bath upgrade) do not require a DCO and can be done under a Permitted Development Order - thus no delay due to lengthy statutory consultations.*
- ❖ Stage B is a 'watered down' version of the original aspiration - i.e. by keeping to the existing maximum speed of 30 mph in parts of the Avon Gorge, then it should still be possible to have one train per hour each way. *We asked if keeping to 30 mph through the Gorge would substantially cut the works required and so reduce costs towards the original estimate. Oh no, we were told - because of the current poor state of the track, modern safety standards for passengers would still need some works to be done on the track and structures. Of course, there is a question here: was the refurbishment for the freight line done to a proper standard or is MetroWest paying for work that should have been done in 2001?*
- ❖ Stage C is when, and if, more money becomes available - in which case the line could be re-furbished up to the necessary speed (including 50 mph in the Gorge) for a half hourly service. *The problem here is that once a lower frequency service is up and running, will the necessary upgrade to a half hour frequency ever happen? This is why we are pressing for Network Rail to consider a 40-minute service from the start, which would mean passing loops and dealing with the Winterstoke industrial estate access now.*

Obviously a lot more work is need to sort out all these problems and the various options were discussed at a meeting of the WEP Joint Transport Board on 17th March. Portishead Railway Group put forward a strong statement about all of this - which can be seen on their website www.portisheadrailwaygroup.org. FOSBR has also put out a press release on 9th March - see our website, and Portishead Town Council expressed their anger and determination that the long-promised half-hour service should be delivered.

Our view is that:

- The Network Rail GRIP 3 report needs to be looked at in detail and should not necessarily be taken at face value. One question - because of the concerns over the original, lamentable NR 'feasibility study', should we have any faith in the new GRIP 3 report. Should another consultancy be brought in to assess the scheme? The problem is that a third party report would still need to be validated by Network Rail - so extra costs with not necessarily any differences in the end result.
- We are concerned that the proposers of the Portishead re-opening (N. Somerset Council) are just not up to scratch as regards rail matters. It seems that they were working just to a local agenda as opposed to working for the whole West Of England Partnership. This has led to the situation we now find ourselves in.

- We think that the proposed 3 stage plan is reasonable, considering the cost issues that have recently arisen.
- However we would like to see any service from Portishead to Bristol operated by two train sets (with proposed double track at Ashton Gate and Pill station) as this would ensure that the projected service would be reliable. We also request that the morning commuter service should have adequate number of carriages - because the less frequent service will inevitably have more passengers. Our experience of the Severn Beach line suggests that an unreliable hourly service, such as pre-2008 as provided by only one train, will have a poor ridership. **High reliability should be the key target.**
- Our revised statement to Bristol City Council the following Tuesday suggested that the Stage B option should allow a 40 or 45 minute frequency service, or at the least that two train sets could be sent down to Portishead overnight. This would allow 2 trains to set off from Portishead within the prime early morning commute time to Bristol.
- We should still aspire to a half hourly service and hope that ridership of an initial, less frequent service will justify an eventual upgrading of the line for this.



Happily there is still support for the scheme from Network Rail and from Chris Grayling, Secretary of State for Transport, who stated that 'I have asked my officials to continue working with all parties to find a workable resolution to this issue.' We are also pleased to see a press release from North Somerset Council (2nd May 2017) confirming that the Portishead line re-opening remains a priority for the council and that, in addition to the currently approved budget of £1m, some £1.6M extra funding (from a Local Growth Fund grant) has been put aside to enable technical work on the scheme to progress.

We can only hope that a way forward can be found - quickly. This line re-opening must go forward, for the sake not only of the good citizens of Portishead, Easton-in-Gordano and Pill - but also for the public's perception of rail schemes ever becoming a reality in our area.

The last Passenger Train from Posset?

Michael Farr

Was this the last passenger train to leave Portishead, on 7th October 1977? A party from Gordano School chartered the 3 car d.m.u. to go to Bath and my parents (living at Posset) were on hand to photograph it. They even got hold of the special ticket for my collection.



Photo and text sent by Michael Farr who now lives in Cornwall but still is a FOSBR supporter

By the way, Posset is an old local name for Portishead.

Avonmouth Station Improvements

There have been some changes at Avonmouth Station, under a funding package put together by the Severnside Community Rail Partnership. Platform 1 (used by trains travelling towards Severn Beach) used to have an old Victorian station building which, despite a campaign by FOSBR and others, was pulled down in summer 2015. This left only a small bus stop-type waiting room plus a covered cycle parking store (plus a pile of bricks!). The covered cycle store has been removed and so has the old blue painted 'bus shelter'. Now this platform 1 has a new fit-for-purpose shelter located nearer the level crossing than the previous one - in fact on the position of the old station building. Coupled with this there is new fencing at the back of the platform, together with new planters. It is also hoped to install CCTV.



Get a GRIP

You will have seen quite a few references to the GRIP process, especially in relation to the re-opening of Portishead line to passenger service. But what is it?

GRIP stands for **Governance for Railway Investment Projects** and is the process that Network Rail uses to manage developments to enhance or renew Britain's rail network, such a station and line openings/ re-openings. Rail projects can be funded, procured and delivered in several ways but Network Rail, as rail infrastructure manager, must still ensure that all schemes are compatible and integrated with existing railway operations. The Portishead line re-opening is an example of a Third Party project (because it is proposed by the West of England Partnership rather than by Network Rail or DfT) that has to be overseen by Network Rail.

Their GRIP procedure helps them to manage how rail projects are accomplished; it is designed to minimise and mitigate the risks associated with such projects and help ensure that any resources are used sensibly. The EIGHT stages developed by Network Rail are:

1. **Output Definition** – establishes the scope of investment and potentially asset renewal.
2. **Feasibility** – defines the investment goals and identifies constraints to ensure that they can be achieved both economically and strategically.
3. **Option Selection** – assesses potential options and selects the most appropriate one to deliver stakeholders' requirements.
4. **Single Option Development** – the implementation of the option selected during the third step.
5. **Detailed Design** – the creation of a detailed engineering plan that provides definitive costs, times, resources and risk assessments.
6. **Construction Test & Commission** – the project will be completed to the agreed specifications and testing will commence in order to confirm that everything is operating within the design brief. *(In terms of the Portishead line, construction starts at this stage).*
7. **Scheme Handback** – the transfer of asset responsibility from the contractor to the operators.
8. **Project Closeout** – contracts are settled while contingencies and warranties are put into place before an assessment of the benefits is finally carried out.

Whereas most people understand in general terms what GRIP is, very few have actually read it. Perhaps that's not too surprising since GRIP consists of some seven manuals and 47 documents, in all some 1750 pages! It may be a useful tool for managing projects but does seem rather inflexible. What projects should come under GRIP? Obviously large infrastructure projects such as Crossrail and, in our own backyard, the Portishead railway re-opening. But what about the replacement of a passenger footbridge at Pilning - is it really necessary to go through all this very costly procedure for such a small project?

Severn Beach Line Fare Increases

Following a meeting on 13th January, the West of England's Joint Transport Board plus Severnside Community Rail Partnership (SCR) sent a formal request to the Secretary of State to direct Great Western Railway to implement the re-pricing of fares on the Severn Beach Line linked to the planned introduction of Class 165/6 rolling stock in autumn 2017, as shown below:

Proposal to increase Severn Beach Line Fares						
Journey		Current Fare		Proposed Fare		
		All Day (£)	Equivalent Price per day*	All Day (£)	Change (£ / %)	Equivalent Price per day*
Single	short hop	-	-	2.00	0 / 0%	-
	1 Zone	1.50	-	2.00	0.50 / 33%	-
	2 Zone	2.00	-	3.00	1.00 / 50%	-
Return	1 Zone	2.00	-	3.00	1.00 / 50%	-
	2 Zone	3.00	-	4.00	1.00 / 33%	-
7 day season	1 Zone	6.00	1.20	10.00	4.00 / 67%	2.00
	2 Zone	9.00	1.80	15.00	6.00 / 67%	3.00
Monthly season	1 Zone	23.10	1.15	36.00	12.90 / 56%	1.80
	2 Zone	34.60	1.73	48.00	13.40 / 39%	2.40
Annual Season	1 Zone	240.00	1.00	380.00	140.00 / 58%	1.58
	2 Zone	360.00	1.50	500.00	140.00 / 39%	2.08

**assumed use: 5 days per 7 day pass, 20 days per monthly season, 240 days per annual season.*

The main points of the fare increases are:

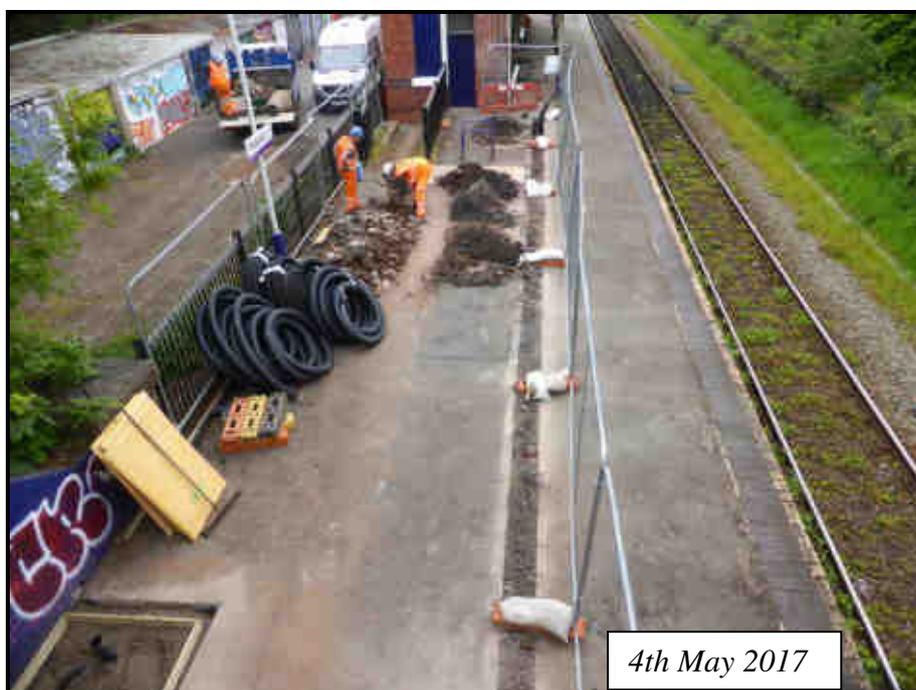
- one zone return – will rise from £2 to £3 and two zones return from £3 to £4.
- two zone “short hop” – £2. This is a new fare for short (up to 3 stops) journeys that just happen to cross over the zone 1/ zone 2 boundary at Clifton Down.
- To encourage customers to purchase monthly or longer period season tickets, the weekly tickets will see the highest percentage increase.
- As part of the proposals there would be a temporary freeze on the price for monthly and longer period season tickets at the time of increasing other fares on this line. These season ticket prices would subsequently be increased to the level shown in the table at a later date.

Fares on the Seven Beach line have not changed since 2007 and are amongst the lowest fares in the country. GWR wants to bring them more into line with other fares in the south west and at the same time increase the collection of fares (revenue protection has always been a contentious issue). Thus the fare changes aim to get people to move towards longer season tickets.

It is recognised that fare increases will be more palatable if passengers can see some improvements and so the fare increases will be timed to coincide with the introduction of the cascaded Class 165/166 trains in the autumn - which are faster and more attractive than the existing train stock. GWR plans to introduce a smartcard pilot scheme on the Severn Beach Line in September 2017 and this will also be used to promote discount travel. The scheme will see new ticket validators at all Severn Beach Line stations, a new ticket vending machine at Clifton Down and smartcard reading gateways at Bristol Temple Meads.

The Bristol representative on the Joint Transport Board, Mark Bradshaw, proposed an amendment to the Joint Transport Board to request that these fare increases should be staged, but this amendment was rejected. Since then, we understand that Mark Bradshaw asked GWR to respond to his proposal, and we have been in correspondence with GWR to suggest various mitigations to this drastic, though arguably overdue, fare increase. We have yet to hear back from GWR and would welcome suggestions from you, dear readers, even if to say that the proposed fare increases are reasonable and affordable for you!

On the subject of fare paying: at our AGM we were also told by Keith Walton (SCRIP) of a new ticketing system for pupils at Cotham school. On a trial basis, children using the train will be able to purchase, through the School, a discounted photo ticket attached to a lanyard. This will enable those who participate in the scheme, which is linked to a good behaviour code, to be easily identified on the train. It will thus enable train conductors to concentrate on collecting fares from other passengers, knowing that the children have pre-paid. *Ed: This is a very welcome initiative.*



Meanwhile progress is being made with smart the ticketing scheme. The picture below shows the installation of ducting and cabling for the smart ticket validators at Redland Station.

These will be rolled out on all Severn Beach line stations in the near future - with the validators themselves being installed just before the scheme is meant to start in the autumn.

Severn Beach line - Platform shortening

The class 165/166 Turbo diesel trains, that are going to be 'cascaded' from Thames Valley for use on the Severn Beach and other local lines around Bristol, are longer and slightly wider than the existing Class 150 Sprinter units. Thus to accommodate the new trains at the stations, either a bit of the platform edges needs to be shaved off and/or the track slewed slightly to one side.

In January we heard that Network Rail (NR) had shortened the platform at Severn Beach station (by demolishing part of it) to restrict it to 3 car trains only. There were also rumours that they intended the same at Avonmouth and Sea Mills stations - presumably to save costs as it is probably easier/ cheaper to maintain a smaller station, although it is MetroWest's clear policy that platforms on local stations should be able to handle 5 coach trains - either a 3+2 coach 165 train or a 5 coach Intercity Express train.

Various things need to be considered if NR is seriously considering shortening platforms on the Severn Beach line:

- Could there be 3 car platforms on the Severn Beach line but 5 car platforms on other stations? *Not practical because trains have to work over various routes as part of MetroWest - to maximise through trains and minimise the amount of rolling stock required). So, if there were 3 coach platforms on one route (such as the SB line), then all local routes would also be restricted to 3 coaches.*
- Could there be selective door opening on 5 coach trains? *Yes but the West of England Partnership does not favour this - it is inconvenient for passengers.*
- What would happen to the excess platform on the Severn Beach line stations. Would they be safeguarded for future use if required - or would they be sold off to developers?
- Once a 3 car length had been modernised and ready for use, would it ever be possible to bring mothballed sections of platform back into use at a later date. Or would it need a GRIP procedure to justify it - and end up being too expensive?

It seems that NR got the message that, by not consulting over the shortening of the Severn Beach platform, they have caused a major local upset. They are now reviewing what is needed on each station (in the whole area, not just the SB line) to clear platforms for 165/6 operation - and will be producing proposals for each station, probably by June. As regards the Severn Beach line, NR have now agreed the following:

- From St Andrews Road to Montpellier inclusive: all can physically accommodate 5 coach trains but, because of the absence of lighting along the whole platform and some signalling issues, the platforms are only authorised to take 3 coaches. There will be no barriers between the live and mothballed parts of the platform. The only exception is at Avonmouth where there is an anti-social behaviour problem at the Bristol end of the platforms - which will be fenced off as a safety measure.
- Severn Beach station: the now unused part of the platform will not be restored although discussions have been held with South Gloucestershire Council about this.
- Lawrence Hill & Stapleton Road: the usable platform will cater for 5 coach trains - which other services will also be using.

North Filton station location

This station is due to be re-opened as part of MetroWest Phase 2 - on its original site. The plan was that it would serve the large, new development planned for the now redundant Filton airfield. As the station is close to the A38, it would also enable a park and ride to be built there - for commuters driving from the north and wishing to get into Bristol quickly by train.

There was a meeting about the new development on Thursday 6 April 2017 at Filton Airfield, hosted by the site developers, YTL Land and Property UK Ltd. It was apparent that they wish to move the station location more to the west of its original site. It was explained that this would be more central to the development area and thus accessible/ convenient for a larger number of people. It would also make the station adjacent to the MetroBus stop and this interchange would encourage people to travel by rail or bus to Bristol rather than using the car.

There is some merit in this argument but it still leaves the problem that there would be no park and ride facility for commuters on the A38. Although Bristol Parkway (designated as a Park and Ride) is reasonably close, road access from the A38 or M32 is not great. Neither Patchway Station nor Filton Abbey Wood have room for car parking and the proposed Henbury Station is envisaged as a "suburban rail station" with minimal parking - to encourage residents to walk to the station rather than get in their cars at all. Although Councillor Mark Weston has persuaded Clifton Rugby Club to offer their car park for Henbury Station, this would mean having Henbury Station at the West site, further away from the Cribbs Patchway New Neighbourhood Scheme, rather than the East location that FOSBR supported in our submission to the Phase 2 consultation.

What is needed is a master plan for North Bristol, with several Park and Ride locations at the access points from the North. For example, if we can persuade the West of England Combined Authority to include Pilning in their Joint Spatial Plan funded by the devolution deal, with a road link to the new M49 junction, then there could be a large Park and Ride at Pilning for cars coming from outside Bristol - to prevent cars from getting inside the M5 boundary. FOSBR will be proposing this to the new Combined Authority when it first meets, as well as promoting other stations not considered in the Joint Spatial Plan.

Please take a look at our FOSBR Aims and Map (at the end of this newsletter and also in our 'Manifesto' on our website) and give us your comments!

FOSBR 2017 Membership Subscriptions

Thanks to all of you who have renewed your membership for this year. Your subscriptions and donations are much appreciated and are vital for our campaign to improve local rail services. A 2017 membership card is enclosed.

To those of you who have not yet renewed your membership, it is not too late and we would be very happy to receive your subscriptions. In case you have lost the membership renewal form that was sent out in January, another one is enclosed with this newsletter.

Best wishes, Tony Lloyd (FOSBR Membership Secretary)

Parson Street - a station with a history and big future

Malcolm Brammar & Jackie Smith, Friends of Parson St Railway Station (FoPSRS)

There has been a station at Parson Street in south Bristol for almost nine decades. Established in 1927 to serve the needs of the expanding suburbs of Bedminster and beyond, later this summer the station will celebrate its 90th anniversary.

Although the latest published figures about local station usage have shown a remarkable increase in journeys to and from Parson Street Station, over 126,000 in a year, making it south Bristol's most popular, the actual condition of the station and the rail services from it have been less than impressive.

Five months ago, a group of people from the area near the station formed the Friends of Parson Street Railway Station (FoPSRS) with the intention of working with GWR, Network Rail, Severnside Community Rail Partnership and others to improve the condition of the station and platform experience. Also lobbying for a more integrated approach to local and national rail services from the station as well as other modes of adjacent public transport like bus, Metrobus and Airport Flyer services.

Malcolm Brammar, Chair of FoPSRS adds, "The Group also has a view that our station should be regarded and promoted as a 'gateway' to some of the important venues and events which happen in our part of Bristol".



One of the most significant is the newly enlarged Ashton Gate Stadium and discussions have already been held between FoPSRS, GWR and Bristol Sport about how the station could play an increasingly important role in events held there.

It's no surprise that GWR decided to stop more trains at Parson Street Station on a Sunday earlier this month to cater for football supporters attending the final home league game of the season.

There's much to do to improve the 'look and feel' of the station to encourage more people to use it. Some improvements have already occurred - the steps have been repaired, new handrails installed and yellow warning lines painted on the platforms.

The Group also hope that a station re-paint, plus further improvements to the platforms and shelters might also be in place in time for the 90th celebration at the end of August

this year. There are even plans for a morning commuter coffee stop at the refurbished station. The relationship with Bristol Sport will add more 'gloss' but the involvement of the community, particularly the local Primary School (Parson Street Primary), will ensure that local connections remains a key element to the success of the Group.



In addition, talks are on-going with Bristol City Council officers about joint signage of train and bus services in the Parson Street area to create what could be the city's first suburban inter-modal transport hub.



"We may have discovered our Station has a long history to be celebrated this summer, but it's the future we're focusing on and how our local station can play an increasing role in the lives of people who live in south Bristol in the 21st century" adds the FoPSRS chair Malcolm Brammar.

At present they have Facebook (with up to 101 members), email (FoPSRS@mail.com) and Twitter (@FoPSRS) - and a website may follow. All meeting dates are posted on Facebook and on the Friends noticeboard at the station. Membership is open to anyone - just turn up at a meeting or email/Facebook and ask to be added to the circulation list.

Parson Street Railway Station is Bristol's gateway to the world.

Eric Wildman (Eric used to be editor of the FOSBR newsletter but now resides in Madrid, although he still takes a keen interest in the Bristol local railways)

Parson Street Railway Station has enjoyed tigerish rates of passenger growth in recent years, wallowing at 3000 travellers a year in the early 00's to nearly 130,000 now according to official figures - probably more in reality. It has gained its own fan club in the form of a Facebook group (Friends of Parson Street Railway Station) and it is the station of choice for Bristol City football fans (until Ashton Gate is reopened).

But Parson Street also has the potential to be Bristol's access point of choice for international travellers. It may not be the closest railway station to Bristol Airport, that accolade going to Nailsea & Backwell, but the A1 Bristol Flyer Airport bus passes by nearly every 10 minutes - allowing people wanting to go to the airport an obvious means to avoid city centre traffic. You also get a small reduction in the fare when joining the bus at West Street/ Parson Street compared to going from the City Centre.

By promoting Parson Street as a transport interchange, there would be a virtuous circle of increasing patronage leading to the introduction of more services - this creating more connections and thus more rail users. It is ready to exploit the extra capacity to be made available for local trains by the four-tracking of Filton Bank and a more convenient way into Bristol - uniting the city and beyond.

Will the lines to Bristol ever be electrified?

As discussed in the previous newsletter (No. 93), last November it was announced that electrification of Filton Bank (Bristol Parkway to Temple Meads) and the line west of Thingley Junction (Bath Spa to Temple Meads) would be 'deferred'. This meant that, instead of being completed as planned in 2018, electrification of lines to Bristol would not happen until well past 2019 - if ever. This caused a lot of anger as well as gloom and despondency - and people were asking why the South West, especially the greater Bristol area, was always losing out on rail investment.

However in January of this year, some Railfuture members attended a talk given to Railway Correspondence & Travel Society, Cheltenham branch by **Jill Poyton**, Senior Sponsor for the Great Western Electrification Project (GWEP). She is an engineer with Network Rail (NR) who has worked in the railway industry for 16 years and has special responsibility for sections of routes affected by the recent deferral of electrification to Bristol. She explained the reasons behind that decision but also the factors contributing to the inflated costs of the scheme.

In contrast to some recent articles in the railway press talking down the prospect of further electrification, Jill Poyton has great faith in the benefits of electric traction - including lower track maintenance costs and its contribution to a cleaner environment. She explained that GWEP involves higher technical standards than on the East Coast Main Line electrification, which was completed in 1991 and has suffered frequent de-wirements. The Overhead Line Equipment (OLE) being installed

for the GW lines has been designed to cope with much higher tensions than was the case with the East Coast Main Line electrification.

Reasons for cost escalation of the Great Western Electrification Project (GWEP):

- All holes for the Overhead Line Equipment (OLE) masts in the GWEP have had to be hand dug down to the first metre to detect the presence of buried cables which were a legacy of a BR decision to dispense with troughing by the lineside. OLE designs have had to take account of the cables discovered during digging, including some belonging to third parties.
- The estimates for operating the High Output Plant System (HOPS) train, designed to install OLE while trains were still running on adjacent tracks, had proved too low.
- The true cost of rebuilding road bridges crossing the line had not been factored in. Work is required not only on the bridges but on their road approaches, in order to comply with highway regulations concerning visibility and gradients. 108 overbridges between Maidenhead and Cardiff were involved.
- Additionally 107 sets of pylon cables crossing the railway were having to be raised.

So why has electrification to Bristol been deferred ?

She explained that several interconnected infrastructure projects in the Bristol area needed to be completed before electric train services could start. “Electrification (to Bath and Bristol Temple Meads) has been deferred to release resources for BASRE, Filton Bank and Bristol East Junction remodelling,” she said.

Bristol Area Signalling Renewal (BASRE) would be essential because the existing electronic signals, dating from the early 1970s, were not immunised against induced currents from electric trains. Bristol signal box would be closed and its work transferred to the Thames Valley Signalling Centre at Didcot. The first phase of this work would involve re-signalling Bristol Parkway to Wootton Bassett Junction in February.

The full IEP timetable could not work without four tracking of Filton Bank, due for completion in December 2018.

Another factor was that Network Rail was now effectively a public sector body subject to Government spending limits and could not just raise extra private capital as it wished. Its spending plans were allocated to five-year Control Periods but the routes affected by the deferral would, she said, be electrified by March 2024.

Ed: This is a précised version of the report of the meeting, written by **Nigel Bray** (Secretary of Railfuture, Severnside Branch). The suggestion that there were good operational reasons for the deferment, rather than just cost cutting, gives us some hope that electrification may come to Bristol during the next Control Period (CP 6, from 2019-2024).

A Trip on the Darjeeling Railway, October 2015

Teresa Staniszewska

Andrew loved travelling and we had been planning a trip to Northern India (me for the tea, him for the Darjeeling Railway). This finally came to fruition last October when we, plus a dear friend from London, set out for Delhi, where we were treated to some amazing sights - and traffic! We then travelled to Agra (by road, as there were no suitable train scheduled) to see the truly magnificent Taj Mahal and other tombs and palaces - which did not disappoint in any shape or form.

We then flew to Bagdogra in order to transfer by road (again not for the faint-hearted) to the Glenburn Tea Estate, about a thousand feet below Darjeeling where we were to stay for five days or so. This was a stunning place to stay (and learn all about tea of course). The highlight of all this, naturally, was to be a trip on the gorgeous Darjeeling Railway.



We arrived on the pre-booked day, duly excited in goodtime for catching the train. We were met by the news that the train we were due to go on had been 'cancelled', due to 'engine breakdown'. You can imagine Andrew's face (and ours). It very much looked as though it was going to come to nothing. But, undeterred, and obviously knowing a thing or two in the way of local methods, our lovely driver found out that there was another train due out after about an hour and a half onto which he booked us.

We potted about Darjeeling, poking about courtyards, market stalls and temples, generally enjoying the views and then turned up for the trip, only to find that the very same little engine and carriages which had 'broken down due to age', were suddenly and, seemingly without any necessary repair, good to go. We strongly suspected that the reason they had cancelled the trip was because there simply weren't enough passengers to make the journey worthwhile.

Well, on we got, the whistle blew and we were off! The comfortable carriages were an excellent way of viewing the surrounding, at times coming so close to newbuilds that one could have had a very close shave indeed. Of course, the train meandered all over the road, with people, cars, cattle, dogs, cyclists and all sorts dodging in front of us. No-one seemed nervous about being so close to all that machinery at all.

We bucketed along to the Batasia Loop, where we were able to get out to admire the views and the serene and superb Ghurka Monument. Again, the whistle blew and off we went to Ghum, which was where the journey was to terminate as the original line to Shiliguri was closed due to 'landslides'. This was, we suspect, merely a way of saying that the line further on was in such dire condition that it was no longer safe. At Ghum there was a little railway museum and more of the charming, throw-back station architecture prevalent on the line.

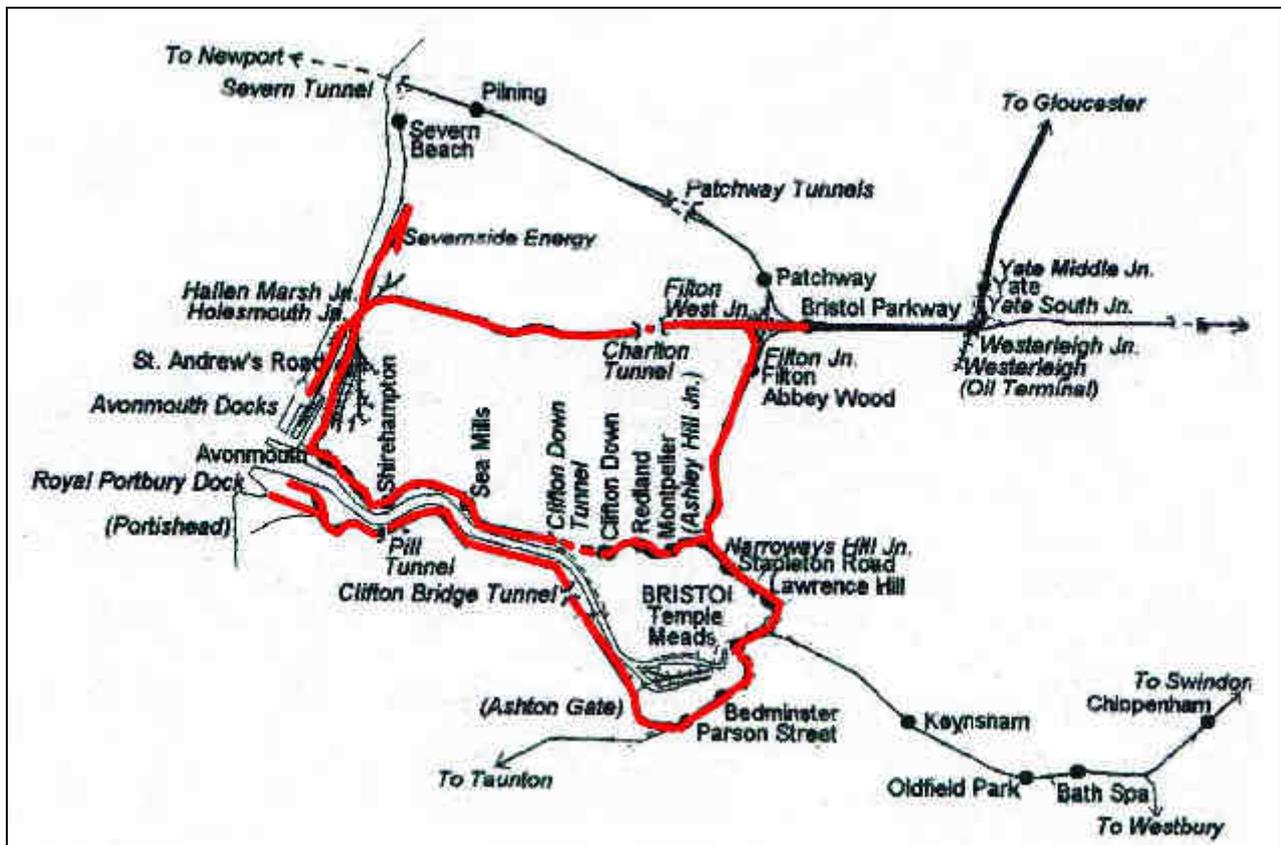
Needless to say, we had a wonderful time, but were left with a definite feeling that the line was being seriously neglected. Where, in the UK, we would generally speaking eat our lunches off the gleaming paintwork of the engines so lovingly restored, in contrast the Darjeeling Railway stock and infrastructure was in dire straits indeed. There was peeling paintwork and rust visible, despite the obvious dedication (and some amazingly huge spanners and hammers) of the engineering staff. Everything looked so down-at-heel (however, the ladies' toilet was a force of nature!). There is no serious funding from either state or central government, despite the fact that this is a UNESCO site. We really couldn't see any reliable future for the Little Train unless Central/State Government wakes up to the amazing tourist potential of the line and divers a little money from, say, its space programme maybe, in order to properly maintain, if not completely restore, the Darjeeling Railway to what is, after all, a world famous destination. Our fear was that it would be left to decay amidst ever more frequent resorts to the 'landslide' excuse, to such a parlous extent that, even taking into account India's lackadaisical approach to health and safety, it has to be shut down on safety grounds. That said, if anyone is planning to visit one of India's little railways, I say 'GO', but stay as flexible as possible and enjoy this stunning country and its lovely people.

Ed: Andrew Staniszewska, a keen supporter of FOSBR, was a railway enthusiast until sadly he died in 2015. His widow sent us this narrative from one of their joint journeys together.

Bristol Docker

David Collier

Tour companies periodically run a charter train around the freight lines in Bristol for the entertainment of railway enthusiasts. On Saturday 4th March 2017, Pathfinder Tours ran the '**Bristol Docker**' along a route that took in freight-only track leading to local dock sidings. The train departed Didcot Parkway at 06.30 and reached Bristol Parkway via Banbury, Birmingham and Cheltenham. We joined the train at Bristol Parkway at the more civilized hour of 10.45. The train was powered by two class 66 locos in "top and tail" mode – the convoluted route involved many reversals of direction!



Bristol Docker Route Map, courtesy of pathfindertours.co.uk. David's route shown in bolder lines

From Bristol Parkway we travelled east to west across the Filton Diamond, giving us a view of the new Hitachi depot where the new IEP electric trains will be maintained. The **freight-only Henbury Loop** section to Hallen Marsh provided a smooth ride, the track and ballast looking as if they had been recently re-laid. It was easy to identify the overgrown platforms of the closed stations at North Filton, Henbury and Chittening, less easy to pick out Charlton. The old station site at Hallen can be seen from the train as much of the infrastructure still remains. North Filton and Henbury are scheduled to re-open as part of MetroWest Phase 2, but not at the original station sites. The line will be passengerised as a spur, only as far as Henbury.

From Holesmouth Junction we inched slowly into the **Avonmouth Oil siding**, resting a while just inside the dock gates. We then reversed back around the Henbury Loop via the Filton Chord of the diamond joining the **Filton Bank** mainline at the old Filton station (those platforms being slightly north of Filton Abbey Wood). The weedy platforms of historic Horfield and Ashley Hill stations are still visible amongst the engineering works that stretch all the way along Filton Bank as double track is again four-tracked. Ashley Hill is scheduled to re-open on the original site as part of MetroWest Phase 2.

After Stapleton Road and Lawrence Hill, we passed straight through Temple Meads, Bedminster and at Parson Street Junction took the **freight-only Portbury line** through the Avon Gorge under the Clifton Suspension bridge. Along this line it was easy to spot the old platforms of Ashton Gate and Pill. Pill is scheduled to re-open at the original site as part of MetroWest Phase 1. Ashton Gate is not included in Phase 1 and is subject to a separate business case.

From Portbury Dock Junction, new track will be laid for the new passenger route to Portishead (MetroWest Phase 1). We passed under the M5 and through the dock gates into the **Portbury Cargo Terminal** where we were surrounded by a sea of cars, amongst them many MGs, Fiats and Alfa Romeos. Our conductor told us that the port would not normally be loading vehicles at the weekend but due to "17" car registration starting in March a train load of white vans was ready to depart. We waited an hour in the Cargo Terminal whilst our tanks were refilled from a fire bowser. Plenty of time to enjoy cider and beer from the buffet car and browse the on-board book stall!

After shuffling back and forth through a separate short tunnel, we arrived in the **Portbury Coal Terminal**, a large area which is also used for car storage, coal imports having dropped dramatically. It is estimated that coal powered electricity generation dropped by 66% in 2016 from 2015 levels. The 8 remaining coal-fired power stations are likely to close by 2025 as they will be unable to meet new carbon emissions standards.

The return journey to Bristol Temple Meads via the Avon Gorge and Parson Street offered a good view of the new Winterstoke Road skew bridge which will allow the new MetroBus route to pass over the railway line. The skew bridge was re-designed to give 2 metres extra height to allow for Portishead branch line electrification (which seems more remote a possibility since even Bristol Temple Meads is probably 7 years away from electrification!). The MetroBus route to the centre continues along the route of the old railway to Wapping Wharf via Ashton Avenue Swing Bridge.

From Temple Meads we headed up the Filton Bank, around the Henbury Loop (for the third time!) then south to Avonmouth station - in order to reverse the train back north towards Severn Beach. We diverged (northbound) onto the recently constructed access **loop for the Severnside Energy Recovery Centre** from where we switched (southbound) to the works line as far the (closed) gate to the SERC. The charter company (Pathfinder) hope to negotiate with Sita for entrance to the SERC facility on a future trip. Many trainspotters were scattered along the A403 to watch our unusual train including some who climbed trees for a better photo!

We retraced our route onto the **Severn Beach Line** and followed the normal passenger line down to Avonmouth and then on to Bristol Temple Meads. There we strolled on the platform before reversing north back up to Bristol Parkway. We alighted at Parkway but our colleagues were not due back at Didcot Parkway until after 11.00. Luckily the buffet car was still serving real ale to ease their journey.

I learnt a great deal about the Bristol railway network on this journey but, more than that, it was a surprisingly sociable day out. Our fellow passengers were knowledgeable and friendly and introduced us to the different sub-tribes of train enthusiasts and to some of the myths and legends of the craft. We thought we were interested in trains, but now I realize we are mere beginners, still short of the dedication required to be a true "buffer kisser", i.e. a train passenger who will walk the length of the train in each siding in order to have travelled every metre of track!

I thought this trip would be a one-off but, reading the brochures, a trip to some West Midlands aggregate loading sidings seems quite appealing.....

Hitachi Train Depot, Stoke Gifford

***A report from Brian Allinson to South Gloucestershire Council (February 2017)
(Councillor for Stoke Gifford, Deputy Leader of S Glos Council)***

For several years, I have been the liaison officer between Stoke Gifford Parish Council, South Gloucester District council, and the new Hitachi train depot at Stoke Gifford. The depot has now moved beyond the initial build and development phase, into a new operational phase. Accordingly the Depot is now actively recruiting the required staff, in order that the necessary training can be completed before the new trains become operational later this year.

My initial point of contact, Ross Cunningham, has now effectively handed local responsibility over to a new depot manager Gary Martin and, in order to maintain continuity, they both kindly invited me to visit them at the depot on the 14th February in order to view progress to date. It would be no exaggeration to say that what I saw, during the visit, astounded me and presented me with a whole new perspective on how far rail engineering technology has progressed in recent years.

At the time of my visit, two of the new five car trains were present in the depot, both on the same internal road (track). The two trains comprised of a total of 10 carriages and it was apparent that, in busy times, four complete trains could be accommodated on the two internal roads, plus many more on the multiple roads (tracks) outside.

However, that was only the very start of the surprises to come. It was explained that modern digital communication practices have been incorporated into the design of the new depot, enabling the new Hitachi trains to remain in constant digital communication with the depot computers. The system is very similar to that pioneered by the aviation industry and is designed to constantly monitor performance parameters on each train. It maintains a log of any attention required by engineers, either at the next scheduled maintenance period or if attention is more urgently required.

As the train enters the depot perimeter at the end of its working day, a laser reader identifies the train automatically and the depot computer interrogates its internal memory in order to establish what attention is required. It then directs the train to the correct internal road in order to place the train in the correct spot. Firstly the train is completely washed, using a sustainable recycled water system; then it is routed into one of the outside roads for an internal clean and re-supply of consumable articles.

When the train is first delivered to the depot by GWR staff, they will hand over the train to the depot staff. The GWR drivers will then clock off duty in a canteen designated for their use before going home. GWR drivers, arriving at the Depot to go on duty, will report to the same dedicated canteen area and will receive information from the system's computer presented on large wall type charts. These charts give individual drivers their allocated route for the day and the location of their train - which will have been checked and ready to leave. Once in the cab, the driver informs depot control - who will set all the points open ready for the train to leave on the main line.

Elsewhere in the depot is the wheel lathe which maintains the wheels of all rolling stock to ensure a smooth and safe journey for passengers and staff. The lathe is designed to minimise noise and to collect all swarf removed from the wheels in an environmentally safe condition. I found that the entire depot was clean and oil free, much as one might expect from a new build. However, in this case it had clearly been designed to remain an environmentally clean space - not only to assist the engineers to complete their task more efficiently but also to ensure that the local environment was protected from their activities. The engineers themselves required only the minimum of protective clothing etc., as most of the dirty work was done automatically by computer driven machines.



An Hitachi Intercity Express (ICE) train inside the Stoke Gifford service depot

(from the Bradley Stoke Journal, March 2017)

The depot had been designed from the outset to cater for new generation electric trains which would receive their motive power from overhead electric power lines. However now, because Network Rail had failed to complete the installation of the required power lines to the Bristol area within the original planned time, each of the new trains had to be modified so as to include supplementary diesel power to each 5 car set. Three carriages in each set now include a newly designed 21 litre Maybach engine, in order to provide motive power to the train where there is no overhead electrical power. The new engines are very quiet in comparison with the old diesels. In addition harmful diesel emissions have been very much reduced by the addition of 'Ad Blu' to the fuel system. Once again, in a repeat of proven aviation standards, these engines may only be maintained by approved Maybach engineers who are now located at the Stoke Gifford depot.

Even though these new engines are noticeably quieter than the earlier generation of diesel engines, Hitachi has decided to install sound barriers to help mitigate against any impact to the local area as a precautionary measure. They, (Hitachi) are contracted to maintain these new trains at Stoke Gifford for 27.5 years. There are a number of performance requirements built into the contract in order to maintain a high standard of delivery to the travelling public.

1. Walking to Arnos Vale Cemetery

There are many reasons to visit this delightful Victorian cemetery. My version is that it provides a haven of humanity which can be reached on foot and I can recommend various ways to get there:

- Walk from Keynsham Church through open countryside, along Ironmould Road, past the Pilgrim Inn in Brislington Village and onto Arnos Vale.
- Walk from Bristol Temple Meads station along the River Avon
- Walk from Bedminster station through Windmill Hill

You will see some wondrous sites but surely nothing could be as wondrous (for us FOSBRITES) than the headstone of a Victorian station master, Harry Edwards (1872-1925) - who apparently was Station Master at Temple Meads. ***The locomotive at the top of his epitaph shows his passion.*** (If you want a guided tour, the best day to visit is on a Saturday).

Thanks to Neil Burlton (FOSBR member) for this photo.

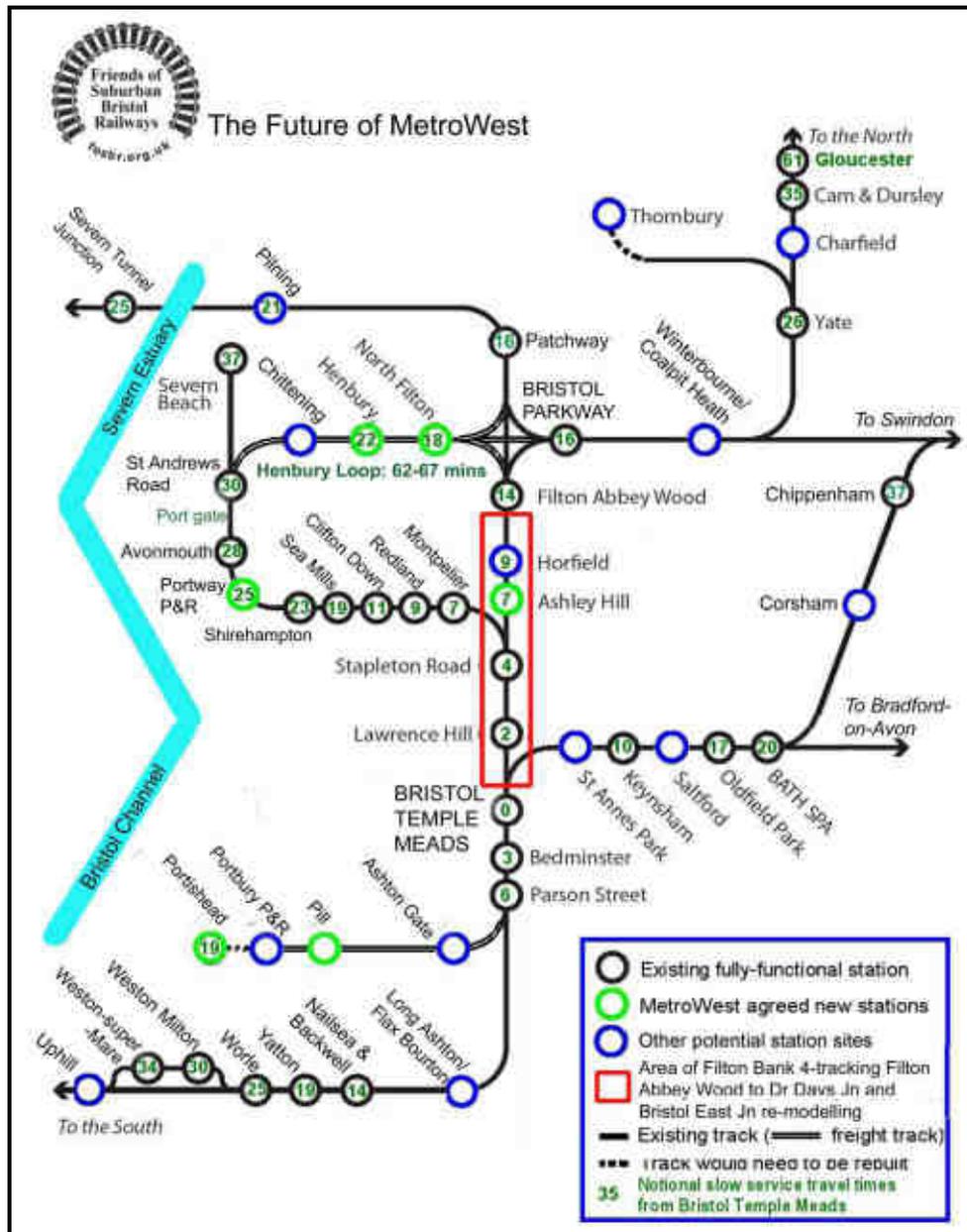
2. Wessex Wanderer Walks - Summer Programme (May to October 2017)

The programme of Public Guided Walks from stations on the Bristol to Weymouth railway line is available in public libraries and also on line (www.wessexrailwaywalks.org.uk). These walks start from at least 10 different stations between Bristol Temple Meads and Weymouth and vary in length from 3 to 11 miles.

The co-ordination of the programme this year has been taken on by Joy Harrison, a member of the Severnside Ramblers Association. As much of the line is single track, the timetable is erratic - which makes organisation a daunting task. Fortunately another rambler, Sylvia Popham, has helped in the programme which includes at least 10 different walk leaders from different Ramblers Associations. Peter Gould set this up about 19 years ago as a way of exploring beautiful countryside, using the train. What impressed me, when I did a pre-walk with Joy, is how well signed is the walk from Avoncliff station - thanks to the clear, new way markings by Wiltshire County Council. Public rights of way are vital to the enjoyment of the countryside.

The walks are open to non-members but, after two walks, you need to join the Ramblers Association. Strong walking boots and a walking stick are essential for the route we took - and food and drink is also important. Our trains are the most expensive in Europe - Joy's day return ticket from Bristol Parkway to Avoncliff station was £13, for example. *However we are delighted that Great Western will now pay for the train fares of the leaders this year!*

What does FOSBR campaign for?



FOSBR calls on our MPs, mayors, and local councillors in the immediate term to press the government to deliver:

- MetroWest Phase 1 to Portishead via Pill
- MetroWest Phase 2 to Henbury via Ashley Hill and North Filton
- Completion of four-tracking of Filton Bank
- Re-modelling of Bristol East Junction
- Electrification to Bristol Temple Meads
- and the Temple Meads Spatial Plan.

Also we press the West of England Partnership and the constituent local authorities to:

- improve the timetable to complete a 30 minute service to all local stations including stations between Bristol Temple Meads and Severn Beach
- optimise access to all local stations (rail/bus interchange, disabled access and signposting)

- and replace the footbridge at Pilning to permit a meaningful commuter service.

In the longer term, we also urge MPs to press the government to fund the public transport elements of the West of England Joint Spatial Plan and Joint Transport Study, with local rail as a backbone for the region, including:

- extension of the Henbury Spur to the Henbury Loop
- five new stations at Horfield, St Anne's, Saltford, Ashton Gate & Charfield
- addition of our FOSBR MetroWest Phase 3 proposals for five further stations at Coalpit Heath, Chittening, Uphill/Locking, Corsham & Long Ashton
- serving all these stations with a half-hour service.

Bristol cubs find out about Brunel & Temple Meads station *Julie Boston*

Answer as many of these questions as time allows in any order depending on the weather, how busy the station is etc

- * What flag is flying on the roof of the main building?
- * Visit Brunel's statue on Temple Back, outside Osborne Clark. What is Brunel holding?
- * Go to the ticket machines. How much is an off peak, adult return to London Paddington?
- * Go to Platform 14. To where can you travel from here?

Those were some of the questions for the 1st Great Bishopston Cub group on an outing in April 2017. About 29 Cubs and 9 adults met at Redland Station and took the 18:19 train to Temple Meads. As their leader had bought the tickets in advance, everything went smoothly.

One of the cubs (Wayne) enjoyed it so much that he decided that I should do the quiz on Easter Monday. This took us all over the station and down to Temple Back. As I have no idea how to use a self-service ticket machine, I asked about the cost of fares at the booking office. My other bit of cheating was to ask one of the station staff about Platform 14. Wayne has 2 Awards – one from the Queen and one from Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways (FOSBR) and knows everything about railways - except he could not explain Platform 14!

Do you think that the organiser of the Quiz for 1st Great Bishopston Cubs deserve a FOSBR Award? Should FOSBR secretary ask FOSBR member and local artist, Mike Baker, to design a new Quiz? Thanks to our 7 day railway, Mike's work can be seen on the display at Stapleton Road station.

Our next newsletter will be in Late Summer 2017. If you have anything for the next newsletter (comments, photos, whinges, praise, poems, etc.), please send them in to us.

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