

FOSBR NEWSLETTER

Newsletter 61

June 2007

Passengers on the Beach line can look forward to one **more train** from December. The improved 40 minute frequency on weekdays was achieved by an energetic FOSBR campaign and supported by all Bristol City councillors and local MPs. But an equally vigorous campaign is essential if we want rail passengers everywhere to be under **less strain**.

The following extract from the **More Train Less Strain** (MTLS) website looks at the regional and national picture and explains what's going wrong:

- *The Department of Transport now write new rail franchises. They set the minimum level of service specification, the subsidies payable to the train companies, and the fees payable by the train companies to the government.*
- *The minimum level of service specification has been going down, so the subsidy that the government pays the rail company in the early years of the franchise is reduced. At the same time, the fee repayable by the train companies to the government in the later years of the franchise has been going through the roof. First Great Western (FGW) and South West trains will both be paying the government more than one billion pounds! (£1 billion).*
- *They can only pay and continue to generate profits for their shareholders by reducing their costs (fewer trains), and increasing their income (higher fares).*
- *The Department for Transport says: "It's nothing to do with us, it's up to the train companies to run more services," whilst the train companies say: "It's not our fault, we are running the minimum service specification set by the government." We say: "Franchises should be taken away from First and other poorly performing companies and re-advertised with a higher level of service specification to meet local needs. In the longer term the only solution is putting rail back into public ownership. Public transport run for the profit of its shareholders is incompatible with the needs of the public for reliability, comfort and affordability. Rail transport should be at the heart of a government policy of sustainable transport to tackle impending climate chaos."*

MTLS is based in Bath and achieved national publicity for its passenger fare strike in January. Is anyone able to attend their June meeting and report back to the FOSBR team? For more on how you can help, see page seven of this newsletter or visit the MTLS website at www.moretrainlessstrain.co.uk.

Severn Beach line delays and cancellations

Passengers need accurate information of delays and cancellations. This should be provided at all the Information Points on the line. A Severn Beach resident has been recording and reporting cancellations for the past 2 years. He has also researched into why trains run late so often and

are cancelled. One reason is the complex timetable for train staff. There are fifteen trains and several staff changes. You rarely see the same guard twice in a day. If staff are held up on another train then there are obviously massive knock-on effects. This was seen on May 15 when 5 FGW trains were delayed by up to 40 minutes. There is not enough staff or trains and there are no contingency plans for when things go wrong. FOSBR will report to the Franchise Manager, Peter West.

New fare structure

The new fare structure is intended to make it quicker and simpler to buy tickets on the Severn Beach line. The line is divided into 2 zones (with Clifton Down as the middle point between the zones). Journeys across both zones cost more than single zone journeys.

This simplification should make it quicker for train staff to issue tickets and change, so that more passengers can buy their tickets on the train, reducing both queues on the Temple Meads barriers and also reducing the number of people leaving the train at intermediate stations without paying.

The new system should mean that ticket sales and revenue for the line reflect the high numbers of people using it, helping to guarantee its long term future. However, the management of the new system has been completely incompetent. At the time of writing (28 May), the train staff and the ticket office at Temple Meads have received no briefing on the new fare structure and are still issuing point to point tickets and not zonal tickets. Also, the first passengers heard of these new fares was from the guards or when they arrived at their stations on Monday morning and saw the posters!

New timetable

On the same day as the new fares structure, a new timetable came into effect across the network. On the Severn Beach line, however, there have been minimal changes. The last service of the day now departs 30 minutes later.

First Great Western have also published a 'Mini timetable' detailing all rail and bus services from all stations between Temple Meads and Severn Beach. In addition, times of connecting trains to Bath and London are detailed. This timetable is numbered E6 and should be available from the racks at Temple Meads Station. FOSBR webmaster will put cross – city train times - eg between Weston and Yate on the website.-

Third platform at Parkway

During May, the third platform at Bristol Parkway was opened which will improve capacity for eastbound and northbound trains during times of disruption. The fourth platform has already been approved and construction will hopefully commence soon.

Bus to train connections between Severn Beach & Avonmouth

There have been numerous problems with connections between the bus and train at Avonmouth, making a mockery of the timetabled bus / train link. We were promised better communication between bus staff and train staff, but this has not happened. Once again, this is poor management by FGW.

Some FOSBR members had their Bank Holidays spoiled by their journey taking two hours after having to wait at Avonmouth station for an hour because of bus service had not been booked. A Shirehampton passenger, Jill Sheppard, turned her anger into a poem "Stranded at the Beach." It's in the Magazine section of the FOSBR website and also on the desk of Andrew Griffiths the Regional Manager for FGW.

Strangely, the general notice on the National Rail website said that the whole of FGW were running a Saturday service on the Bank Holiday. Yet there was a Monday service in operation on the Beach line.

How you can help

We want to improve rail services in the area! From crowding to fares, please get in touch with local councillors, MPs and newspapers (see 'campaigners' contacts' sheet.) Ask for the franchise with FGW to be put back into public ownership so it can provide an affordable, reliable train service that can cope with demand.

FOSBR's own 'Development Plan'

The FOSBR monthly meeting has been hurled into the abyss. Our new structure of working groups with quarterly meetings is working better.

Dumping of rubbish on Network Rail land

There are several locations in the area where fly tipping has been taking place, particularly in the Easton area. Whilst some of the problem may lie with those behind this illegal dumping, surely it is in Network Rail's interest to remove this for local residents and train users alike?

Missing station stops

It has been reported that Severn Beach line services have been missing stops if the train is running late. Please report it to FGW/ FOSBR/ politicians. The Line Development Plan says skipping stops is not desirable. **FOSBR says it's unacceptable.**

FOSBR outing to Wales

March 30th saw a group of 6 FOSBR members take the train to Cardiff (using the 4 for the price of 2 tickets) where we met up with representatives from Transport 2000 and Railfuture. We took

the train from Cardiff to Bridgend via Rhoose, a recently re-opened line, and then up to Maesteg and back to Cardiff on the direct line. We were impressed by the promptness of the service and it was worth noting that the patronage was healthy.

We then met up with Mike Hurley, senior manager of Arriva Trains Wales who was able to give us well over an hour of his time to answer our questions. He was very helpful and we left with the feeling that expansion of train services is possible where there is a will and a Welsh Assembly!

The trip helped us gain information for our own campaigns here. Meanwhile, why not try the Welsh Valley lines for yourselves - the Ebbw Vale line is due to open shortly!

- Bernard Lane

FOSBR celebrations at Severn Beach

On the 19th May 2007 over 20 passengers, clutching tickets at the reduced rate for groups of 4, arrived at Severn Beach at 11.45. The plan was to wish Cat Hobbs good luck in her new job in London, working for Transport 2000. Cat's main contribution to easing, ameliorating and resolving Bristol's traffic fiasco was through the Half Hour Train Campaign.

We played rounders, boules and Twister on the Severn Beach open green space, shared a picnic and then we went to Shirley's Café for drinks and ice creams followed by the FOSBR Awards 2007 ceremony conducted by Mike Baker, designer of the Awards 2007.

New Executive Member for transport on Bristol CC

FOSBR will ask for a meeting with Councillor Mark Bradshaw (Lab, Bedminster) responsible for "Access and Environment, including planning, transport and traffic, sustainable development and sub regional and citywide waste strategy."

Councillor Bradshaw, like Bristol Councillors of all political parties, was supportive of the FOSBR Half Hour Train Campaign. However, apart from his enormous job description, he has the added task of answering letters which Councillor Brown ignored. Two FOSBR members, who wrote to Councillor Brown during his time in office, are especially angry at being ignored. One eventually wrote to Cllr Barbara Janke, who responded in writing. The other wrote asking about the future of a transport interchange at Temple Meads, station signs and other crucial transport issues. In frustration, he sent copies of his letters to the Bristol Evening Post and leading councillors. It will be Councillor Bradshaw's task to send a written response.

Station signs

The unauthorised removal of local station signs in spring 2006 is another issue which FOSBR is pursuing. The signs are the responsibility of Bristol City Council and Network Rail. A FOSBR member made endless attempts to get a written promise from Councillor Dennis Brown, former Executive Member for Transport, to restore the signs.

SW RSS EIP

No, not a reformulation of Relativity Theory! It stands for South West Regional Spatial Strategy Examination in Public. We have been invited to take part in this long term planning process on Tuesday 26th June at the Thistle Hotel Exeter - opposite Exeter Central Station. Please come and cheer on Peter Gould, the FOSBR representative. To save our time and the inspector's patience, FOSBR is endorsing the Bristol Civic Society's detailed submission; annexing the Transport Alliance Manifesto. The full version can be found online.

Severn Beach Line Development Plan

The Line Development Plan (LDP) was recently published by Severnside Community Rail Partnership, First Great Western and the line working group, made up of 10 organisations, including two local councils and FOSBR, however, many of our comments were rejected, so we cannot endorse it.

Some parts of the plan have already been implemented, such as the fares structure and 'Mini timetables,' mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter. Those who have used the line recently will also have noticed new timetable posters which are supposed to be easier to read.

The LDP supports CCTV at all stations and numerous other station improvements which are contained in the document on a station-by-station basis. In the future, we may see basic ticket machines on stations and local shops selling 'carnet' tickets.

The LDP can be viewed & commented on by going to <http://www.severnside-rail.org.uk/resources.asp>.

Montpelier station clean-up

An estimated 60 volunteers turned up at Montpelier station on the 12th May to participate in a clean-up event organised by the Severnside Community Rail Partnership. Despite the rain, lots was achieved, including the removal of rubbish from the track and platform (Network Rail staff were in attendance as volunteers were not allowed on the track) and also the clearing of the unused platform.

Graffiti on parts of the former station building was covered up with an uninspiring shade of brown, but a mural was painted (or should that be sprayed), by 4 graffiti artists, commissioned by First Great Western. Sadly, the station, including the new mural, was covered by graffiti less than two weeks later. First Great Western has issued a £500 reward for any information which leads to the conviction of the vandal (or vandals, as the police believe 4 people were involved!)

On a more positive note, however, there have been reports that the plants in the new station garden are flowering nicely!

Station graffiti

Being unstaffed and secluded, Severn Beach line stations are often the target of illegal graffiti, but recently the news of the graffiti mural at Montpelier station, as mentioned above, got the FOSBR Email group talking!

John Hall said that “the effect of the existing graffiti at Montpelier is to create an impression of an uncontrolled threatening environment, beyond official protection, exactly the sort of place that you would not want to wait for a train.”

Anna Newsome, however, disagrees. “Graffiti is one of the most exciting and vibrant forms of modern art, becoming more and more well respected in 'serious' art circles. As for increasing people's fear of crime - surely the [reasons for this is] due to the normal locations for graffiti in public, and not the graffiti itself. Rather than just accepting that this is the way things are wouldn't it be more constructive to think let's bring this art into a public place used by all sections of the community and then the associations with it will be changed”

Another contributor said: “The facts are quite simple - Graffiti is a form of art that is applied to places that are not "in the domain" of the artist concerned and that is the base problem. How many graffiti artists do you find ‘tagging’ their own houses? I would suggest very few.”

First Great Western have said if the mural is a success and well-received by the public, they will consider similar murals at other stations on their network, which could, ultimately include other Severn Beach line stations.

Clifton Down train reversing facility approved

The Network Rail business plan includes provision of a new signal at Clifton Down which will allow trains from Temple Meads to reverse direction. We have been told this will be used in times of disruption to avoid cancelling an entire round trip, but FOSBR is concerned that it will be used on a regular basis to turn around trains, meaning passengers for Sea Mills and onwards could lose confidence in the line, causing a fall in passenger numbers and contributing to any future plans to close the line.

On the other hand, we have to balance the benefits this would bring, such as an improved service between Temple Meads & Clifton Down and also the possibility of Sunday services, which would almost certainly not operate if they have to go all the way to Avonmouth.

Patronage at local stations on the up!

In the latest figures produced by the Office of Rail Regulation on the use of individual stations we have seen welcome increases. West of Clifton Down, there have been big rises for Severn Beach, St Andrews Road & Avonmouth, with smaller rises for Sea Mills & Shirehampton. Surely this calls the findings of both the LDP & the Regional Planning Assessment into question?

Review of the rail prospectus for the South West

A draft prospectus is now available on the Government Office of the South West website, prepared by our friends at Atkins and is currently in its fourth edition issued on the 1 May 2007. With all its appendices it runs to some 60 pages and covers the whole of the South West Regional Office area.

On brief analysis the following can be said about the document:

- It goes into some detail about the reason for making improvements to rail in the South West both in terms of infrastructure and extra train services
- It can be considered a live document, so any elements that FOSBR feel are excluded we should make an effort to have included
- Many of the schemes that it outlines can be found in the latest Network Rail Business Plan

The remit of the document seems to be only for the medium term. It has “unclassified” such improvements as the 4 tracking between Filton and Parson Street, but seems to make encouraging noises about:

- Turn around at Yate and Worle
- Cross Bristol services
- Reopening the Portishead line
- Expand Bristol network (Weston/Yate/Bath or Westbury)

The writers on the prospectus should be encouraged to take account of the increased frequency of the Severn Beach Line, in the development of cross - Bristol services. All cross-Bristol trains would dovetail neatly into the more frequent Severn Beach line services (which hopefully by the time will be even more frequent), thus making a trip Yate to Clifton by train possible in half an hour. Generally it is an encouraging document and any positive recommendations contained within it should be supported by FOSBR to push these things through.

- Eric Wildman

What's on

Saturday 2 June

Guided walks with the Heart of Wessex Partnership starts. Meet Peter Gould outside Temple Meads Station @ 11.15 for 8 mile urban walk with historical monologue. See www.heartofwessex.org.uk for more info.

Saturday 9 June

Easter Compton Carnival. 13.00 onwards. Support the FOSBR stall at Easter Compton Playing Field. 0117 944 5687 for offers of help.

Saturday 16 June

Meet at 10.00 Temple Meads for European Aviation Day of Action against Airport Expansion, with the call **Trains not Planes**. Cyclists will ride to Bristol International Airport (BIA) in support of re-signalling at TM and in opposition to the expansion of Bristol International Airport.

Friday 21 June

December timetable on Beach line expected from S B Line Working Group.

Tuesday 26 June

Examination in Public (EIP) of South West Regional Spatial Strategy.

Saturday 30 June

Climate Bill Demo in Parliament Square, London @ 1400; London, Manchester etc.
Visit www.campaigncc.org for more information.

Saturday 7 July

Guided walk with the Ramblers. 1004 train from Temple Meads to Trowbridge (Groups of 4 can travel for price of 2). The walk follows the river and canal and ends in Bradford-on-Avon or Avoncliff to catch the train to Temple Meads. Call 0117 942 8637.

Saturday 14 July

FOSBR business meeting at GW Staff Club in Temple Meads Approach. Meeting starts on the arrival of the 16.22 from Severn Beach or about 1700.

October

"No Way to Run a Railway" possible fare strike. To get involved, see www.moretrainslessstrain.co.uk, local press and www.bristolindymedia.org !

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