

FOSBR Chair's Report - 2010 AGM

This is the end of my second year as Chair and during the last two years I have sought to make FoSBR an organisation that fights for the improvement of rail facilities and services in the Bristol Travel to Work area in accordance with the original spirit of the organisation. My vision is very much of an organisation that is the grain of sand in the oyster rather than the pain in the backside. I believe we will achieve more if we work with people not against them. However that does not mean we do not challenge people and companies but irritate until something good is produced.

In this I am not the only one involved – the Committee has worked hard over the year to attend meetings, meet politicians and industry leaders, written letters and articles, responded to reports and sat at various community fairs and events with our stall as well as distributing over 9000 copies of timetables twice a year. I want to record my thanks to all concerned for their hard work and for their acting as grains of sand. I want to thank too the membership for its response to our campaign in response to the RUS report especially.

I cannot let 2009 pass into history without remembering the great loss of Will Fancy our Treasurer and Membership Secretary. He was a great campaigner not only with FoSBR but all his working life with the Unions (and was once branded as the UK's most dangerous man – not by MI6 but by the Daily Mail!). He worked tirelessly and always supported our public meetings and committee. We miss his quiet and wise words. Our condolences and thoughts remain with Julie in her loss.

This is the second year of the “improved” service on the SB line. It has been a highly successful improvement with a huge increase in patronage (see the Severnside Community Rail Partnership figures) over 40% in a year. The target of 525,000 in 3 years was hit in less than 18 months, which shows that REGULAR and RELIABLE services are needed and are used.

The Sunday Service has been seen as successful too and in the summer timetable of this coming summer there will be trains earlier in the day and running later, with connections to WsM. Thanks to S Glos Council services will also run all the way to Severn Beach...giving passengers there a better service than during the week!

We have also been campaigning for the requadrupling of the line from Parsons St to Filton Abbey Wood and extending the loop at CD to Montpelier to allow greater flexibility with services running late at Narrow Ways. Can electrification include these projects?

Portishead: Call me a cynic, but until I see a train pull out of the new Portishead station, I am not convinced that the project will go ahead. N Somerset Council seemed to be presenting a Rapid Transport Bus system as the answer to commuting, using the rail formation from the town to the Pill side of the M5 at the AGM of the Portishead Rail Group. I am deeply suspicious of their intent, but hope I will be proved wrong.

We have met various politicians locally –MPs and candidates from all 3 major parties as well as senior leaders from those parties. Local Councillors too have been generous with their time. We also met Mark Hopwood, CEO for FGW and we came away encouraged to not only push for Portishead and Henbury but also Thornbury.

Most people we spoke too seem to agree that the main problem with improving public transport in Bristol and region is the lack of integration of planning. Bristol is falling behind and seems in many respects to have barely crossed the starting line in improving public transport, especially rail. In Nottingham, Sheffield, Leeds, Birmingham and Cardiff, the political will and unity has allowed the formation of Independent Transport Authorities which have allowed transport planners the freedom to integrate and improve services hugely. The potential in Bristol exists and soon Pip Sheard will be here to share with us something about the campaign TfGB are conducting to persuade local councils to form an ITA. May I urge you as members to support this campaign with energy and vigour, as it will affect rail as well as other forms of public transport?

Can I also appeal to the membership to become more active? This may be encouraging others to join FoSBR, perhaps coming to some of our public events and meetings, supporting speakers at council meetings or even organising trips out? (We had a fun day from Pilning a few weeks ago). We also need articles for the newsletter.

This coming year we will be busy too – trying to persuade the Council to continue funding the SB services, seeking to publicise the network, getting politicians to support rail in Bristol through a meeting in April, as well s responding to events that arise.

Your help is greatly needed as are your ideas. Do keep in touch via the website and the FoSBR group e mail. Come to our committee meetings too. This is a group of members, for the members.

Bristol is a great city and deserves and desperately needs great public transport.

