

## FoSBR Newsletter Autumn 2010.

Financial Winter : Keeping local rail on track during times of fiscal restraint.

**15 Years of FoSBR: It all started when a cyclist could not get his bike on the replacement bus to the beach. 28<sup>th</sup> Sept 7pm celebration in La Ruca!**

Park Rail: the Brecon Beacon national park by train.

Perugia: Minimetro reborn as a cable car.



**COLD FINANCIAL WINDS TO BLOW SNOW ON THE LINE?  
Rail: an enabler for economic growth to plough us  
through the fiscal snowdrift ahead.**

## FRIDAY 24<sup>th</sup> September at La Ruca to Celebrate 15 glorious years of FoSBR.

Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways will be celebrating 15 years of campaigning with a £5 buffet supper at La Ruca Café, 89, Gloucester Road, (junction Overton Road), BS6 on Friday 24 September . This will be a chance to meet some of the key players, survey the 15 years coverage by Bristol Evening Post, and revitalise ourselves. No need to book in advance, pay at the door

"Every time a suburban train runs in the Bristol area is a victory for FOSBR!," says Teresa McGill. Teresa, a Bristolian who lived in North Bristol and worked in South Bristol for 30 years, couldn't use the unreliable, badly timetabled service, but became involved on retirement. She promotes FOSBEER - an illustrated guide to the pubs along Bristol's suburban railways - which featured in a recent edition of Pints West.

Since the Beeching cuts in the sixties, Avonmouth dockers, rail workers and the Severn Beach Line Association kept the Severn Beach line running. FOSBR started at 07.30 on Monday 25 September 1995 in protest at the reduction of the commuter services to Severn Beach. The event was inspired by a poem and organised by a 24 year old cyclist. We encouraged people to meet on Avonmouth Station with bikes and buggies to show that a bus was no substitute for a train. Until 2003, Bristol City Council (BCC) subsidised the line when councillors of all parties voted to continue with the subsidy until the end of the franchise with Wessex. Following an energetic Half Hour Train Campaign targeting BCC budget in 2006/7, councillors of all parties voted for a higher subsidy which did not start until May 2008. The improved service, funded for 3 years by Bristol City Council and using two trains, resulted in a 60% ticket sale increase in 2010- or 100,000 extra journeys in the past year.

FOSBR has been financed through individual and group subscriptions, donations, especially from ASLEF train drivers union, and free meeting room supplied by the rail unions.

At one of our first meetings, Alex Gordon, RMT National President, formerly Bristol guard and driver, suggested that FOSBR concentrated on increasing passenger numbers on off peak services. Bristol Ramblers responded by starting walks from local stations - a policy which continues to this day.

Unless BCC continues to fund the service at the present level, FOSBR thinks it will revert to one train and endless cancellations. For this reason, FOSBR has submitted questions on negotiations between Bristol City Council and partners - First Great Western and Network Rail- on maintaining the more frequent service from May 2011 - 2014 to Bristol City Council Sustainable Development and Transport Scrutiny Commission.

We'd like to see everyone who wants to celebrate our success so far and wants this service to continue join us at La Ruca. See What's On and Where in newsletter and [www.fosbr.org.uk](http://www.fosbr.org.uk) for details.

**Julie Boston, FOSBR campaigns organiser 08 September 2010**

## THE BRECON BEACONS: MOUNTAIN BIKING AND WALKING BY RAIL



**Merthyr, where all rail journeys began.**

The Brecon Beacon national park can be enjoyed in a new way by rail. Although many of the railways that once served the area have been closed, the national park is still accessible via the Valley Lines from Cardiff and soon from Newport, the Welsh Marches line and the Hart of Wales line from Swansea. Instead of having to return to the car at the end of a hard day walking or cycling, walkers, road cyclists and mountain bikers are free to make routes from one rail line to another. For example, Abbergavenny to Ebbw Vale. Access will improve further from Bristol once passenger trains run from Newport to Ebbw Vale as well as Cardiff. This will speed up access to the Welsh hills from the Avon area by using Newport as a hub. Perhaps Ebbw Vale could reinvent itself as Bristol's mountain biking hinterland.

### Executive Members of the West of England Partnership (WEP) support Dave Woods (Post 25 August 2010)

"Your correspondent, Dave Wood, is correct with his calls for investment in rail," wrote the four Executive Members of the West of England Partnership Joint Transport Executive, Councillor Charles Gerrish, Bath and North East Somerset, Councillor Gary Hopkins, Bristol City Council, Councillor Elfan Ap Rees, North Somerset, Councillor Brian Allinson, South Gloucestershire in a letter to the Bristol Evening Post. (25 August 2010).

The councillors' statement is a tribute to Bristol Evening Post for providing an outlet for local people; to Dave Wood's tireless campaigning in the letters page of the Post; to Bristol RMT and to the councillors' who now recognise that growing rail passenger numbers in the Greater Bristol area needs increased investment in rail. What is especially encouraging is that the councillors are speaking for the whole Partnership area - not just their patch.

However, on half-hourly cross Bristol train service is in the 'rail vision' West of England Joint Local Transport plan 2005 - 2011. And surely the frustrated and exhausted council tax payers of WEP land are entitled to see their money spent on the agreed WEP policy.

This is an invitation to the four Executive Members to join us on a cross city rail journey. A Sunday train journey between Weston Super Mare and Avonmouth - without changing at Temple Meads - is on the timetable.

Just name the date and station of departure and FOSBR will do our best to participate, publicise and celebrate.

**Perugia's answer to traffic: The Minimetro, trust the Italians to produce some serious public transport eye candy.**



**Hills not an issue. The route also passes through a tunnel where the cable cars are rotated on a turntable, the ultimate turn back solution.**



**Imagine this scene by St Mary Redcliff.**

**If employed in Bristol stations could be outposts for Temple Meads, selling tickets providing travel information.**



When one mentions the word “minimetro” in this country some older people may recall a car from Austin that was to save the British car industry. For the burgers of Perugia they think of cable car system that saved their town transport chaos. Perugia has three things in common with Bristol; a railway station away from the centre of the town, challenging topography and road congestion. To resolve all of these issues is the “Minimetro” connecting the core of the town on the hill with its railway station below. There are a number of stations along the system’s route which has a capacity of 8000 people and hour. A system such as this may be the answer for Bristol to connect Temple Meads with city centre on the old freight route through the tunnel at Redcliff or even on up to Clifton Village via Ashton gate through the old Clifton Rocks Railway tunnel terminating next to the Avon Gorge Hotel. Cable car technology makes easy work of the steepest inclines that Bristol can offer. Of course there are many issues with such a system in Bristol but it is important for people to be aware what is available and operating elsewhere in the world.

### **Better connections, Better Signage, Better Journeys.**

One reoccurring theme of the FoSBR newsletter is the use of stations like Stapleton Road and Filton Abbey Wood as interchanges. Recent figures from the Office of Rail Regulator now show that Stapleton Road was frequented by more than 100,000 times in the 08/09. But under the column for interchanges no entry was entered. However in reality this is not the case as there are now a significant number of travellers changing trains, following the increased number of trains stopping there on the main and Severn Beach lines together with the increased use of internet journey planners and rail operator websites showing routes that require changing at Easton’s station. Old pictures of Stapleton Road station show the station signage indicating to use the station to change trains to Avonmouth, Severn Beach and Bristol Zoo. (Maybe when passenger trains from Ebbw can run via Newport, Arriva or First Great Western could start running Monkey Specials once more from the valleys to Clifton Down –(would we have to wait for the Henbury Loop though?).

One suggestion to improve the Stapleton Road interchange situation, which may be difficult until Filton bank returns to four tracks, is to delay a couple of minutes the 0752 train at Stapleton Road to allow the southbound Severn Beach train to arrive at Stapleton Road beforehand allowing people the opportunity to change catch the what would be the 0756? To Bristol Parkway. A potential quick win for the network.



Loco-Hauled mainline trains to Cardiff and Parkway now stop at Parson Street, Stapleton Road northbound creating interchange possibilities to and from Clifton, Avonmouth and Severn Beach with Wales and Somerset. (Candidate Rolling stock for a Monkey Special?). Could HSTs via Bath Spa be next?

### **Ashton Gate Station to save the day for Bristol City Football Club?**

Following the difficulties that Bristol City Football Club finds itself in regarding new stadium development, perhaps the club should try thinking outside of the penalty box and substitute out of town parking for a reopened Ashton Gate station. There has been a trend for some English football clubs to move their grounds out of town. Due to pressure for increased car parking: a common symptom of a poor public transport system. If it were otherwise the case then Bristol City Football club would not be so concerned on providing parking for its car dependant fans and could concentrate on simply improving its existing facilities gradually rather than enduring all the problems of selling the existing ground, building a new one and. The club could take a more enlightened approach and boost the local rail network and enable home and away fans decent access to the ground. Of course it is a bit transport centric to think the only reason to relocate Bristol City is only down to parking, built whilst they are wrangling with how to take their stadium improvement scheme forward they is no reason why the can not make the most of what they have and push to have Ashton Gate reopened

**Letter to the Evening post;** Dear Sir,

The Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways welcomes Councillor Gary Hopkins's assurance that the present level of service on the Severn Beach line will continue after the current contract between Bristol City Council and First Great Western ends in May 2011 ("Campaigners call for quick railway action", September 15).

We also welcome the news that the council is considering improving the service on the line. Any improvements, especially to the evening service, will be very much appreciated by passengers.

When the 40-minute service was originally planned in 2007, its introduction was delayed by six months because of the time taken to negotiate the contract. Now that the contract needs to be renegotiated, we have been anxious that there should not be a similar delay. We are therefore pleased to learn that negotiations have started.

The 60% increase in ticket sales since 2007 should make it possible to reach a deal that will benefit all parties. Since First now receives substantially increased revenue from the line, it should be possible both to reduce the subsidy and to introduce improvements.

We wish the council and First Great Western well in their negotiations, and look forward to news of a successful conclusion.

Yours sincerely,

Christina Biggs, Campaigns Organiser, Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways

### **Local Rail's role in economic growth.**

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The case for investing in local rail rather than cutting it is beginning to take hold amongst local government and rail operators. The increase in revenue on the Severn Beach line running at 60% the initial money used for the improved Severn Beach seems to have kick started the local rail in the greater Bristol area. Following the introduction of a additional unit increasing the Frequency as far as the Avonmouth further improvements began to develop as a result. An extra train was found to fill in a gap in services in the evenings and an then this summer the expected Sunday service was extended with more trains and their being run right to severn Beach with connections to Weston Super Mare in the mornings and evening due to a rare example of inter county co operation with South Gloucestershire contributing improved Severn Beach service.

These improvements have a direct economic return. Already shops in Severn Beach have extended their opening hours, Business men and professionals with lap tops have been spotted passing through Montpellier. American accents have been heard commenting on the buddleia by Filton Bank. Indicator albeit anecdotal ones, that as well as the social benefits Bristol's improving rail network is producing hard economic results. And this is just a fraction of the systems potential. Capacity can be increased with no recourse to an sort of public inquire as the railway land is still there waiting to be put back into use. The cost of the mechanical hardware needed is a fraction of the value of the existing assets that rail has to its disposal.

### **Bring back information displays at Redland and Montpellier**

Regular users of Redland and Montpellier must be missing the information displays that were cruelly stolen from these stations. It has be several months since these information systems have gone missing with no sign of a replacement. These displays had greatly enhanced the attractiveness of these stations and it is a shame that there has been on sign of an effort to replace these devices. It can not be too difficult to engineer secure enclosures for the displays so that can be reinstalled and return to providing the invaluable information and communication that is stilled enjoyed on stations still information systems.

Dates for your diary.

**Saturday 18 September 2.30 pm**

**Railfuture meeting**

Cornubia Pub, Temple Street, off Victoria Street Reforming Rail Franchising  
-the government's consultation document.

**Friday 24 September 7 pm - 10 pm**

Friends of Suburban Bristol Railway FOSBR celebration of 15 years.

La Roca Café, 89, Gloucester Road, Bristol BS7 8AS. £5 buffet. BYO  
drink.

For further information ring; 07791 867 512, 07906 041439

**Wednesday 29 September.**

1049 depart Temple Meads Station, Bristol Ramblers 9 miles walk from  
Oldfield Park to Bath. Peter Gould 0117 973 3059

**Monday 6 December 8 pm -9pm**

Bristol Indymedia Xmas Party £4 / 3 - a light hearted look at the year with  
"favourite clips" Cube, Dove St South, BS2 8JD. 8 - 9 pm FOSBR light  
hearted look at rail travel with poets David Johnson & Ian Sills

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## Keep in Touch

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