

**FOSBR Newsletter. #76 SPRING 2011.**

# **¡WIRES COME WEST! SPARKING** Mid April.



**Electric Spring: Getting ready for peak oil?**

**Government extends electrification to Cardiff taking in Bristol and Bath.**

**Funding continues for the Severn Beach Line.**

**Infrastructure creep: Ticket machines at some Severn Beach Line stations.**

**Capacity improvements of local Bristol Lines come closer.**

**Positive noises heard about the Portishead Rail Corridor.**

## The Great Western Hub.

At last the coalition government has confirmed that the Great Western Main Line including both the lines via Bristol Parkway and Bath through the Severn Tunnel to Cardiff are to be electrified, implementing something that should have occurred in the 80's together with the late British Rail's Advance Passenger Train (where do you think the Pendolino's tilting technology came from?). Instead of running innovative British Technology in the spirit of Brunel we shall have custom-designed bi-mode Hitachi Trains possibly assembled in the north of England to run electrically as far as Cardiff switching to Diesel mode (should I be saying self powered?) to reach Swansea where it is currently deemed not cost effective to rig the wires. Perhaps it is time for the Irish to take up the lobbying from the Welsh to have this European strategic route electrified all the way to Fishguard. However electrification to Swansea has not been ruled out completely and when it sinks in that it would mean that the new trains would not need to carry a diesel engine per carriage that would only be used for the last 40 miles then there is a chance that common sense will prevail. Lord Adonis knew what he was doing.

However let us be grateful for the paradigm shift in transport policy brought about by an outbreak of technical literacy amongst some politicians.

What has been approved will influence the following future developments:

- Electrification is being taken through the Severn Tunnel thus opening up the all of South Wales to rail electrification.
- Development of the Welsh Valleys lines into a Cardiff Metroland.
- Four tracking of Filton Bank removing the biggest restriction on the development of Avon area local rail.
- Reopening of Horfield and Ashley Down stations possible following Filton Bank four tracking.
- Catalyst for Bristol's own electrified Metroland including the Portishead Rail corridor, Weston-super-Mare, Bath and Gloucester.
- Creation of a "Great Western Hub" similar to the "Northern Hub" or "Manchester Hub" centred on Bristol Temple Meads requiring the need to develop Plot 6 (spare land near to Temple Meads) as a rail/bus/tram interchange.
- Return of Brunel's railway shed to use as a Eurostar Terminal restored in a similar vein to St Pancras, enabled by the possible removal of the signal box at Temple Meads and the building of London's Crossrail connecting Paddington to Stratford International thence to Brussels, Paris and Cologne.
- 4<sup>th</sup> platform at Bristol Parkway as part of developing Greater Bristol Metro.
- Reinstatement of Stapleton Road as Bristol's second station. Now on a showcase bus route combined with 4 tracking an interchange for the Severn Beach line and Bath Express services from Severn Beach or the North Fringe. (A Bath Express service would miss out Bristol Temple Meads making a Filton to Bath service in the region of 20').
- Enhanced service at Parson Street connecting with a Showcase bus route but also the airport service allowing people to miss out travelling through the centre by road to get to Lulsgate.

All of the potential developments above have only been made possible by the green light of electrification for the Great Western Main line. But in the grand scheme of things these are quick wins. No need for expensive public inquiries, disruptive road works, compulsory purchases. Only the full exploitation of existing rail routes and procurement of rolling stock and line side equipment.

Once all of the above has been achieved we can move on to reopening the line to Thornbury, the original Severn Bridge to the Forest of Dean, stations at Winterbourne, Wick (Glos), rail to Radstock, the Somerset and Dorset....



**Bristol Parkway Bottleneck after Reading:** The new local platform can be seen to the left of the image, the aborted 4<sup>th</sup> platform would have allowed local trains from Bristol to use Parkway without crossing the main line thus allowing better connections.

### **Bristol City Council continues funding the Severn Beach Line.**

Bristol City Council has renegotiated the contract with First Great Western for the Severn Beach Line including a later train through to Severn Beach and back on Sundays. The annual amount of money paid by the council has been halved to £200K. However the cup is very much half full as the remainder is filled with the increased revenue from the extra passengers the line now carries thanks to the pump priming funding begun 3 years ago. An extra train working the line enabled a 40' frequency for a large part of the week and a Sunday service for the first time. The return on the council's investment far outweighs any other of its public transport investments.

This experiment has proved the massive latent demand for a decent local rail service in the Bristol area that even the likes of First Great Western have realised the potential of expanding and exploiting by putting on longer trains and working with the council to install ticket machines. (See

infrastructure creep below). The improvements now on the Severn Beach Line appear to be self generating as there is talk of more time table enhancements.

The council now has funding available to apply to guide incumbent operators where they can improve local rail. The development of a quick cross-city rail service is the key. Parson Street and Bedminster have seen huge increases in passenger numbers in the second half of the past decade due largely to the Severnside Community Rail Partnership's push for trains stopping at these Cinderella stations. However this arrangement seems to be a gentlemanly one and is constantly under threat by punctuality pressures on the operators, who are prone to snub these stations or look for ways to drop them off their timetables, very much the situation on the Severn Beach Line five years ago.

It has been proven on the Severn Beach Line that Bristol City Council can do business with a train operating company and work out robust agreements that the operators honour sufficiently for the project to be a success.

Leadership is once again required of Bristol City Council to lay the groundwork of a cross-Bristol service developing ridership in preparation for when the Greater Bristol Metro becomes a reality following Bristol Parkway's 4<sup>th</sup> platform and Filton Bank four tracking (now on the cards thanks to the electrification go ahead). Bringing Parson Street and Bedminster into the fold, this service will provide Bristol with real bang for the £200K saved from the Severn Beach line and be more inclusive to the residents of South Bristol.

### **Filton Bank four tracking and Portishead Rail corridor.**

There are strong indications from various sources that the four tracking of Filton Bank and the reopening of the line to Portishead to passenger traffic are now seen as the next rail objectives for the West of England Partnership. It requires the combined efforts of the all the ex-Avon authorities to take on central government to gain the funding for such major infrastructure projects.

For example, Filton Bank may lie almost entirely within the city of Bristol boundary but its four tracking will benefit the other counties in the Partnership. Portishead line reopening could be regarded as only the business of North Somerset but reopening it would provide the whole Bristol with an Overground system in one fell swoop.

### **FoSBR Guest Speaker to discuss Ebbw Vale reopening.**

6pm 'til 9pm - Halo, 141 Gloucester Rd (200 m from The Arches), nr Montpellier Station, parking free

David McCallum BA (Hons) MSc CMILT Associate (Rail & Public Transport) Capita Symonds

The **Ebbw Valley Railway project** involved the establishment of an new hourly direct passenger service from Ebbw Vale to Cardiff, requiring the complete upgrading of 18 miles of former freight railway including 3 miles of new passing loop and construction of six new stations. Unusually the project was procured and delivered by the local authorities prior to being handed back to Network Rail. Since opening in 2008 usage as surpassed initial forecasts with around **600,000** trips per annum.

David McCallum was the project manager for this project from the first feasibility studies in 1998, through to its opening in 2008 and lives in Bristol. His presentation will cover the development and implementation of the project, some of the challenges encountered and developments since opening.

FoSBR Is inviting Charlotte Leslie, MP, Dr Liam Fox, MP, Kerry McCarthy MP, Steve Webb MP and John Penrose MP who have all made pledges in favour of public transport rail included.

Perhaps those in the West of England partnership involved in reopening the Portishead Line and Filton 4 tracking should attend.

**Infrastructure Creep.**

Stations along the Severn Beach Line are slowly regaining the amenities they once had, at least their electronic equivalents. Though rail staff may have even been spotted selling tickets in the rush hour at Redland.

The information points have been a great success giving a clear picture to travellers of when the next train will come but also showing what other trains are due to call including destinations inspiring people of potential destinations they may want to make in the future.



**Automatic Fare Collection: Going fast, now only available at Clifton Down and Redland.**

Ticket machines are now working at Redland and Clifton Down in a bid to reduce the queues at Temple Meads. However they only sell tickets for the Severn Beach Line. A next step would be to upgrade to a machine that sells fares for the whole country and season tickets a fully electronic booking office. Maybe it is time to produce a Severn Beach Line App.

If electrification is extended to Avonmouth (or even further) then Clifton Down the grand dame of the local Bristol stations can have its entropy reduced and be restored into a staffed station with café/bistro and Eurostar travel shop.

**FOSBR Subscriptions for 2011**

Thanks to all of you who have sent your subscriptions and donations for this year.

We have raised nearly £1,000 so far - which is excellent ! Your membership card is enclosed with this edition of the Newsletter.

A gentle reminder for those who have not yet renewed ... If you would like to continue supporting FOSBR and to receive future Newsletters, a subscription form is enclosed with your Newsletter.

Thank you. **Tony Lloyd, Membership Secretary.**

## Zermatt's electric economy.

Electrification has been taken to the  $n^{\text{th}}$  degree in the Swiss ski resort of the Zermatt. No vehicles with internal combustion engines are allowed. Visitors either travel in by train (the entire Swiss network is electrified) or park and ride down the valley using a special rail shuttle. All taxis and buses are electric. But in the main people walk. Town planners don't need to accommodate petrol stations, car parks or traffic lights. Most impressive is the promenade of holiday makers and residents in the evening, unhindered by cars parked or driving. One has to admit Zermatt is an upmarket resort but the car-free policy is a great leveller as the super wealthy can't intimidate with oversized 4x4s or noisy sports cars, perhaps an indication on how quality public transport can be socially inclusive.



Electric Avenue.

## Improvements to Bristol Temple Meads: Making the most of Plot 6.



Have they lost the plot?

Just the ticket for a rail/bus/tram interchange.

Bristol Temple Meads is a splendid station but it could be even better with some major improvements. It is widely recognised that its location is frustratingly far from the centre of Bristol. There is a ragbag bunch of buses that can take you there. It is a 15' walk from the Arnolfini but pedestrians have to negotiate a dual carriageway (a dual carriageway in the centre of town?) to reach the station concourse. But plot 6 could be used as an interchange plug in Bristol Temple Meads to the rest of the city.



**Munster's monster underground bicycle park just in front of the Hauptbahnhof. It even has photovoltaic panels. I believe there is an underground link to the station.**

There are cycle racks on the station platform and some in front of the station. I believe that Temple Meads has a complex of underground vaults. Could these be converted in to a secure cycle parking area? Together with cycle repair facilities so one could have one's bike repaired whilst travelling on the rails.

Whilst there are plans to rebuild Birmingham's Curzon St retaining the original 1830's entrance, Brunel's old station with extension seems to be long enough to accommodate Eurostar sets. Following electrification, signalling will be managed from Didcot, potentially allowing the signal box to be removed so that the train shed can become a station again.



**So much for forward planning.**



**The new Temple Meads International?**

Enough shed.

<b>When</b>	<b>What</b>	<b>Where</b>	<b>Background</b>
<b>8<sup>th</sup> of April 6-9pm</b>  <b>Not to be missed event!</b>	FoSBR Guest speaker:  David McCallum BA (Hons).  Ebbw Vale reopening.	Halo Café. Gloucester Rd, 200m north of the arches. Nearest station Montpelier.	Project Manager of the reopened Ebbw Valley line that enjoys more the 600,000 trips a year since reopening.
<b>May Day Bank Holiday</b>	Redland Fair	Redland Green	FoSBR stall
<b>Sunday 22 May Noon to 3pm</b>	Celebration of Severn Beach line success, new timetable and FOSBEER Guide	The Barley Mow Pub, 39 Barton Road, St Philips, BS2 OLF Directions; Take side exit from Temple Meads, turn right through car park, cross bridge, pass Ibis hotel on your left, take second left in Chimney Steps Road and pub is 50 metres down on right. Parking on the road is free.	Extra trains, Roast Dinners £8 and Baguettes. Mmm nice.  Plus a children's playground at the Dings.

## **Keep in Touch**

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