

FOSBR: Minutes of AGM

29th January 2016 at Halo Café, Gloucester Road, Bristol

1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed members and speakers to the meeting. There were 29 attendees.

2. Chair's Report (Bernard Lane)

The Chair referred to the "FOSBR Round-up 2015" (attached) to illustrate the plethora of activities in which FOSBR were involved:

- rail trips
- campaign meetings
- submissions to consultations
- questions and statements to council meetings
- attendance at conferences
- newsletters.

2015 was a frustrating year for rail campaigners in Bristol:

- WEP decision to progress Henbury Spur rather than Henbury Loop for MetroWest Phase 2
- announcement of 18 month delay to MetroWest Phase 1 Portishead (May 2019 -> December 2020)
- 3-year delay to electrification as far as Bristol (2017->2020).

Highlights of the year included a group walk to Pilning to catch the one westbound train a week, a group trip to Newcourt to see the newly constructed station and receiving over 700 responses to the FOSBR Bristol travel survey.

The Chair is stepping down due to imminent re-location to Devon and thanked committee members for their contributions: Lionel ("voice of reason"), Tina ("energy"), Julie ("indefatigability"), Carol (web), Tony (newsletter), Rob (analysis).

3. Speakers

Chris Austin, OBE

Chris Austin is co-author of "Disconnected: Broken Links in Britain's Rail Policy".

Chris is a board member of the Association of Community Rail Partnerships, secretary of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Heritage Railways and a member of the Railway Heritage Designation Advisory Board of the Science Museum. He is chairman of the Avocet Line Community Rail Forum in Devon, and the West Somerset Steam Railway Trust and is an active volunteer on the WSR. He chairs the Infrastructure and Networks Group for Railfuture. He has previously worked for ATOC, Strategic Rail Authority and British Rail.

Chris made his talk very interesting for the Bristol audience by showing some 1960s slides of Clifton, Sea Mills, Ashton Gate and the "Fry's Angels" trains to Somerdale in Keynsham.

The decline of rail in the Bristol area started before the Beeching report:

- Radstock-Frome - closed 1958
- Portishead - closed 1964
- Henbury – closed 1964
- Severn Beach-Pilning – through services stopped 1964
- Yate (original) – closed 1965
- Bath Green Park – closed 1966
- Midland Line to Mangotsfield - closed 1970
- St Annes Station and Saltford – both closed 1970

Chris's book "Disconnected!" cites local examples where branch closures did not make economic sense, such as the Yatton-Clevedon closure in 1966 and Portishead line closure in 1964 at a time when Portishead population was projected to increase from 6,500 to 10,000 by 1981. Note: the Portishead 2015 population is 22,000 forecast to increase to 30,000.

Recent re-openings of passenger lines surpass expectations. The re-opened Borders railway from Edinburgh (Newcraighall) to Tweedbank has carried 350,000 passengers in the first 3 months – double the expected ridership. Traders in towns along the line are benefitting: in Melrose (2 mile walk from Tweedbank) hotels have had a 40% increase in bookings; Sir Walter Scott's house in Abbotsford (1 mile walk from Tweedbank) has had to extend opening hours. The Ebbw Vale line was not re-opened in 2008 for primarily transport benefits but the Welsh government foresaw local re-generation. The link has worked on both these counts - passenger numbers are 450% above forecasts.

To close, Chris offered us some key pointers to good campaigning:

- making the case
- forming alliances ("a divided house will fall")
- building political support
- raising awareness constructively
- positive engagement
- arguing from a passenger perspective.

Keith Walton - Severnside Community Rail Partnership (SCRP)

SCRP are sponsoring a "makeover" of Severn Beach station over the next few weeks. This includes new fencing, a shelter and a new entrance. The makeover has been funded by SCRCP, the Association of Community Rail Partnerships (ACORP), South Gloucester council, the Heritage Lottery Fund (via Forgotten Landscapes project) and GWR.

The shelter will help to keep children dry during railway familiarisation trips to the seaside that SCRCP offer for Year 6 children at any primary school within walking distance of a (wider) Bristol station. 25% of these children have never travelled by train before.

SCRCP have published their latest progress report and it can be downloaded from their website: <http://severnside-rail.org.uk>.

Break

4. Brief Talks

Chris Banks – Friends of Ashton Gate Station

Chris talked about the progress of the campaign to re-open Ashton Gate station. The stadium has widespread support from residents and from local business such as Bristol City Football Club, the Tobacco Factory, University of the West of England (Bower Ashton campus) and Imperial Tobacco.

A petition attracted more than 5,000 signatures and triggered a debate by Bristol City Council which demonstrated cross-party support.

Friends of Ashton Gate Station consider that the original feasibility studies hugely under-estimated passenger numbers, even if the assumption is made that the station cannot open on football match days due to risk of overcrowding. The CH2MHill report ignored the re-development of Ashton Gate stadium as a 900-seat 7-day a week conference centre.

The campaign website is: <http://ashtongatestation.org.uk/>

Bernard Kennedy – ASLEF

Bernard commended Dave Woods' regular articles in The (Bristol) Post and Tina's presentation at the Railfuture (Severnside) Bristol conference. He also described how Network Rail delays are impacting on freight paths in the Bristol area, such as the delivery of London waste to Severnside via Portbury.

Rob Dixon – FOSBR

"Save MetroWest"

Rob gave updates on the Portishead MetroWest Phase 1 delays and stated the need to keep pressuring the DfT and the WEP to deliver in a timely manner the projects that already been promised, such as MetroWest Phase 2. Henbury Loop will be re-signalled to passenger standards as a diversionary route whilst Filton Bank is four-tracked and electrified.

Tina Biggs – FOSBR

"Public feedback from Rail Map Campaign"

Tina discussed the survey data included in the FOSBR submission to the WEP Joint Transport Study. Respondents provided valuable feedback on the lack of rail/bus or bus/bus integration and also on the lack of cross-city and radial connectivity.

Tina mentioned the possibility of devolution to a combined transport authority with a "metro mayor" in 2018 and the opportunity for a £1 billion loan to be made available by the treasury to the 4 local authorities for investment in local infrastructure. FOSBR needs to offer local politicians a clear vision of how a proportion of that £1 billion could be wisely spent on rail.

5. Treasurer's Report

- Current account balance at end of 2015 was £933.
- There are currently 182 private members, and 11 contributing organizations: ASLEF, Bristol Civic Society, Bristol Pubs Group, Bristol Respect, Cotham Labour Party, Friends of Bridgwater Station, Henbury Community Council, Pilning and Severn Beach Parish Council, Railfuture (Severnside), Ramblers Association, RMT.

[Note: The "Treasurer's report for year ending 31st December 2015" was distributed with the agenda.]

6. Minutes from the previous AGM (23rd January 2015)

These were accepted without amendment.

Proposed by: Bernard Kennedy

Seconded by: Tony Lloyd

7. Elections to the Committee

A new FOSBR chairman was elected unopposed - Rob Dixon.

Proposed by: David Redgewell

Seconded by: Bernard Kennedy
Otherwise the committee remains unchanged.

Bernard Lane was presented with a campaign scrapbook to thank him for his years as Chair.

Meeting closed 9:00pm