

Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways (FoSBR)

DRAFT Minutes of Annual General Meeting

(to be ratified at next AGM)

29th January 2021 – 7.30pm

Held via Zoom – a video of the meeting can be found on the FoSBR YouTube Channel [here](#)



1. Welcome from the Chair (Rob Dixon)

The Chair welcomed members, speakers and visitors to the meeting. There were 36 attendees.

A [FOSBR 2020 Roundup](#) had been circulated with meeting papers.

2020 has been dominated by Covid. Passenger numbers fell to a third of previous levels (even before current lockdown). Government recognised importance of rail with Emergency Measures – is this the end of franchising?

FoSBR has been active in remote meetings and on online social media and website. If members have anything they'd like to write about/see covered, get in touch.

A FoSBR 25th Celebration event could not happen – Julie and Teresa arranged socially-distanced FoSBR Six trips out on local rail, when restrictions allowed.

In 2020 Andy and Tina left the committee, and we said a sad goodbye to our friend Mike Baker who did the locomotive artwork at Stapleton Road.

Real progress has been made in 2020 – the ongoing Bristol East Junction track remodelling will enable the MetroWest Phase 1 ½ hour service. WECA decided to extend MetroWest Phase 1 to Westbury, and MetroWest Phase 2 to Gloucester.

Temple Meads refurbishment has started, this will include opening an entrance east to Bristol University Campus in Temple Quarter.

Portway P&R is due to be December 2021, as is the ½ hour service between Avonmouth and Westbury.

We have more certainty about MetroWest Phases 1b and 2, Portishead is due in 2024 and Henbury in 2023 – these dates still seem some way in distance but get marginally closer

The WECA Rail Plan shows long-term ambition with plans for Charfield, a loop at Chittening to allow passenger trains from Severn Beach to Parkway (with passenger services using the Henbury Loop west of Henbury station). WECA and the DfT have both published rail decarbonisation strategies.

There are also issues we will need to address post-Covid. The government have simultaneously said they will “Build Back Better” whilst cutting rail infrastructure budget by £1billion. Some potential stations have not made it onto concrete local plans, eg, Coalpit Heath, Horfield/Lockleaze.

Passengers will need encouragement to return to rail - this will need very regular local services. Frequency of service is one theme of tonight's meeting.

2. Speaker: Nicholas Falk ([Urbed](#))

Planning for Green Recovery

Nicholas' complete presentation can be found on the FoSBR YouTube Channel [here](#) – worth a watch.

(1) Why planning fails to deliver better results in UK?

The system is reactive to development proposals, needs to be a community vision not “Punch & Judy”. If power is devolved to local level – to tie up development and infrastructure can be tied together, eg, Paris ZAC Claude Bernard – exemplary integration project, compared to disjointed Bristol's UWE/M32/M4/M5 area.

(2) Where could finance come from?

Land Value Capture harnesses uplift in land values due to improved connectivity.

This finances the improved connectivity, eg, Singapore, Orestad/Copenhagen, DLR/Docklands, and Kings Cross.

Concentration of growth around transit lines can be done in Oxford and also applies to Bristol. Appropriate spatial planning can avoid flood plains and AONBs.

Swift Rail - urban transit system (NR standard) with “turn up and go” services – more capacity for local services if long-distance ridership does not recover post-Covid. Also need integration with trams, eg, Grenoble is 1/3 size of Bristol with 8 tram lines radiating to disadvantaged areas, Freiburg also has tram links to new suburbs.

(3) Can Bristol adopt a Green Recovery Plan?

Post-Covid we may need to re-invent dying town centres, for this we need to combine: Action, Access, Attractions, Amenity, Agency.

3. Q&A

Sue suggested that the presentation be passed on to Marvin Rees (Bristol City Council).

Rob suggested inclusion of Don Davies (North Somerset Council).

Ben said in his planning experience that local plans tend to get trumped by private developers paying piecemeal Section 106. What level is most appropriate for strategic planning/visioning?

Nicholas responded all levels but major projects need leadership of development corporations.

WECA is the appropriate size body for regional spatial planning in the Bristol “travel to work” area.

4. Speakers: Andrew Braddock ([Bath & Bristol Trams Group](#)) and Gavin Smith ([TfGB](#))

Andrew and Gavin’s complete presentations can be found on the FoSBR YouTube [here](#) – worth a watch.

Andrew Braddock - The Case for Trams and their benefits for cities and towns

Trams are good: jobs, local economy, sustainability, air quality, local environment. Every Euro invested in public transport creates Euro 5-5.3 of added economic value (German study)

In 1985 the French government initiated re-birth of tram mode of transport by requiring all urban areas with population of 50k+ to produce a local transport plan. Plans were funded by state subvention but mainly by local transport tax on employers. Mayor is bridge between state government, local authorities and operating consortia. In France risk rests with public sector, in UK transfer of risk to private sector has resulted in repeated bail-outs.

The outcome is that in last 34 years, France inaugurated 28 new tram networks, with more on way. Average time from inception to start of service is 6 years – compare this to UK.

Andrew’s advice to Marvin Rees (Bristol Mayor) is: don’t dig an underground. Public transport belongs in the streets so take the cars out. Tram introduction results in increased bus use due to interchange opportunities.

Some examples:

Nantes – good urban design,

Grenoble low-floor trams, level access

Strasbourg – iconic tram shelter

Bordeaux – ground level power supply results in no OLEs but construction costs are 2x that of OLE and maintenance costs are 8x that of OLE as subject to rain and ice

Orleans – image to demonstrate OLEs invisible

Nice – tram is source of municipal pride

Trams are cheaper than buses in whole-life costs, as the major operational expenditure for buses is drivers in the relatively low-capacity vehicles.

Post-Covid – congestion will be a problem as people have returned to their cars as will air quality, including Oslo effect of non-exhaust particulates – another reason to develop trams rather than buses.

Gavin Smith – TfGB – an integrated transport plan for Greater Bristol

Gavin asked for a show of hands for those who have seen trams in UK, eg, Edinburgh, Manchester, Sheffield, Nottingham, Birmingham, Croydon, Cardiff (planned). There was good response in meeting, but sometimes there is low awareness of tram resurgence.

TfGB have been working with ZeroWest and have produced a set of integration plans:

Traffic Management Plan

Parking Plan

Bus Plan

Rapid Transit Plan – some original tram routes, plus ring road for radial and orbital routes, interchanges with rail and bus, feeder buses to terminal tram stops

FoSBR is very focussed on MetroWest but other corridors will need trams, eg, Kingswood, south Bristol.

TfGB received a £28k grant to further plans from the “Foundation of Integrated Transport”. TfGB got consultancy advice from LRTA on how to make plans happen. The LRTA suggested a pilot line from P&R on M5 to Cribbs Causeway, Southmead, Bishopston and City Centre loop.

Bath-Bristol corridor also a priority. TfGB also envisage a tram-train coming from Thornbury-Yate, via Westerleigh, down cycle path to Emersons Green, then running on-road around ring-road and down M32. TfGB also supporting re-opening Clevedon-Yatton link.

5. Q&A

Are TfGB more ambitious than FoSBR rail-wise as they are campaigning for Clevedon-Yatton? Rob said needs discussion.

Dave R said that Marvin Rees’ focus (providing he is re-elected) is on the Bristol-Bath corridor or south Bristol corridor. These corridors can be converted from MetroBus to light rail, linking new housing developments in Whitchurch and Hengrove.

BREAK

6. Formal business

a. Treasurer’s report – Tony Lloyd

A draft treasurer’s report had been circulated with meeting papers – [here](#).

Income vs expenditure had a positive balance of £480 due to lower outgoings as Covid limited outreach opportunities.

Balance in bank at 31st December 2020 was £1230 – Tony considers this money will be needed to promote train passenger confidence after Covid.

T-shirts were printed to celebrate FoSBR 25th Anniversary. Teresa asked that the t-shirt sale income be corrected by +£10 and mentioned that there are still 18 t-shirts in stock with asset value of £90. Contact FoSBR through usual channels if you would like a t-shirt.

b. Elections

No nominations were received for the vacant committee posts, but Rob asked for people to consider whether they would like to help and to contact FoSBR through usual channels.

The committee posts are as follows:

- Chair – Rob Dixon
- Secretary – vacant as Andy McGillivray is no longer performing this role
- Membership Secretary & Treasurer – Tony Lloyd
- Press (including social media) – Carol Durrant
- Campaigns Organiser – vacant as Tina Biggs is no longer performing this role

The above 3 were jointly proposed by Dave Redgewell and seconded by Bernard Kennedy.

The meeting co-opted two committee members who will continue to serve:

- Data Analyst – Terry Miller
- Webmaster – Tim Weekes

Rob suggested that the delayed “FoSBR 25th Anniversary” celebration may be an opportunity for further discussions, as Q&A time in the meeting was limited. It may be also be a suitable as an EGM to co-opt further committee members, should they come forward.

c. Minutes of previous AGM

Teresa reminded the meeting that it was necessary to ratify the minutes of the previous AGM and requested that a correction be made – Teresa is a member of North Bristol Wellbeing Choir NOT Bishopston Ukelele Group.

d. Resolution

The wording of the proposed resolution had been circulated with meeting papers:

“Although MetroWest is bringing much-needed and long-awaited train frequency improvements, FoSBR seeks a 15-minute frequency train service to all Bristol stations for a true metro-style service”.

There was discussion around the following:

- is this is an active campaign goal?
- is this a realistic goal?
- much infrastructure is needed (passing places, signalling) to achieve this goal
- some stations will benefit from a 15-minute service earlier than others
- is this campaign adjustment too soon, should we pocket the ½ hour December service first?
- does campaign adjustment make FoSBR appear “ungrateful” for the ½ hour service?

The meeting voted as follows: 13 in favour of the resolution and 4 against.

7. Regional updates, discussions & AOB

(a) Bernard Kennedy – ASLEF

- (i) Covid: Covid has severely disrupted rail services. Passenger numbers are down, service levels are down, TOCs have found it difficult to have available sufficient operational staff levels to maintain service, due to Covid, self-isolation and shielding. Training has also been difficult with social distancing impossible in a train cab.
- (ii) Bristol East Junction/Bristol Temple Meads: this is a major project and the first time since the 1970s that the signalling has been renewed. New Bristol East Gantry is already up. An extra line will be created so that the 4 Filton Bank tracks continue into the station (rather than reducing to 3) plus the 2 lines from London. There will be disruption throughout the year but this capacity improvement is needed for the ½ hour service from Avonmouth to Westbury in December.
- (iii) Bernard announced a £300 donation from ASLEF to FoSBR – thank you ASLEF!

(b) Nigel Bray – Railfuture

How do we attract passengers back to rail?

- (i) Restoring people’s confidence – spread the word when appropriate that the railway environment is safe and comfortable
- (ii) Marketing services – under the current Emergency Measures Agreements, TOCs cannot market services, Community Rail Partnerships will be able to market services, visitor attractions will be able to market services when non-essential travel is allowed again
- (iii) Changes to ticketing - GWR are awaiting DFT approval for flexible season tickets. Railfuture consider that rail card holders should be compensated where they have been unable to travel due to Covid.

(c) Keith Walton – [Sevenside Community Rail Partnership](#)

Keith picked up Nigel’s point that CRPs will market services when they are allowed to do so, with walks from stations, family outings, events on trains.

During Covid, SCRP have continue to work with communities, issuing masks, engaging in artwork when possible, such as Stapleton Road. More artwork is coming in Fox Park under the 4-track bridge, sponsored by Network Rail.

There is now a community group for St Andrews Road Station. The Secret Garden at Avonmouth station has continued to produce food for local people and Avonmouth Community Centre.

The SCRP Annual Report is due out at end of January.

(d) Owen Polley – [ACORN](#)

ACORN is a member-led Community Union, tending to work with lower income communities. They have focussed on tenants' rights, council tax, local environments and public transport. They do creative actions such as campaign for bus franchising by taking to streets with large cardboard bus and forming Bristol's longest bus queue of 100+ people.

Covid has hampered campaigning, but ACORN are gearing up for WECA elections and looking forward to working with TfGB and ZeroWest.

(e) Olga Taylor – [Pilning Station Group](#)

Pilning passenger numbers (ORR) have grown from 46 in 2015/16 to 710 in 2019/20.

PSG applied in June 2020 to the Restoring Your Railways fund. Olga admitted that the application was rushed, but FoSBR materials formed a base. They application was not successful but PSG have been invited to apply to Restoring Your Railways Tranche 3 in March. FoSBR help would be welcomed.

Rob commented on how well PSG keep Pilning in the news, eg, recent coverage in Bristol Post of Severnside "travel desert" and under-used Pilning potential.

(f) The meeting officially closed at 9.43pm, but informal discussions continued until 10.00pm.

Keith confirmed that, to his best knowledge, the ½ hour Avonmouth-Westbury service will come with December 2021 timetable. Tim repeated Bernard's point that Covid is affecting driver training: no drivers, no trains.

David informed the meeting that a legal agreement has now been signed between Bristol City Council, the local authorities, WECA, North Somerset, Network Rail and First Group regarding Portway Parkway and the upgraded service between Avonmouth and Westbury.

Tina thanked FoSBR for her farewell present (FoSBR cup&saucer, plus FoSBR rail plan jigsaw) and spoke of her favourite FoSBR moments over the last 10 years. She recommended that people step up to offer any skills they have to FoSBR as local railway campaigning is fun, rewarding and yields results such as 4-tracking on Filton Bank!