

**Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways (FoSBR)
DRAFT Minutes of Annual General Meeting
(to be ratified at next AGM)
Alma Church Hall, 24th March 2023**



1. Welcome from the Chair (Rob Dixon)

The Chair welcomed members, speakers and visitors to the meeting. There were approximately 30 attendees. The FoSBR 2022 Roundup had been circulated with meeting papers.

60 years since Beeching

Rob was pleased to say that sixty years after the Beeching Report, we have at last seen some progress in reversing some of the cuts it led to. The Portishead railway has finally gained its Development Consent Order – we will keep up the pressure to get this line delivered – and new stations are being delivered at Portway Park & Ride and Ashley Down.

Julie Boston

We were sad to lose Julie Boston, whose campaigning was key in getting Portishead approved. Julie recognised the importance of connecting people and causes, and of having fun doing it. Rob was really glad that Julie saw some of the achievements that she worked on, such as half-hourly cross city services.

The year ahead

In the year ahead we want to make sure that we improve services. It is important in the context of the cost of living crisis, that people use local rail to make sure ridership is still high.

FoSBR will continue to meet with WECA to press for integration between bus and rail services. We are particularly concerned that developments such as the new station at Ashley Down are being implemented without considering bus connections. Integrated journeys have to be easy.

We are also concerned that planning decisions are being made without proper consideration of the impact on future rail projects. Developments such as Longmoor, at Ashton, could potentially limit rail capacity. We will try to prevent this.

With local elections coming up, Rob encouraged members to ask their MPs and councillors what they are doing about transport and to make sure that things are funded. WECA must get the money it needs to fund local services.

We will continue to campaign for better accessibility, and to set out our views for future phases of MetroWest.

Events

We plan to celebrate the start of new half-hourly MetroWest services to Gloucester and Westbury when these commence, and hope to organise other trips for members as the year progresses.

2. Speaker: Dan Okey, Head of Regional Development at GWR

Growth and Communities Team

Dan listed the members of his Growth and Communities Team, all of whom have strong backgrounds in planning or public transport. Their job is to connect with transport operators, local councils, community rail partnerships and other stakeholders and find ways to grow the railway.

The team is very interested in future stations and how people get to them. They worked with South Gloucestershire Council on the Bristol Parkway station masterplan. They employ architects and town planners to help plan integrated transport and to provide better for rail customers.

GWR currently has ten community rail partnerships, and would like to extend this to cover the whole network.

Customer and Communities Improvement Fund

The Customer and Communities Improvement Fund (CCIF) allows GWR to support projects across its network, helping customers, charities, community groups and voluntary organisations to deliver benefit in the communities it serves

As an example, CCIF was used to help Grub Hub in Didcot, who wanted to offer a day out in the summer for communities in deprived local areas with food as part of that experience.

Integrated transport

The Growth and Communities Team is promoting 'Bus branch lines', joining up the bus with the train in terms of timetabling, ticketing, and branding. These are already operating at Totnes and Okehampton in Devon, where GWR have seen a 20% rise in people using the connecting bus. Wiltshire Council are interested in this concept.

Branded cycles and E-bikes will be rolling out as well to support door-to-door services.

Other projects

Dan outlined projects to improve stations at Castle Cary, Reading West, Taunton and Newbury. He pointed out that improving the railway is very painful. It takes a long time and is hard graft. But GWR is proving that we can however do these things. Projects are driven by stakeholder relationships, the industry's plan, annual business plans, and the extent to which these overlap.

Business update

Passenger numbers have recovered to almost 100% of 2019 levels, but revenue is still slightly down. The comparison with pre-COVID levels is becoming less relevant, as things change and grow.

GWR now have a National Rail Contract rather than a franchise, which means they now operate a business plan agreed with the Government. The big structural changes to be implemented as Great British Railways is established are still awaited.

3. Questions and Discussion

There was time for just one question.

An attendee asked:

“What is your vision for the future?”

Dan Okey replied: The business case for reopening the line to Tavistock has been submitted. I think we need to work with what we already have as well. Some of our big stations definitely need looking at: Plymouth, Paignton, Exeter St Davids. We need to reach out and get the basics of those stations sorted out. There's also a lot of train technology as well. What does the future train look like? We are unfortunately still running some old trains, and we need to look forward.

We have some big aspirations, but we need to look at what we have got and how we can make it even better as customer expectations keep growing.

BREAK

4. Updates from the Region

Keith Walton, Severnside Community Rail Partnership

Keith stated that a key theme for Severnside CRP is integrated transport: train and bus connections. The CRP are looking at every station in the WECA and North Somerset area to see what can be done better. Examples are cycle infrastructure at Severn Beach, and coordinating timetables at Weston super Mare and Nailsea.

The CRP employs four qualified teachers to deliver the 'Platform' education scheme, which empowers young people in accessing the railways. Access to this award-winning scheme, which is sponsored by GWR and CrossCounty, is free of charge to schools.

The traditional 'Day Out By Train' activity has suffered because of COVID, but is back running. It has helped people who are hard of hearing, or have dementia, or who are elderly and suffering from loneliness. It has also helped asylum seekers.

Strawberry Line Cycle Adventure Days involve catching a train to Yatton and a guided cycle trip. The CRP has decorated the cycle storing equipment at Yatton station, with a different type of mural that has been received very well.

The CRP continues to support Community Art Work. It recently put a 'pioneers of the railway' gallery at Filton Abbey Wood. Patchway has new artworks, as well as student art Nailsea &

Backwell from Backwell School. It also supports Incredible Edible at Avonmouth station, helping to grow food at the station and cook food for the community there.

Sevenside CRP's annual report should be available soon.

Questions and Answers

Rob Dixon stated that FoSBR is keen to promote the work of Severnsidfe CRP. **Keith** replied that getting volunteers is generally difficult and that the CRP would be more than happy to accept any help our members can offer.

Rob Dixon asked: "In terms of the days out by rail. I work with people with dementia and their carers. How would they access this?"

Keith replied: if you get in touch with Heather Cullimore at Severnside CRP, she can help sort something out. If anyone knows any groups that would benefit, please let me know.

An attendee asked: "Member: have you seen how bad Nailsea and Backwell is for accessibility?"

Keith replied: Nailsea and Backwell has a lot of problems. There's a scheme for a lift, but there are certain points of the platform that don't allow for wheelchairs to be able to turn. The platform itself is getting worse, and will need to be totally redone for that in general.

An attendee stated: "There are a lot of Access for All bids in Bristol. But not enough.

Keith responded: The feasibility of a lot of this is unfortunately not great, but we will still work on it. Thank you all.

David Netherwood introduced himself to the meeting. David is seconded to the committee and is focusing on planning issues such as bus/rail integration at the new station at Ashley Down.

5. Formal Business

a. Minutes of Previous AGM held 28th January 2022 (via Zoom)

The meeting accepted the minutes:

For: 14

Against: 0

There were 5 abstentions.

b. Treasurers report

In the absence of Treasurer Carol Durrant, **Tony Lloyd** presented the report..

Tony thanked the Chair and complimented Carol for the quality of her report.

Expenses decreased by £317 last year. A lot of this was due to lack of printing. Recently we have only produced 2 newsletters a year, though we intend to increase this. Also we now send more newsletters by email, which has reduced costs.

Our bank balance is currently £3746.

Membership has increased from 169 to 188 over last year. Income has fallen slightly but we are still doing quite well.

An attendee asked if we retain the union affiliations?

Tony confirmed that we retain all our union affiliations.

The meeting **accepted** the report:

For: 22

Against: 0

There was 1 abstention.

c. Elections of Officers

No nominations were received, so committee posts were put forward as follows:

- Chair – **Rob Dixon**
- Secretary – **Mark Maggs**
- Membership Secretary & Treasurer – **Carol Durrant**
- Press (including social media) – **Tim Weekes**
- Campaigns Organiser – **Tina Biggs**.

The committee intend to co-opt 2 other committee members.

- Data Analyst – **Terry Miller**
- Newsletter – **Tony Lloyd**

The meeting voted unanimously to **elect** this committee and its co-optees en bloc

d. Amendments to FoSBR constitution

Section 4 of the FoSBR Constitution currently reads:

Subscriptions are due on 1st January at a rate set by the General Meeting. New members joining in November and December will have their subscriptions carried forward to the following December.

proposed that this wording should change to allow memberships to last for 12 months from the *payment date*, as follows:

Subscriptions are paid on an annual basis at a rate set by the General Meeting.

Section 5 of the FoSBR Constitution currently reads:

Officers: A Committee of Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Press Officer and Campaign Secretary shall be elected by the General Meeting. Other members will be co-opted to the Committee as required.

The meeting proposed that this wording should change so that co-opted committee members are approved by a vote at the next General Meeting, as follows:

Officers: A Committee of Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Press Officer and Campaign Secretary shall be elected by the General Meeting. Other members will be co-opted to the Committee as required; these co-opted members must be approved at the next AGM (or EGM) if they are to be re-appointed.

Quorum:

The meeting proposed a new **Section 6** be added to the constitution, as follows:

Resolutions can only be approved at an AGM if 25 or more members are present. There will be a quorum of 4 for committee meetings, which will include a minimum of 2 committee members fulfilling named roles.

There was a discussion around exact numbers needed for a quorum and whether it would be better to express them as a percentage rather than as explicit numbers.

After some discussion it was agreed that the proposed changes should be put to a vote as they stood.

The meeting voted unanimously to **accept** these changes to the constitution.

6. Discussion

There was a general discussion about the need to hold more events. Ideas included opportunities to draw attention to the need for bus/rail integration at the new station at Ashley Down, and supporting new service improvements.

Ann Light suggested a social trip to Severn Beach. These activities are a fun way of getting together.

David Redgewell (?) suggested a trip to Cheltenham to meet with Gloucester Rail Partnership to learn from their experience working with First Group and other rail operators. The importance of continually lobbying the WECA mayor must also be recognised.

Funding decisions are on a knife edge, and lobbying can help, and we need to keep up the pressure for the Henbury line and North Filton

David Netherwood suggested doing a visioning workshop for some of the new stations (St Anne's Park, Ashton Gate etc.) and invite local members of the community to go to the sites and have a look at what the community wants.

Rob Dixon felt we should be looking at outreach to the local community to tell them about what services are available. We could consider posting flyers through letterboxes explaining that. By advertising what services are available, we are also advertising ourselves.

An attendee suggested that we could advertise this in local newspapers. **Rob Dixon** agreed that we should consider this.

The meeting closed at about 9.30pm

Tim Weekes
on behalf of the Committee