

***DRAFT* Minutes of Annual General Meeting**

(to be ratified at next AGM)

Friday 8th March 2024 – 7.15pm



1. Welcome from the Chair (Rob Dixon)

Unfortunately Rob was not in the room due to being stricken with flu but he did record a video address.

Rob welcomed members, speakers and visitors to the meeting. There were 32 attendees.

A [Roundup of 2023](#) had been circulated with meeting papers.

- Half-hourly Bristol-Gloucester and Bristol-Westbury services were introduced from May 2023
- Portway Park & Ride station opened in August 2023
- Ashley Down station is projected to open in summer 2024 – we have continued to campaign for a better bus/rail interchange here and Bristol City Council have finally included a southbound stop near Ashley Down station in the Muller Road consultation
- WECA are pursuing feasibility reports on various transport infrastructure projects. There is a summary on the Bristol Rail Campaign website [here](#)
 - o electrification
 - o new stations (BRC are keen to keep all potential station sites in play)
 - o station accessibility and interchange improvements

- o possible increased services on Severn Beach and Henbury lines
- o MetroWest Connectivity to the south including 4-tracking to Parson Street
- We will continue to campaign for tram trains as a potential way of creating a rapid transit system for Bristol with rail as the segregated spine. We are concerned that WECA rejected tram trains without consulting NR or taking future infrastructure into account.
- Rob thanked Carol who is standing down as Treasurer, other members of Committee are standing for re-election.
- In 2024 we hope to have more diverse social events and outreach opportunities – train trips, pubs, cafes, walks – many thanks to Ann for leading walks in 2023.
- We were sad to lose Lionel, a long-standing FoSBR member, who distributed timetables, newsletters and helped at stalls.
- In 2024 we will leaflet to promote stations and services, eg, Redland and Stapleton Road. Sadly, strikes seem no closer to resolution but there is a risk of service cuts. Since pandemic passenger numbers have recovered but revenue is down due to lower numbers of peak, first class commuters.
- In the Bristol area, we have been very lucky to see service increases.
- There is great potential for rail in the West of England.

2. Speakers: Steve Penaluna and Tom Belletty, MetroWest Phase 1 Team

We had an informative presentation from Steve Penaluna and Tom Belletty of the MetroWest Phase 1 team about the Portishead line re-opening.

Steve and Tom outlined the overall MetroWest Programme, which is delivering seven new stations, five new or enhanced rail services, and improvements to Temple Meads and other stations. They reminded us that the programme constitutes a £350 million investment which is committed through to 2027/8.

They went on to give the background to the Portishead reopening project, starting with 9km of existing freight line and 5km of disused railway.

The current plans are for an hourly service using 3-car trains. Services will operate 18 hours per day from around 6am to around 11.30pm, Monday to Saturday. On Sundays trains will operate around for up to 10 hours. Journey time to Bristol Temple Meads will be 23 minutes, and trains will call at Pill, Parson Street, and Bedminster. This will provide a three trains per hour service at Bedminster and Parson Street.

The team are currently exploring the opportunity to link the Portishead Line with the planned Henbury Line, rather than just operating a shuttle to Bristol Temple Meads.

We were reminded that the Development Consent Order process, which allowed this project to go ahead, involved 989 documents, many of which concerned environmental issues. In 2022 the Department for Transport became the lead client for this scheme. This means that when the full business case which they are funding is approved, they will accept the cost risk of the project.

Network Rail will deliver the railway, associated highway works and ecological work where this interfaces with the railway. North Somerset Council and WECA will deliver other work packages in support of this.

In order to reduce costs, the project will not fund a station building at Portishead. There is talk of reducing the length of the platform from 5-car to 3-car, but this is still under discussion.

North Somerset and WECA intend to submit the full business case in April 2024.

The Portishead Line runs through an area of extreme environmental sensitivity, including Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Areas (SPA) and RAMSAR sites. Each area has its own protected features, including bats, birds, flora and fauna. Scheme impacts from construction and operation had to take all of these features into consideration.

Whitebeams have been a particular focus. Where they have seeded in brickwork of tunnels, they need removing. However Bristol University, in collaboration with Paignton Zoo, have successfully grown over 200 whitebeams for replanting.

The project also required a Habitats Regulations Assessment because of the likely significant effects on 'European Sites' (Regulation 8 of the Habitats Regulations, inc. designated SACs and SPAs). Network Rail's 'permitted development rights' do not apply within an SAC or SPA.

As the old track was disused for 30 years, it is treated as if it was never there for ecology purposes. Environmental work on the line has included planting more than 250 new trees along the A369 to provide an alternative bat corridor, installing 1200m of reptile fencing, moving over 3,500 slow worms and 100 grass snakes, phased mowing (to keep reptiles off), badger sett construction and bird and bat box installation.

Steve and Tom took questions during the presentation:

Q: Will there be a passing loop for freight/passenger trains around Pill viaduct? Will that limit the possibility to upgrade to a better than hourly service?

A: The Longmoor Village development may prove more of a challenge due to the way that it complicates alternative access to the Ashton Vale trading estate (currently accessed via Winterstoke Road level crossing).

Steve undertook to expand on this answer by email after the meeting. In this email, he said:

"A passing loop is not required for the intended service pattern. The line will be twin tracked through Pill with a new junction somewhere west of the viaduct to provide a branch for freight off to the port and the branch for passengers off to Portishead. Should it be required in the future there is nothing the scheme is proposing now that would stop an extra junction further west to create a passing loop. However, whether it would be needed to provide a more frequent service would be looked at as a separate project with separate funding, business case and major processes"

Q: What will be bus interchange at Portishead station?

A: (from floor) There is a Bus Service Improvement Plan in progress for Portishead.

Q: What will facilities be at Portishead station and have Portishead Town Council been approached about financial assistance for better facilities?

A: It is possible that there may be a refreshments van. Team will check council input.

Q: Will there be bus stops at Pill station?

The answer to this question was unclear. Post-meeting note: Service X4 currently stops on Station Road, approximately 140m from the new station site.

Q: Will there still be additional trains at peak hours?

Steve responded to this question later by email, as follows:

"The infrastructure to be provided by the project would allow an 'hourly plus' service (approx. a 45 min service) at the morning and evening peaks. This would be the train operator's decision, as it is dependent in part on the number of train sets available and whether the Portishead line operates solely as a branch or for through services beyond Temple Meads. Discussions continue to take place about this."

Q: What will be the construction duration?

A: 2.5 years, possibly first train in 2027 (much caveated)

Q: Is there a risk with 3-car trains that Bristol-bound trains will be full before Pill?

A: There are still discussions around 3-car/5-car platform length. Team have taken on board the success of recent station openings such as Okehampton.

Post-meeting note: The recent planning application for Portishead Station states that the platform will be 126m long. We believe this will accommodate a 5-car train.

Q: What is the next major hurdle for the project?

A: Submission of Full Business Case in April

Q: What is the lowest point on the line? Are there risks from sea level rise?

A: The Environment Agency were only concerned with possible flooding around one of the compounds in Clanage Road. The track is on an embankment next to the Avon.

Q: Are Bristol Port Company making a financial contribution?

A: No. BPC are understandably keen to protect their freight paths of 1 train per hour.

Q: What is the biggest risk to the project?

A: DfT is a major funder who can be swayed by political landscape, such as a general election.

Q: Have the team realized that leisure demand may be high, Portishead being a nice place and a convenient distance from Bristol.

A: Yes

Q: Why does Patchway still only have an hourly service?

A: (from floor) The Transport for Wales consultation on better cross-border services may be our best hope for service improvements at Patchway.

Q: Why is the new Henbury station platform designed on a siding? Is this passive provision for Henbury Loop or will it in fact make it more difficult to re-instate Henbury Loop to passengers?

“The infrastructure at Henbury Station will provide a 'turn back' facility for passenger services that will serve the Henbury line, enabling them to turn around to complete the return journey from Henbury. The platform design will enable passenger services to call at the station without blocking the line and the existing freight paths. The bi-directional platform will also mean that passengers will be able to access the services without having to cross the tracks via a bridge. The infrastructure is being designed to not preclude through services should a loop option, connecting to the Severn Beach Line, become feasible in the future.”

Q: Does everyone realise that Dan Norris WECA is subsidizing MetroWest services with £35m over 3 years?

A: (rhetorical)

Q: As a train driver who drove freight trains up the line to Portbury after 2002 re-opening, why oh why was the line not upgraded to passenger standard at that point?

A: (Those present shared the frustration.)

Q: Can Ashton Gate station be re-opened?

A: Ashton Gate is included in the WECA New Stations Study which is a separate piece of work.

Q: Where is there public access to see the work that is happening?

A: Marsh Lane Bridge and Sheepway Bridge overlook the line.

Comment from attendee: I attended the Portishead Railway Group AGM last month and it was moving to see people who have campaigned for the line re-opening for 50 years being so close to seeing their goal achieved.

BREAK

3. Local updates

Ashley Down – Tina Biggs talked of submitting questions to WECA and Bristol City Council meetings around the lack of bus/rail interchange at Ashley Down. BCC have finally included a southbound stop near Ashley Down station in the Muller Road consultation papers which seems to be a positive development.

Montpelier – Ann Light of the station adoption group talked of the successful campaign to raise funds for a gate and gardening tool cupboard under the steps at Montpelier station.

Redland – Ann talked also of concerns for Redland station building now that the tenants Hamilton and Hodson have moved out. The owner is ArchCo and the roof needs repairs. The platform canopy also needs repairs. Access to the station is non-ideal as it crosses private land and is poorly lit. There is a large new station totem on Redland Grove which residents were surprised by.

4. Speaker: Tim Weekes, is a CIO structure right for Bristol Rail Campaign?

Tim did a short presentation on whether a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) structure would be appropriate for Bristol Rail Campaign.

He explained that a CIO is a relatively recent organisational structure, overseen by the Charity Commission, which could suit us.

FoSBR is an 'Unincorporated Organisation', which puts limits on how we operate and increases the risks of personal legal liability. The CIO structure creates a legal entity, protecting members from personal liability and making it easier and cheaper to obtain services such as insurance and admin software. We may also be able to claim Gift Aid on members' subscriptions. We think it would also improve our credibility.

We recognise that this would be a big change, and potentially involve a lot of work. We have already spent some time working on a new, much more comprehensive constitution, which we would ask members to approve before applying to the Charity Commission.

The intention of this is to lay foundations which would allow our campaign to grow and evolve, while keeping alive the 'soul' and spirit of FoSBR.

Tim pointed out that the work we have done so far shows that even if we do not go ahead with this change, our current constitution has some important omissions and will need to be updated.

Q&A:

Q: The CIO registration process is very slow?

A: Yes, this is a longer term plan.

Q: CIOs typically tend to be risk-averse? Would the new organisation lose some of the original FoSBR campaigning spirit?

A: Good question, we would hope not. There are risks in NOT moving to a new structure.

Q: Will Bristol Rail Campaign fulfil the criteria to be a CIO?

A: The Charities Commission would review our application.

Vote: Should we take steps to set up a CIO in the name of Bristol Rail Campaign?

For: 21

Against: 0

Abstention: 4

5. Formal business

- a. Elections

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

- Chair – Rob Dixon
- Secretary – Mark Maggs
- Membership Secretary & Treasurer – Tony Lloyd (previously Carol Durrant)
- Press (including social media) – Tim Weekes
- Campaigns Organiser – Tina Biggs
- Data Analyst – Terry Miller as co-opted committee member

The above committee was jointly proposed “en bloc” by David Redgewell and seconded by Carol Durrant. There were no votes against.

b. Treasurer’s report – Carol Durrant

The [2023 treasurers report](#) had been circulated with meeting papers.

During 2023 our expenditure was almost identical to our income, income being £2150 and expenditure being £2155.

Many thanks to our 200 members for their subscriptions and generous donations.

Expenditure was up by £1327 from the previous year for several reasons:

(a) we produced 3 newsletters, 2 out of 3 in the more expensive colour format which we hope members are enjoying

(b) we held an in-person AGM, rather than a Zoom meeting as in 2022 and 2021

(c) we printed 40 t-shirts with our new Bristol Rail Campaign logo, this expense will be recouped.

The balance in bank at end-2023 was £3740. The healthy balance will enable us to source materials, banners, etc under our new branding as Bristol Rail Campaign.

c. Minutes of previous AGM

Unfortunately we ran out of time to ask the meeting to approve the [minutes of the 2023 AGM](#), so we will carry this action forward to the next General Meeting.

6. The meeting closed at 9.25pm.