

Campaigners concern at rumours of station closure

Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways (FOSBR) are disappointed to hear rumours that Network Rail intends to close Pilning railway station in South Gloucestershire. We cannot say we are surprised since it has suffered from a poor “service” of one train in each direction since 2006, when it was reduced from a daily to a weekly service in each direction. (This is known as a “parliamentary service” - see note 1).

Pilning has the future potential to serve the extensive industrial and housing development proposed by our local authorities at Severnside. It is expected that 25,000 new jobs will be created in the area. Pilning is on the line from Cardiff to Bristol so would enable workers to travel to work from a variety of locations and give local people more options when travelling to work.

For that reason FOSBR would like to see Pilning station retained and have an improved service. In our response to the West of England authorities' Spatial Plan and Transport Study consultations in January we proposed that Pilning should be served by a twice daily weekday service enabling commuters from Severnside to get to work. At present there is no public transport from Severnside to Bristol's North Fringe. FOSBR also proposed that a new station be built to serve Severnside at Chittening on a future Henbury Loop (2).



FOSBR campaigners at Pilning station

FOSBR suspect that this closure plan is due to the electrification programme. Network Rail are raising bridges along the route to ensure that there is enough room for the wires to run underneath. We believe that they are reluctant to raise the bridge at Pilning and wish to remove it instead. This would remove access to one of the platforms.

Rob Dixon, FOSBR Chair said, "While we appreciate that Network Rail do not want to spend money on a little used station, Pilning is little used because it does not have a meaningful service. It is within walking distance of proposed industrial and housing developments so has the potential to be a useful and well used station, which would provide workers and local people with an alternative to the private car. At present they have no such alternative. The increased passenger numbers travelling to Severn Beach and St Andrews Road (with a train only every two hours) shows the demand is already there and will only increase. Network Rail must keep this station open. We will oppose any attempt to close it."

Tony Lloyd, FOSBR campaigner said, "Should the station be closed and found to be needed after all, reopening would be compromised by the costs involved – consultants' reports, Network Rail's investment management process, etc. - which would make it expensive and create long delays. As it is bound to be needed in the future, closure would be a false economy. FOSBR would object strongly to any closure proposal."

The FOSBR campaign is supported by David McCloud, landlord of The Plough at Pilning (pictured below), who has collected over 40 signatures for a petition: "We the undersigned are concerned about the possibility of Pilning Station being closed. We recognise that Pilning is a future growth area for industry and housing and call on Network Rail to keep this station open so that Great Western Railway can restore a daily commuter service."

Notes for editors:

(1) It is common for stations to have services reduced to "prove" that there is no demand. This is what has happened to Pilning. In 2006 it was reduced from a daily to a weekly service. Such a service is known as a "parliamentary service" as it fulfills the requirement for a station to be technically open but with a meaningless service in order to avoid going through the closure process.

(2) The line from Avonmouth to Bristol runs via Henbury and is known as the Henbury Loop. FOSBR and others are campaigning for this to be reopened to passengers. This transport scheme is our priority for the period after 2020-1 when the MetroWest rail project is delivered. Our other priorities are new stations at Ashton Gate; Charfield; Coalpit Heath (for Winterbourne and Emersons Green); Corsham; to the South of Bristol near Flax Bourton (for Long Ashton and Bristol Airport); Saltford. We also want to see an investigation into the case and viability of a station at St Annes.



David McCloud, landlord of The Plough, Pilning