

Newsletter

Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways

Number 69

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REGIONAL ASSEMBLY GIVES RAIL THE COLD SHOULDER!!!

Recently the South West Regional Assembly (**SWRA**) had the opportunity to bid for money from the government for transport. Members of FOSBR and Transport for Greater Bristol Alliance have attended recent meetings to lobby for the inclusion of rail schemes in this bid and for the prioritisation of public transport.

Unfortunately the region – dominated by **shire counties** – decided to fund rural road schemes ahead of urban public transport projects. We want the region to change its priorities: by delaying schemes like the South Devon Link Road and the Westbury Bypass and bringing forward public transport projects, particularly rail, these schemes would truly benefit the the whole region during this current recession.

Rail schemes shunted to the back of the queue ...

Most of the urban and public transport schemes in Bristol, Gloucester, Swindon, Exeter and Plymouth have been pushed to the very end of the bid period and then only if any money is left over. Like all other major cities in the region, Bristol has come off badly.

The Greater Bristol Metro project and the Hengrove to North Fringe rapid transit scheme aren't scheduled until 2017 onwards. (The Metro scheme includes new platforms at Bristol Parkway and Weston-Super-Mare, new track between Worle and Weston, new rolling stock and facilities to let trains reverse at Yate). It would benefit the **whole region** by removing bottlenecks in Bristol, thereby improving services to Wiltshire, Somerset, Gloucester and Wales.

Portishead must wait until at least 2014!

Although the Portishead rail reopening is in the programme, it will not be funded until 2014 at the very earliest, and then only if a future government continues with the regional funding system. Since Labour is changing it and the Conservatives say they will abolish it, the future of all these schemes seems now uncertain.

The region has **ignored** the government's criteria for projects. Schemes must be in major areas of economic importance or in areas of future population growth; they must also be on **regionally significant routes** and should **not lead to increased carbon emissions**. Unlike the schemes in the West of England, which have been thoroughly prepared, the road schemes given a high priority do not meet these criteria. Some have not even been assessed.

The rail improvements would be much cheaper than the prioritised rural road schemes and would benefit a far wider geographical area. In addition other road schemes have been "parachuted in" at the last minute, such as the A30 Temple project and the A303 - which took a 10% slice of the money!

Rural Roads Stupidity

We've been arguing that the region's decision to build rural roads is **stupid**, particularly during a recession. The SWRA should be helping the economy by supporting schemes in places where jobs are, like Bristol, Swindon and Exeter. This decision **won't** help the economy, it **won't** help people get to work, and it **won't** build the public transport schemes that we desperately need. Unless we get these transport improvements right and get them right **now**, the whole region will suffer.

We need these things TODAY – not in ten or fifteen years time!

Please write to Ben Bradshaw (Minister for the South West, bradshawb@parliament.uk) and to your local MP. Ask them to change the priorities so rail and public transport are prioritised **ahead** of rural roads. Copy in the cabinet member for transport at your local council.

Thank you – Rob Dixon

ACTION STATIONS! * ACTION STATIONS! * ACTION STATIONS!

When making the FOSBR film last year (see www.youtube.com), unfortunately Redland was omitted due to technical difficulties with the camera. This brought a vociferous response from a FOSBR member, whose home station is Redland.

So, for some months now, having been landed with the job of FOSBR newsletter editor, I have been thinking of new content and have been considering a series of "station" articles. So, to put matters right, the first Action Stations article is all about Redland Station.



Pictured is a sketch view of Redland station in 1912. The station had opened in April 1897 and was not originally planned when the line to Clifton opened in 1874. Redland came about after a campaigning local vicar finally convinced the Great Western Railway that a station at Redland was really needed.

By the time of the sketch, Redland employed 13 full time staff, a number that seems inconceivable by the standards of today.

But back then, the station was very much the heart of the community and it was the main link to the outside world, both for passengers and parcels.

The original entrance to Redland station was from Redland Grove, via a substantial ticket office located next to the bridge. There were buildings on both platforms. For many years, there was also a signal box at Redland, though it was only manned at particularly busy times, its last recorded use being 1954.

As with most stations on the line, Redland was manned up until the rationalisation of the late 1960's. The line was reduced to single track, the fine ticket office was demolished and a new entrance established from South Road.

Today, Redland is used by the many local residents as well as a fair few people who park in the surrounding streets and complete their journey into town by train.

The station is convenient for Redland High School for Girls, Bannatyne's Health Club, Gloucester Road shops and Redland Park is directly opposite. Bus services 8 & 9 stop on the main road above the station.



Your railway needs YOU!

We'll see YOU down at the Station!

FOSBR

FOSBR Mailbag

Dear FOSBR,

How refreshing that local LibDem MP Stephen Williams is championing the railways in our region. I am impressed.

Unfortunately the railway is playing catch up because of years of under-investment. It is being ignored by politicians, local decision makers and developers. A prime example is the proposed development at Ashton Vale; a main railway line runs through this development but no mention is made of providing a new railway station. WHY?

I applaud Stephen Williams MP for his Early Day Motion and the LibDems across the South West, including Steve Webb in Northavon, for supporting him.

What is needed now is for all the local Bristol MPs to put forward an Early Day Motion highlighting the under utilised local railway system in Bristol - and calling for immediate action. The local Bristol lines, including Portishead and the Henbury loop, need to be invested in to bring these important routes back into use for the 21st century.

South Bristol Supporter

*Meanwhile, over in Melksham, the local rail service consists of just **two** trains per day – The local campaign group has understandably asked for our support!*

Dear FOSBR,

I would be very grateful indeed if your members would consider signing our pledge for an appropriate TransWilts Salisbury-Swindon passenger rail service, and ask others to do the same. Please visit the link below to sign and support us:

www.transwilts.org.uk/pledge.html

Lee Fletcher

Dear FOSBR

In January, I scrapped my car and took to the trains, buses and walking on foot. I have to say, this has been a very enjoyable experience. Three months on, not only am I feeling much fitter and far less stressed, I have reduced my monthly transport budget around Bristol to less than the cost of a single tank of petrol, by way of a lovely FGW season ticket.

Whilst not driving, I am able to see more of the world in detail, to meet and talk to new people - I don't have to bother about parking tickets and fines or road tax, insurance and repair bills, I don't ever need a parking space (so I can just jump off and go!) *and* I can stop for a drink wherever and whenever I like, without fear of breaking the law.

Admittedly, some places are bit slower to get to (mainly through buses being stuck in traffic) and I may have to plan my journeys a little more, but the trains are superb, both quick and reliable. Now, looking around me at my poor fellow citizens trapped in their cars and rushing through their lives, I have developed a feeling of almost "pity" for their car-bound, isolated lives.

And when one stops driving, one does tend to notice the sheer number of cars on the roads and to question how much longer this selfish addiction to oil can continue? I wonder if anyone would like to buy my spare carbon credits?!

JD, Clifton

JD's letter inspired us to run an exciting FOSBR competition – see next page. Ed.

IT'S COMPETITION TIME!!

Yes, FOSBR are giving you the chance to try out The Severn Beach line by giving away a free all-line weekly season ticket. The idea of this competition is to try and attract a few new passengers to the line, so please feel free to photocopy these competition questions and pass them on to your friends and neighbours.

All questions are local rail-related and the answers can be found either in this newsletter or from publicly available information. If the lucky competition winner would then like to help FOSBR and tell us their experiences of using the trains for a week, we'll publish their story in the next newsletter. To get your season ticket, you will need to go to Temple Meads with a passport photo and be issued with a free Rail ID card to use with your new ticket.

FOSBR COMPETITON QUESTIONS

1. Which railway station is located between Keynsham and Bath Spa?
2. You are at Temple Meads on a Friday night out. What time is the last train home to Shirehampton?
3. In which year was Clifton Down station opened?
4. Solve this anagram to get the name of a busy Severn Beach line station: **Arsenal Dot Pot**
5. It takes 32 minutes to get from Temple Meads to Clifton Down on a number 8 bus. How long does it take by train?
6. How many full time staff worked at Redland Station in 1912?
7. Under current plans, which is the earliest year in which Portishead might get its much needed rail link re-instated?

Paper entries should be sent to **FOSBR**, c/o 29 Brighton Rd, Bristol, BS6 6NU or email entries can be sent to **guillebaudus@yahoo.com**

Please give your name and address, email and/or contact telephone number. The closing date for entries is **Friday 15th May** and the first entry out of the hat with all correct answers will win the ticket. Details of the winner will be published in the next newsletter. The editors decision is final! Good luck!!

A tale of two modes ...

Recently, I have had to make frequent journeys from my home base of Sea Mills to Frenchay hospital. The obvious choice for me is to take the train to Stapleton Road and change there for a bus to Frenchay. These journeys have given me an ideal opportunity to compare the two modes and look further into why trains cause "modal shift", but buses rarely do.

A typical journey goes as follows: I arrive at Sea Mills station for the 14:11 train, which arrives spot on time. It is clean, comfortable, cheap (£3 return) and quick. I can check the trains are running to time either before I leave home on the internet, or at the station using the information point. There is a shelter to wait in if it is raining. The train gets me to Stapleton Road in just 14 minutes.

The number 4 bus is not due until 14:50, but with luck the previous one will be running late. I can't tell, as there is no information at the bus stop other than a paper timetable. There is no shelter at this location, so if it rains, I just get wet.

I wait. The bus finally arrives, 10 minutes late; it seems each day that the service 4 has a fantasy timetable. I pay my £3.60 return fare to sit in a noisy, dirty, slow old bus, which you can't even see out of due to the advertising stuck all over the windows. There is no "quality" to this journey at all – it is cheap public transport at its worst (but mile for mile, twice as expensive as the train!)

We get stuck in a horrendous traffic jam due to road works in Stapleton village and my journey, that should have taken 17 minutes, ends up lasting over 40. But it still beats the car, as if I'd brought a car with me, I'd still be prowling the hospital grounds looking for that elusive parking space.

The return journey, you can guess is much the same. It's not the bus company's fault that the service is so unreliable – they have a near impossible task trying to run a service through Bristol's congested streets, try as they might.

So why is it that our politicians seem so keen on getting us all onto buses, that every new transport scheme involves buses, guided buses and more buses ... yet no rail? How did this come about?

Back in the 50's and 60's there was a horrible word used in transport planning – **bustitution**. This described the process of closing local railway lines and replacing rail services with buses. Back then, the steam age branch line railway was seen as slow, dirty and expensive to run. Undoubtedly it was.

People were acquiring their own cars and for those that couldn't, the answer was seen as the bus. Buses could go more places than the train and there were no more long walks to inconveniently located wayside stations.

But my, how times change! Back in the 60's, there was nothing like the number of cars on the roads as there are now, and the whole issue of the bus is that it largely shares the same road space as everybody else. In short, it was seen as an ideal solution back then, but no amount of Showcase bus routes are going to make it work effectively now. It's unreliability as a solution is sadly just going to get worse and worse.

Which brings me to our politicians – and rail. Bus schemes are cheap, so politicians like them. They don't take the courage, commitment and political will that a typical rail re-opening requires.

But politicians should listen to the public – who tend to vote with their feet. The travelling public will not get out of their cars to sit in the very same traffic jam – in a bus! And that is why only rail causes real modal shift from private car - to public transport. *JW*.

01 February 2009

Severn Beach Line passengers up by a third!

The latest Progress Report from the Severnside Community Rail Partnership reveals that the number of passengers using Severn Beach line stations has increased by a **third** since Bristol City Council funded an improved train service.

Since last May, over **500,000** passengers have used the Severn Beach line.

There is further good news for passengers in 2009 as Bristol City Council will be funding CCTV at all Severn Beach line stations and First Great Western will be installing a new passenger information system.

28 February 2009

POLITICAL BACKLASH

The Regional Labour Party Conference on 28th February overwhelmingly passed the motion that:

"spending on roads proposed by SW Regional Assembly for the south of the region should not take precedence over integrated public transport, including railways, in the Greater Bristol Region and other city regions." *Other political parties please emulate – Ed.*

12 January 2009

FOSBR supports investment in Severn Beach Line

At its AGM, FOSBR welcomed the 27 - 30% passenger increase on the Severn Beach line since May 2008.

This improvement has been achieved by investment by Bristol City Council. We call on BCC to publicise this success on its website and in its newspaper.

The investment should send a strong message to councillors and the electorate in North Somerset and South Gloucestershire that council tax expenditure is an essential first step in providing a viable local rail service.

FOSBR urges BCC to lobby the Department for Transport to maintain this investment beyond May 2012.

We further urge BCC to:

- Negotiate with FGW to improve ticket sales on the Severn Beach line.
- Record and report any delays or cancellations. FOSBR has coverage for 2006 /7 /8.
- Respond to Bristol Evening Post double page spread on 3 January 2009.

Along our line

A regular feature detailing work and improvements along our line.

News reaches us that Network Rail are commencing a major project to replace Blaise overbridge on the Henbury loop line. This will result in Hallen Road being completely shut from April to August. Whilst not currently in use by passenger trains (*sadly!* - Ed) we will be closely monitoring any effect the replacement of this bridge might have on Severn Beach line services. Presumably, the railway will remain open more so than the road, so the Avonmouth coal trains will continue to run via their normal route. There is no danger of the coal trains being re-routed via our Severn Beach line as they are banned from the route as they are just too heavy. Any pedestrians attempting to use the alternative road route will be exceptionally fit by August, as it is about a three mile detour! Helpfully, Network Rail will be laying on a minibus service for resident pedestrians for the duration of the works.

Contractors for Network Rail have just completed earth stabilisation work at the site of the former Sneyd Park Junction, between Clifton Down Tunnel and Sea Mills. Users of Sea Mills will have seen their "camp" underneath the Portway Road Bridge.

Very good to see attractive flower gardens appearing on most station platforms!

What's On Where

Tue 31Mar 5.30 - 6.00pm	Council House Entrance	Half Hour Train Campaign placards with fantastic Singalong train songs!
Sat 4 April 6.00 - 8.00pm	Great Western Staff Club, Temple Meads	Ian Crawford , Transport for Greater Bristol Alliance, on transport lobbying. Glen Burrows , secretary, Bristol RMT Rail Workers Union, on trade unions. Gurchetan Shoker , a Science teacher, on climate change.
Mon 4 May	Redland Green	FOSBR Stall at Redland May Day Fair.
Sun 17 May 3.00pm	Shirehampton Station	First Anniversary of improved train service, with spectacular train cake, the new summer timetable, FOSBR stall and singalong train songs. Speakers from Campaign for Better Transport, Bristol City Council, FGW.
Tue 19 May 6:20pm	Sea Mills Station	Launch of Ramblers evening walks, Peter Gould.
Sat 11 Jul 6:00 - 8:00pm	Great Western Staff Club, Temple Meads	FOSBR Meeting
Sat 10 th Oct	Severn Beach	"Slide Show presentation" Around Bristol by Tram' by the renowned Peter Davey. See FOSBR newsletter 70 for details.

STAY IN TOUCH with FOSBR!!

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