

Oxford-Bicester Rail Action Group – AGM 2010

THURSDAY 28TH JANUARY 2010, THE KINGS ARMS HOTEL, BICESTER

Present: Ian East (Chairman), Henrietta Leyser (Secretary), Jon Spinage (Webmaster), Linda O'Dell, John Horsman (Customer Liaison Manager, Chiltern Railways) and twelve members (approx).

Apologies: John Watts

1 Accounts

The past year's accounts were approved.

2 Election of Officers

All officers are happy to stay on the committee. Ian asked if anyone on the floor would like to be a member of the Committee. No-one volunteered. No-one objected to the continuation of the current Committee.

Hilary (member) said she would like to be involved with the Customer Panel.

3 Chairman's Report

Reading Station was discussed. Ian said that Reading Station is being blockaded between 23rd and 27th December. Someone from floor said he thought to 4th January. Trains are being re-directed via Banbury.

Ian reported that FGW are refurbishing trains. They will have new seat covers and new toilets. Whether there would be shortage of trains was discussed since there is only one other spare train! FGW maintain no services will be removed. The good news is the trains will be spruced up. The bad news is cancellation may be more likely in the meantime.

We discussed trains that don't turn up and the lack of notification to passengers. FGW now have a new customer system. Bicester and Islip will have a box installed and receive a call if anyone there to let them know what's happening to the train and if alternative transport arranged. Presently Dave point of contact if train not arrived, although he moved to Swindon is now back. Two stations are going to have the new CIS system installed.

Some cancellations arise because the points fail at Wolvercote Junction. In particular, they are prone to freezing in winter. NR informed the CP that these will have a heater fitted before long, though could not specify the timescale precisely.

We are losing two influential friends in Tony Baldry MP and Richard Rowland (former FGW Area Manager) because of boundary changes (although may still be MP for part of the route) and career move, respectively. Tony Baldry has been tireless in pursuit of people and very supportive. Richard has been a great person to deal with, friendly and helpful in the extreme. Above all, he was committed to growing business on our line, which he did effectively.

Finances: We presently run things out of our own pocket. Might be nice if we sent a hat round at end of evening - £2 or £3 per person would be welcome.

Snow was discussed with cancellation of trains. FGW closed one day only because of (above mentioned) points freezing. Information provision, however, failed as usual.

OCC have reported that 1) service will be handed to Chiltern "next year" and 2) that "enhanced service" will end at that point which would leave fewer trains for Bicester until Evergreen 3 is complete and fewer trains at Islip permanently.

4 Discussion

Proposal from floor to exchange First Class accommodation to make room for bikes, prams, and luggage. Chairman replied that we don't want to push too hard for bikes because they might end their carriage. Have tried before anyway, with no luck.

Support was given for an attempt to gain the same contract with Chiltern as existed with FGW regarding enhanced service.

It was pointed out that Bicester Village are under fire at the moment due to the traffic they induce and the congestion it causes. May be best if alternative transportation via rail is put to BV by County Council, but there is an opportunity to retain support from BV.

Chairman's action: Write to OCC, and perhaps BV, in the attempt to regain enhanced service level at both stations.

5 Summary of Evergreen 3 progress by John Horsman of Chiltern Railways

JH gave a brief history of Evergreen 1 and 2.

E3 is split in to two parts. Part 1 is Marylebone to Birmingham. Part 2 Bicester to Oxford.

JH said this is an exciting time to get back what existed. It is being done because there is a bad need for it. Fares will not be increased; instead there would be growth with more people catching the train. The entire project is funded entirely through business growth and not taxation. Capital will be raised via Network Rail loan, which will be repaid over 30 years.

There will be half hourly trains running up to 100 mph. Bicester North will be busier with the Eco Town. Bicester Town station will relieve it.

Oxford-Bicester will become a main line, and not the rural one it currently is.

A summary was presented of the preparatory work done with regard to safety (level crossing closure), noise, and wildlife conservation.

The TWA is available in Bicester Library and on the internet (link on OBRAG website). Objection or approval must be sent to Secretary of State in writing by closure date of 17th February 2010. He must decide the following:

- i) Is it reasonable?
- ii) Do the community want it?
- iii) Have unhappy individuals been taken notice of?

A Public Enquiry is almost inevitable and will delay progress.

Chiltern are keen to get the line open by May 2013. The findings of TWA are not likely to be complete until Spring 2011. Reasonably soon after that work will go ahead. The plan is to run a service until the rebuild is complete. There is going to be a complete rebuild of the line between Bicester and Oxford. Expect it to take at least *nine months* during which there will be some replacement service (bus or rail).

Track will be twinned except for segments through Wolvercote and Islip. There is a possibility of rebuilding Wolvercote tunnel to accommodate both twin track and the new standard height of freight container.

6 Further discussion

Discussion ensued on the cut of trains by three a day when Chiltern take control. Richard Stow (Railfuture) said if trains are lost in the interim they will be difficult to resurrect.

Approaching and leaving Islip would create more noise. Noise varies with speed. An assessment has been done on noise and environment but no mitigation measures proposed.

Discussions took place about the possibility of re-routing via Banbury on Bicester North line.

It is apparent that some residents in Islip do not want trains stopping there because they don't want commuter traffic in the village. Ian said this is not the view of the whole village. Henrietta recommended that the current level of trains will be sufficient which is what people are used to and *need*.

Discussed again replacement services. JH will look into this.

The line from Bicester Town to Oxford will be re-signalled.

Freight from MOD will be re-routed in the interim, also freight to Water Eaton.

Discussed the barrier on London Road that it would be down every 15 minutes, how would this affect traffic.

Rolling stock to be used was discussed.

Jon mentioned Tubbs Crossing in Langford Village. This will be remodelled using a bridge with pushchair/wheelchair access. The crossing will not need to be closed for the whole time that the line is rebuilt, rather just the time taken to build the crossing.

Bikes post Oxford/Marylebone : The 165s and 168s don't have First Class. What they do have is a multi-purpose area which can be used for anything. Trains will also be longer.

Noise again discussed.

John Horsman was asked how many people had written in response to the TWA. He doesn't know but thinks there is in the region of 100 letters so far.