

Severnside

By Nigel Bray
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■ ■ Great Western

At the branch meeting in Taunton on 13 October, the guest speaker was Julian Crow, Regional Manager (West of England), First Great Western. He said that fleet and infrastructure were the main factors adversely affecting FGW's performance, noting that its trains ran over more 1970s trackwork than did most franchises.

Replacement of HST engines had greatly improved the reliability of the re-engined sets, while £11million was being spent on refurbishing the Sprinter fleet because of mechanical problems identified with it. Class 142s were the only stock FGW could lease to fill the gap left by the ex-Transpennine 158s being transferred to Northern Rail in December but in the longer term there might be a case for deploying some of the 1,300 new-build vehicles on the Cardiff-Portsmouth route.

He saw it as encouraging that the Government's White Paper had talked in terms of increasing rail traffic and the Department for Transport were no longer negative about branch lines.

Asked by Graham Ellis whether the growth in use of lines in Devon and Cornwall could be repeated on routes such as Swindon-Westbury, he replied that the challenge for the Melksham line was how to obtain more sets to run more trains whereas improvements further west had come about through intensive use of existing resources.

Other questions from the audience concerned rail and bus connections via Castle Cary, the lack of late evening trains from Exeter to Taunton and beyond; and the potential of the Bristol-Weymouth route for taking visitors to the Olympic sailings at Weymouth.

Several present considered the root cause of deficiencies in West of England public transport to be the mindset of London-based civil servants. Julian Crow concluded by saying that the way to change such attitudes was through elected representatives.

■ ■ West Somerset Railway

The West Somerset Railway is to use upgraded rolling stock to run a shuttle between Bishops Lydeard and Taunton next year, connecting with its steam trains.

■ ■ December timetable

FGW's December 2007 timetable provides a better spacing of evening peak departures from Bristol Temple Meads to Weston-super-Mare but the promised enhancement of Avonmouth services is postponed until May 2008.

There are winners and losers with cross-Bristol services, one major change being that the Bristol-Taunton locals start from Cardiff instead of Great Malvern or Cheltenham.



Missing Link special



SKIPTON: Sporting its 'Missing Link 2' headboard, the Skipton East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership charter train arrives at Skipton, and stands next to a Class 333 electric unit waiting to depart for Leeds. The Aire Valley route enjoys one of the best and most modern railway services in Britain, outside of London, in stark contrast to the railways in East Lancashire. Selrap wants to see the Aire Valley's high-quality service spread across the Pennines to Colne and beyond

Picture: Steve Broadbent

By Steve Broadbent

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More than 200 people packed on to the 09.58 for Skipton at Colne railway station on Sunday 28 October ready for a 150-mile highly scenic round trip on only the second train to link the towns in 37 years.

The train, specially chartered from Northern Rail by the Skipton-East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership carried the headboard *The Missing Link 2 - Going Extra Miles to Bridge The Gap* to highlight the fact that the direct rail route between the towns, closed in 1970, was just 11.5 miles long.

SELRAP aims to see the former Skipton-Colne railway line reopened as part of the national rail network.

Outbound, the train took the shortest available route, reversing at Blackburn and Hellifield and taking 100 minutes to reach Skipton. A modern train on a reinstated direct line could do the journey in under 15 minutes.

After a two-and-a-half hour break to enjoy Skipton's many delights, "Missing Link 2" made a non-stop 25-mile run to Leeds in just 28 min-

utes, and then reversed in Bradford and Burnley before arriving back at Colne just after 16.00.

The Mayor of Pendle, Councillor Alan Buck was joined on the journey to Skipton by the Mayor of Skipton Town, Councillor Carole Manley.

At Skipton, both mayors made short speeches emphasising their councils' support for SELRAP's aims, and noting how the re-opened Missing Link would aid employment, inward investment, tourism and the environment.

SELRAP chairman Derek Jennings said after the trip: "Just like the first Colne-Skipton charter we ran last April, Missing Link 2 was a grand day-out for our supporters, and, with the weather being so kind to us, everyone was able to enjoy some superb scenery from the comfort of a train. There was a marvellous atmosphere on the train all day.

For more about SELRAP, including more photos of this grand day out, see <http://www.selrap.org.uk>

Copies of Missing Link 2 photos on the site are available on request.

Holiday line bustling with visitors

in the guard's compartment. A vintage bus runs between Holt terminus and the town centre in the high season.

Out of season the line continues to play a role in the local economy, with visitors attracted to special events. Steam is obviously a major draw, but not the only one. The North Norfolk Railway also operates vintage diesel railcars which give pan-

oramic views of the countryside and coastline.

Some heritage railways are not easy to reach by public transport. The North Norfolk Railway already connects quite conveniently with the national network, however, and buses also call at its station.

Bittern Line trains from Norwich terminate at a platform built in 1967 across the road from the

original Sheringham station that is now the headquarters of the NNR. However, that platform is cramped and it would make a lot of sense to reinstate track across the road into a new platform, with the two railways sharing facilities.

Indeed, funding is currently being sought for this project. There are also longer-term plans for a Norfolk Orbital Railway which would link the NNR at Holt with the town of Fakenham and then the Mid Norfolk

Railway which currently operates between Dereham and Wymondham.

Whatever may develop in the future, however, the North Norfolk Railway already plays an important role in serving tourism and therefore generating business on the North Norfolk Coast. Trains run daily, or almost daily, from Easter to October. From November to February they mainly operate at weekends. More information at www.nnr.co.uk or 01263 820800.