

# Myths and realities for rail campaigners

## Railfuture campaigners conference 5 July 2008

The Guildhall, Salisbury

The Mayor of Salisbury praised Railfuture as a "truly wonderful organisation" when she opened our campaigners conference.

Former nurse Councillor Mrs Iris Evans said: "You are people after my own heart."

She saluted Railfuture's efforts to improve rail services which were "not as they should be".

The conference helped campaigners to see how improvements had been achieved and how the fight for others could continue.

It also gave several Railfuture branches the opportunity to show a wider audience what they were campaigning for.

The first speaker, South West Trains' Phil Dominey, explained how his company had to expand its income from off-peak passengers to pay the £1.91million premium exacted by the Government for the privilege of running the franchise.

He said: "We now run 30 trains a day to Waterloo, compared to 19 in 1998."

All trains have onboard CCTV and guards.

He promised that SWT would be the first operator to introduce smart card ticketing throughout its network and he said SWT wanted to ensure that the smart cards also worked on buses.

At Waterloo station, 55% of people choose to use ticket machines rather than the booking office but at Salisbury people do not seem to be willing to use ticket machines.

On average across SWT, about 30% of people used the ticket machines, rather than the booking office.

He said SWT wanted to introduce an hourly service west of Exeter, but so far the Department for Transport had not agreed the plan.

The next speaker was Peter Murnaghan of Transport for South Hampshire.

He started his career with BR and said he had hoped to be able to see light rail introduced into the Portsmouth and Southsea area.

But the Government had decided that it had to be a bus-based system even though Hampshire is a pro-rail council.

He showed a map of roads in the area that were "under stress" and warned that by 2020 nearly all the roads will be in that category.

Portsmouth and Southsea alone had grown by 35% in six years.

His chart of ticket sales showed that 66% of rail journeys are within the



**ASPIRATIONS:** Devon & Cornwall branch ideas for expanding rail operations in the Exeter area

area. He said there had been many initiatives in the area to encourage more travel by rail.

But he said he was bitterly disappointed about the DfT decision not to proceed with trams for Fareham.

John Prescott had said in 2000 that there could be 25 new light rail systems. But "we went through the process" with plans for a South

Hampshire rapid transport scheme and were encouraged.

"We had the parliamentary powers and the consortium to build it," he said.

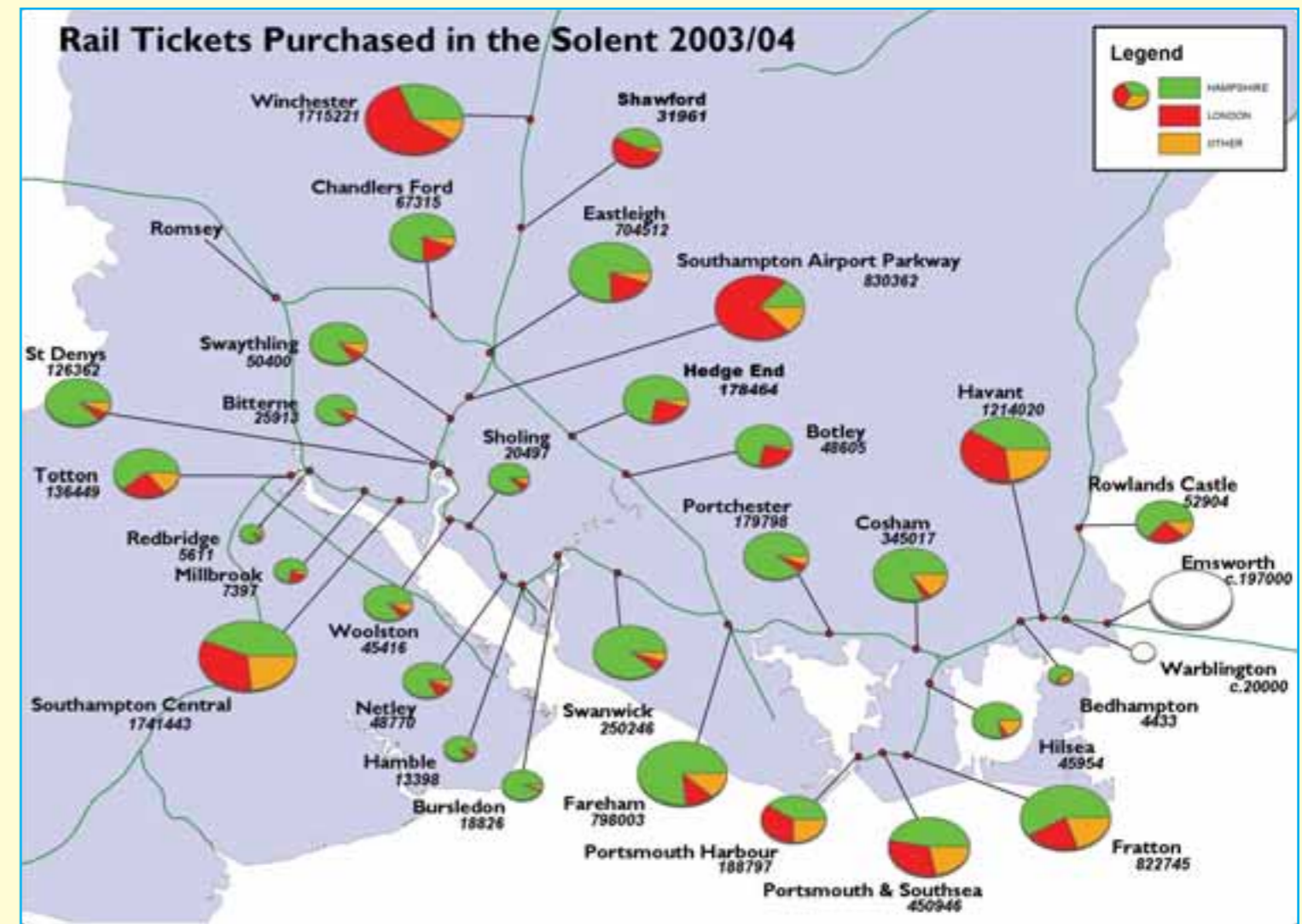
"And we could have expanded it into a regional metro but Mr Darling scrapped our plans."

Now we are being encouraged to press ahead with a busway option. Government admitted it had done

the dirty on the local authorities but had decided the tunnel from Gosport to Portsmouth was too expensive.

Bus rapid transit however will cost £175million and we could only think what might have been if we had got the area tram system.

In questions, Peter Collingbourn said that Munich in Germany was a similar area but added: "What a



**LOCAL INFORMATION:** Although many people travel to London, 66% of tickets bought are for journeys within the Solent area.

contrast in public transport provision. I regret that this country cannot get its act together and cannot match the Germans in public transport provision."

Mr Murnaghan answered: "We have had a strong "no" from the Government on trams. We have to work on buses."

The next speaker Graham Ellis explained how the Melksham Line Campaign was trying to get sensible decisions on rail from the Department for Transport.

In winter, Melksham station does not have a daytime train even though the journey to the county town takes only 35 minutes, compared to the 95 minutes on the "express" bus.

Advice for rail campaigners in dealing with the press, radio and TV came from Bruce Williamson who once worked for Radio Caroline and is now Railfuture's national media spokesman.

He warned that the media are not that interested in "rail campaigners want better rail services" stories.

He added: "You need something which is attention grabbing. Don't

be afraid to jump on to a band wagon, the green agenda or the high price of petrol."

On press releases, he said: "Keep it bright and breezy. Not too much boring detail. Put yourself in the position of an editor."

"Think of a snappy angle. Do their jobs for them. Your press release has to stand out among the dross."

But he added: "Regular releasing of press releases is valuable."

"They can be used to brief journalists even if they don't always get published."

"If you get asked for an interview, do your homework before the interview and make sure you get your message across. And what's your soundbite?"

"Beware of trick questions. Think of the evil questions you might get asked, like: Aren't you just a bunch of trainspotters, or Aren't you anti-car?"

"Learn some interview techniques. Answer the question but then go on to talk about what you want to mention."

"If you are asked about cars, move



**CROWDS:** It's obvious Melksham needs more trains

on to say you would rather be on a train.

Railwatch commentator Peter Rayner gave a provocative address challenging both Department for Transport and Treasury decisions on rail. The Treasury sets our objectives.

What is the point of the DfT if the Treasury rules?

He said he had been disappointed by Tories but Labour have done nothing to change things. You can download his wishlist of rail projects from [www.railfuture.org.uk](http://www.railfuture.org.uk)