Thames Valley Branch Lines – Notes of Meeting

Date: 05 December 2016
Time: 10.00am
Venue: 4 Marlow Road, Maidenhead

Attendees:
Cllr Phillip Bicknell, Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead
Cllr Julian Brookes, Henley-on-Thames Council
Martin Coker, Cookham Parish Council)
Gerard Coll, Wycombe District Council
Kevin Miller, Network Rail
Philip Meadowcroft, Wargrave Users Group
Gordon Oliver, Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead
Nigel Philips, Rail Futures / High Wycombe Society
Tom Pierpoint, Great Western Railway
Michael Porter, Henley Branch User Group
Richard Porter, Maidenhead Marlow Passenger Association
Cllr MJ Saunders, Cookham Parish Council /
Richard Scarff, Cookham Society / Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead
Cllr David Sleight, Wokingham Borough Council
Cllr Jocelyn Towns, Marlow Town Council
David Wilby, Wokingham Borough Council

ITEM	NOTES	ACTION
1.0	**WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**	
	Cllr Bicknell welcomed everyone to the meeting and invited attendees to introduce themselves.	
2.0	**NETWORK RAIL PRESENTATION**	
	Kevin Miller (KM) gave the presentation in place of Simon Maple who had been called away to an urgent meeting. He summed up progress on electrification to date: • The 16 mile section between Didcot and Reading is complete and is being used for fleet testing. • A link to Reading Depot has also been completed, so electric trains no longer need to be dragged in and out and can be moved within the depot, which is being used for training purposes. • Changes at Old Oak Common will affect maintenance operations and some facilities are moving to Reading (e.g. wheel lathe). Some elements of the electrification programme have been deferred, in order to fund previously unfunded scope (e.g. works at Exeter Depot to support the West Country diesel fleet, and platform extensions on the North Cotswold Line to permit 10 car operation). A question was asked about doubling of the track on the Cotswold Line – KM confirmed that no additional track doubling was planned, since sufficient passing loop facilities exist to operate the planned December 2018 timetable. Electrification west of Thingley Junction (Bath to Bristol Temple Meads) has been deferred to further in Control Period 6 (CP6). KM confirmed that the bi-mode trains are able to collapse their pantographs on the move – the trains can do 125 mph in electric mode, and 100-110 mph in diesel. Electrification of Filton Bank (Bristol Parkway to Bristol Temple Meads) has also been	

	deferred. Electrification of Didcot to Oxford has been deferred to CP6. Electrification will go as far as Appleford to permit access / turnback from the northern entrance of the Didcot stabling sidings. Trains will exit north to the first signal and then back down the line, since there are not enough train paths to be able to exit to the south in the peak. Four tracking is being considered for the section to Oxford, but the alignment has not been finalised and it would be sensible to wait rather than relocating the electrification apparatus later. Electrification works have progressed as part of the Oxford Station redevelopment. Network Rail is currently working with Oxford City Council and Oxfordshire County Council to design a replacement bridge at Botley Road, just south of the station, as part of the Oxford track remodelling, which suffers from regular flooding of Botley Road. Electrification of the Thames Valley branch lines has also been deferred until CP6. The Marlow branch line was dropped from the electrification programme a year ago, but outline feasibility is complete for the Henley and Windsor branches (GRIP 1-3). This includes the Approval in Principle designs for the structures and overhead line equipment and Network Rail will be able to take the scheme off the shelf when instructed and progress the detailed design (GRIP 4-5). This is likely to happen sometime in CP6. KM was asked how committed DfT is to the electrification of the branch lines, but didn't know the relative priorities. A question was asked about the proposed points scheme to the south of Bourne End station to allow trains to pass and achieve a 2 tph frequency. KM indicated that it would be sensible to complete this scheme before electrification, but the line is no longer scheduled to be electrified. KM suggested that any overhead infrastructure would be relatively lightweight, due to the low line speeds. Network Rail has looked at the bridges and crossings along the route and has concluded that electrification can be accommodated by track lowering or reduced electrical clearances rather than wholesale bridge reconstruction. Also, there is no need to cut back the canopies at Twyford or Henley. An issue was highlighted in relation to developers seeking to claim land under adverse possession rules, which could potentially jeopardise future rail schemes. KM responded that the electrical equipment can be accommodated in the ballast at the side of the track, so limited land is required. In any case, Network Rail can show that they have exercised acts of ownership through regular patrolling. KM was asked when the line to Maidenhead and Reading would be electrified. He replied that the Paddington to Maidenhead section was scheduled to be completed by June 2017, but that Network Rail was aiming to be ready in time for the May timetable change. The Maidenhead to Didcot section would be completed by December 2017. KM confirmed that these estimates were robust and would affect all four lines. David Sleight (DS) commented that Crossrail was responsible for the electrification as far as Maidenhead and that Network Rail was responsible beyond Maidenhead. Tom Pierpoint (TP) stated that GWR started operating electric services from Hayes and Harlington to Paddington at peak times on 5th September 2016. Passengers from Maidenhead and Twyford are already benefiting from this as fewer existing peak trains call at Southall and Hayes and Harlington in order to speed up journey times into Paddington.	

	A question was asked about the proposed Western Rail Link to Heathrow (WRLtH). KM confirmed that the Development Consent Order (DCO) was planned for CP6. DS indicated that another consultation was proposed. He suggested that the DCO could take 12-18 months. Although WRLtH is not yet fully funded and it involves some complex junction and tunnelling works, it is likely that the scheme can still be delivered by the end of 2024. The HS2 Hybrid Bill should receive royal assent next month – works at Old Oak Common will mean that some maintenance operations will move to Reading and the Heathrow Express depot will relocate to a new site north-east of Langley. KM suggested that Network Rail will look at efficient delivery methods for the branch line electrification. They may look to complete the works under a single blockade, but other mechanisms are being discussed. A question was raised about staff resources necessary to deliver the scheme. KM confirmed that there was pressure on engineers and project managers, but said that Network Rail was recruiting widely when required, including from overseas. A question was asked about how the Chiltern to Paddington relief line would be affected by HS2. KM did not know but highlighted feasibility work relating to a link from Willesden to Acton that would enable the West Coast Main Line to link to Paddington, although this would not be implemented before CP6.	
3.0	**GREAT WESTERN RAILWAY PRESENTATION**	
	TP indicated that the existing Turbo diesel units would be retained on all three lines for the remainder of the franchise period (up to end of March 2019). **Windsor Branch -** No operational changes were proposed in the current franchise period. In the longer term, there was an opportunity to increase frequencies by extending the second line down to Chalvey. However, initial feasibility work has shown that the benefit cost ratio is not great for this scheme. Cycle parking and CCTV improvements are being delivered at Windsor & Eton Central this year. **Henley Branch -** Off-peak train frequencies would increase to 2 tph from May 2017, serving Twyford, Shiplake and Henley with hourly services at Wargrave. Peak hour through-services to Paddington will cease when the main line is electrified to Reading. A question was asked about Regatta Week and whether longer trains would be put on. TP indicated that this was a very different scenario to the everyday operations. He didn't know whether long trains would be put on, but offered to come back with more detail. TP confirmed that the intention was that the line would be operated by two-car units. It was questioned whether this would be sufficient for the demand. TP indicated that GWR expected this to be sufficient but recognised that some passengers would be required to stand on the busiest trains. However, longer trains on the main line services would mean that additional capacity would be provided into Paddington. TP confirmed that GWR is committed to undertaking passenger counts in the New Year. TP was asked what would happen if the surveys showed that there would be overcrowding. He indicated that 3-car units would be made available, but that this would have implications elsewhere as some of the fleet is due to be cascaded to Bristol. A question was asked about maintenance of the turbos. TP confirmed that a significant fleet would be kept and be maintained at Reading. TP indicated that GWR is currently renegotiation their franchise and reworking their rolling stock strategy on the back of the recent announcements about the electrification	**TP**

	deferral. TP was asked about operation of services to Oxford. GWR has recent confirmed that additional AT300 bi-mode trains had been ordered as part of the mitigation to the electrification deferrals. Class 387 units would operate the service when the line is electrified. It was asked if relief line slots would be lost in favour of Crossrail services. TP confirmed that commuter trains would continue to operate on the relief lines until the end of the franchise period, and pointed out that Class 387 trains could be used on the main lines as well as the relief lines. DS commented that the proposals were for Crossrail to operate 2 tph to Reading and 2 tph will be operated by GWR. DfT will prepare a franchise specification for post 2019 and local stakeholders will be consulted in due course. TP did not know when this would happen. TP was asked why GWR could not secure more trains. He replied that there are a limited number of diesel trains available, which are hired from a rolling stock company. It was suggested that bi-modes could be procured. TP suggested that there are no commuter bi-mode units available, but suggested that there may be some in future. Also battery powered units could be another option. Concern was expressed about platform capacity and interchange at Twyford. TP indicated that GWR would seek to make the transfer as seamless as possible by minimising walking distances, coordinating timetables and reviewing policies about holding trains. DS commented that platform capacity issues had been raised before and Mark Hopwood had been happy that there was sufficient capacity. Moving the coffee stall and decluttering the platforms would help. Phillip Bicknell (PB) asked whether new housing had been factored into growth forecasts. TP confirmed that it had and that is was driving investment with trains being increased to 12 car units on the main lines. He suggested that the branch lines were important, since they were feeders for the main lines. DS commented that Network Rail's Route Studies looked ahead to 2043 and incorporated best guesses about future housing growth. **Marlow Branch –** TP confirmed that there would be an extra PM peak service on the branch line from next week. From January, one through-service to Paddington in the AM peak and two from Paddington in the PM peak would be withdrawn. By summer 2017, all through services will cease. The branch line is no longer part of the electrification programme and turbos will continue to operate for the foreseeable future. GWR is funding station travel plans at Marlow and Bourne End. Points and signalling works have been proposed south of Bourne End station to enable trains to pass and permit 2 tph operation. However, there is currently a funding gap. GWR is awarding a contract to work up a detailed design for the proposal to get a better idea of costs.	

	TP was asked whether the signalling would be replaced as part of the scheme. He replied that this would be decided after GRIP 1-3 had been completed and suggested that GWR would seek to deliver the enhancement in a realistic / low cost manner. It was queried whether the token system used on the signals would work with 2 tph and it was suggested that UHF radio should be used instead of copper wire, since this would continue to work in the event of a power cut. TP confirmed that GWR was looking at this. KM confirmed that Network Rail was working with GWR to look at the proposed points scheme. He highlighted the need to look at whether the scheme could fit within the land available. TP said that the design would be overlaid onto Network Rail property records to check. The design is expected to be complete by the end of April. (PB left the meeting and MJ Saunders (MJS) took over the chair.) MJS commented that local stakeholder groups were trying to manage PR in relation to the branch lines and there was an understanding that improving service frequency to 2 tph would be traded for the loss of through services. TP suggested that this was an aspiration rather than a committed scheme. GWR has sought funding and would like to make it happen and have committed £525k from the Station Development Match Fund. Gerard Coll (GC) indicated that Wycombe District Council was recommending that developer funding be allocated to the project. MJS asked whether the Royal Borough has been asked to contribute. GO replied that they had submitted a bid to the Thames Valley Berkshire LEP, but the Council had not been approached to contribute directly. TP highlighted that the proposal would require Network Rail approval in principle. KM indicated that they would need a clear proposal to consider. A question was asked about why it would cost up to £200k to complete the design works. TP commented that getting a project through GRIP 1-3 was expensive. MJS suggested that a report could go to RBWM in due course to seek funding contributions if needed. **Great Western Main Line –** TP confirmed that the main line between Paddington and Reading would be electrified by December 2017 and that services will be operated by 4, 8 and 12 car electric trains. There will be 5 fast services calling at Twyford and Maidenhead in the peak hours. There will be 4 tph in the off-peak until 2019. Crossrail services will operate 2 tph from Twyford, and 4 tph from Maidenhead will operate in addition to Crossrail. Travel time would be similar to now. Concerns were expressed about potential loss of train paths due to Crossrail and the fact that the Crossrail trains would have so little seating and no toilets. TP didn't know how many train paths would be lost, but thought that 2 semi-fast tph would be retained. A question was asked about whether tickets were interchangeable between Crossrail and local services. TP confirmed that this had not been finalised but that discussions were ongoing and it was anticipated that they would be interchangeable from Twyford and Maidenhead	

Further to the meeting, Tom Pierpoint has followed up on some of the points raised and has asked for the following to be circulated with the minutes.

- **GWR operations on the relief lines post Crossrail -** It is planned that GWR will continue to operate 2 semi-fast trains per hour on the relief lines after the introduction of Crossrail in December 2019.

- **Rolling Stock on the Maidenhead to Marlow branch –** The current plan is that at peak times a 2-car Turbo will operate between Marlow and Bourne End and a 3-car Turbo between Bourne End and Maidenhead. The 2-car set will then operate the off-peak service between Maidenhead and Marlow.

- **Rolling Stock on the Twyford to Henley branch –** we are evaluating how we will operate this service following the electrification deferral, however following Mark Hopwood's meeting with the Henley Branch User Group last week and Monday's meeting, we now anticipate that 3-car Turbo trains will be deployed on the majority of services

- **Connecting mainline services –** fast services will operate on the main lines at peak times that will serve both Twyford and Maidenhead and then run fast to Paddington.

- **Bourne End enhancements –** TP has referred back to the Peter Hendy Report following the discussion about the trade-off between electrification and the Bourne End enhancement. The wording in the 'Enhancements Delivery Plan' (September 2016) is as follows:

  "For the avoidance of doubt, electrification of Maidenhead to Bourne End and Marlow branch lines is not included, but Network Rail will support Great Western Railway and other stakeholders to develop their capacity improvements proposals for this section".

  This is a statement of Network Rail's support for the project to be developed but doesn't commit to project delivery and therefore it's really important that the group and stakeholders work together to support progression of the scheme. GWR will shortly commission further feasibility work on this scheme.