

Minutes of Portishead Railway Group Members AGM (PRG145)

Tuesday 4th December, 2018 7.30 Folk Hall Portishead

1. **Welcome and Introduction** – Chairman, Alan Matthews welcomed 51 members to the AGM.
2. **Apologies for Absence** – There were apologies from 12 members.
3. **Minutes of the 2017 AGM** – approved at the March Members Meeting.
4. **Approval of accounts for year ending 31/10/18** – A copy of the accounts were on every chair for members to review. There was a small deficit due to GDPR mailing and refreshments, which included a cake for our 18th Birthday. The accounts were approved, proposed by Bob Brimley, seconded by Daisy Bickley.
5. **Appointment of Independent Examiner.** Mike Travers agreed to continue for another year. Proposed by Colin Howells and Seconded by Alan Matthews.
6. **Webmaster's report** – The website is now 13 years old, people look most at the maps and news updates. We've taken off the timescales as we no longer know what they should be. The news items go back to 2005. The web-site has been updated so that it's easier to look at on a smart phone. FAQ's will be updated shortly. The Web site has won awards in the past.
7. **Secretary's report** – 1174 people now following our Facebook page, over 100 more than a year ago. We use it to communicate with people wider than the current membership and to ensure that accurate information is getting into the public domain.
8. **Membership Secretary's report** – In the last year membership has dropped by 15% or about 80 people. This was mostly due to GDPR, as we needed to get in touch with all members to ensure they were happy to continue to be contacted. Work to contact people has included post, phone and knocking on people's doors at times. Unfortunately a few members have passed away, and there were others that we could not contact, so their names had to be removed from the membership list. While 18 members asked to still be contacted by post, email remains our most important form of communication.

We had a big membership drive about 10 years ago and membership grew rapidly, but many of those are the ones who have dropped away now. Members are based mostly around Portishead and Pill.

There has been a request that we rotate the day that members meetings are held so that members with Tuesday commitments can come. The Folk Hall is already booked for 2019, but we will trial this in 2020.

9. **Election and appointment of committee** - All the committee members were prepared to stand for another year, and were reappointed. There was a request for a Minutes Secretary but no volunteers came forward at the meeting.

10. Chairman's report for the year

May – An application for £58m of funding, submitted in December 2017, failed as the fund was mostly for road transport schemes. The application was made in the hope that if there was some money for rail projects the Portishead line would be considered.

PRG contacted Liam Fox who responded saying he was in contact with the Secretary of State for Transport and would press the issue. Letter from Chris Grayling followed stating he was “Writing to say that he recognises the importance of railway projects” and that he “Sees Portishead as a vital part of the MetroWest project”

June - NSC applied to the Transforming Cities fund, with Wiltshire and Gloucestershire, this bid was rejected in September. Although Chris Grayling had said in a letter that MetroWest should go ahead and

submit the DCO without all the funding in place, its PRG's belief that the DCO would fail at the first stage of the submission.

Chairman Alan Mathews appeared on TV to explain the delays and funding issues and was told that when things go wrong the only people who want to talk to the press is someone from PRG.

PRG met with Liam Fox at his home and discussed deadlines. PRG believed that a watershed moment was the end of September when the four local councils needed to make some key decisions. Dr Fox said he would discuss the funding issue again with Chris Grayling. Dr. Fox forwarded, a letter 2 days later showing he has spoken with Chris Grayling and stressed the importance of the funding.

Oct - Letter from Chris Grayling (issued to members on each chair). Saying the Portishead line is still a priority but that he was awaiting the results of a Bristol Area Feasibility Study, was investigating tram trains and that any financial input from central government must be capped, with the four local councils responsible for any overspend.

Nov - PRG met with the MetroWest project manager and some of his team. MetroWest took Chris Grayling's letter as a positive and is still pressing ahead, working through the 25 different sections of the DCO. About 100 people are working on it to submit it. We are hoping it will go in in February. People working on it are very positive. Alan said "It's like a jigsaw where we have all the pieces but one, the missing piece is the funding".

Dec - Today, NSC committed another £1.4m to be spent to take the project up to the DCO stage.

The total cost is £116m at the moment with a lot of contingency built in.

Question: The DCO was meant to be submitted in September, why is it ok that it wasn't?

A: Colin elaborated why funding needs to be in place before the DCO goes in. This is because it gives the Council compulsory purchase order power to acquire land and property needed for railway. This would put property blight on many houses, so we need to get the funding first. Everything needs to be in order, as it costs £0.5m to submit it. One DCO got rejected recently because the online copy did not have the same wording as the printed version.

The 4 councils have already spent £14m so if the project fails they will lose this, so it's in their own interest to ensure it succeeds.

Q. What does it mean that the cut off date of September is missed?

A. We just carry on! Further information is given in Peter Maliphant's presentation below.

9. 'What next?' by Peter Maliphant

The reason for not saying much over the past few months was explained in a presentation called: 'What Next?' and was about the funding update, distractions and the Development Consent Order.

Peter publicly thanked Dave Chillistone who put much of this together. PRG requested that the membership helps to communicate the facts to help dispel some of the myths and legends that are being circulated.

The opinion in the room on Chris Grayling's letter, copy on each chair, was that most people thought of it as politician speak. But it does give a different perspective and a possible way forward.

Last week WECA and the WEJC met and approved a number of actions to progress the project. Peter's presentation linked the actions from the WECA / WEJC meeting with the letter from Chris Grayling and PRG's private meeting with Liam Fox last summer, where Dr. Fox reiterated his support for the project.

The information from this presentation can be found on the PRG website here:

<https://www.portisheadrailwaygroup.org/dec-update.html>

A number of questions were answered during the presentation:

Q. When making the forecast, have they put a value on the ticket price?

A. We would expect so, although we haven't seen this.

Q. Can section 106 money be spent on the railway?

A. No, because it is specifically allocated under section 106 agreements. Over £1m, that was allocated for the railway when the Marina developments were built, has all been spent now.

Q. Why will our line be subsidising Severn Beach?

A. Because the MetroWest project needs to be seen as a whole. Phase 1A is cheap to make and expensive to run. Phase 1B is expensive to make but profitable to run. Together it works well as a whole – and it is a MetroWest budget not a NSC budget.

Q. What could happen over Brexit or if there is a change of government, will all the funding be pulled? We need to be told if anything changes.

A. The project has £70m ring-fenced and needs a further £46.9m. We believe this will be the case regardless of what happens nationally. One of the reasons for meeting MetroWest on a regular basis is to be kept up to date with this information. We have to deal with what's happening now.

Q. Is Chris Grayling going to explore Tram Trains and set the project back to GRIP 2?

A. No. It mustn't go in the DCO even if it is a long term solution for Bristol. A Tram-Train project will take longer and be more expensive than the current heavy rail project.

Q. Why is the DCO submission being delayed?

- Network Rail are late delivering some aspects
- Habitats Regulation Assessment & Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest (IROPI) now has to be gone through. This is due to a new European Court Judgement in April 2018, which means the project will now have to go through IROPI process.
- Flood Risk Assessment- the Environment Agency has requested late changes to modelling of the line's flooding risks.

Q. The next control period for rail funding, CP6, lasts over 5 years so who decides where and when it is allocated?

A. We don't know yet and we need some assurance that it contains funding that would be spent here.

Q. Is the Portishead Line mentioned in the control period?

A: yes

Introduction of Ian Brown, Director of Railfuture with vast experience of working in the rail industry.

Ian felt that we were a very informed group. He talked a little about his background working first for British Rail, then Docklands Light Railway and then finally on Crossrail before retiring. He discussed various London Underground and over-ground schemes and some of the challenges that he had encountered.

Ian felt that we had a great opportunity here but it was about putting it in the right context. The fact that there is a BCR of over 3 on the combined scheme has never been seen before. He said that we had a strong case because the economy in this area was so strong. He didn't feel that the issue was about the cost of the line so much but more about us having a 'client side' that could not deal with Network Rail. He also highlighted the fact that Network Rail does not take risks. He believes that we need the government to feel obliged to take the project forward.

The future for this area has to be an integrated transport system and the Portishead line and MetroWest phase one was 'a starter pack'.

In a discussion regarding tram trains he said that they are likely to be an integral part of the future of rail across the county. They would take longer and cost more to deliver here at this point in time, so they are not a viable alternative to the Portishead line being built at the moment.

Next members' meeting: To be confirmed