

**BLACKWATER VALLEY
ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR
PUBLIC TRANSPORT
18 JANUARY 2023
2.00 - 3.05 PM**



Present:

Cllr Rod Cooper, Hampshire County Council
David Daniels, Southeast Communities Rail Partnership
Phil Dominey, South Western Railway
Mike Griffin-Thorn, Hampshire County Council
Edward Hawkins, Surrey Heath Borough Council
Cllr Adrian Newell, Rushmoor Borough Council
Cllr Mike Roberts, Rushmoor Borough Council
Councillor Chris Turrell, Bracknell Forest Council (Chair)
Rob Vince, Stagecoach
Cllr Bethany Woods, Hart District Council

Apologies for absence were received from:

Cllr David Beaman
Lisa Cook
Richard Davies
Cllr Steve Forster
Edward Goose
Cllr Alan Oliver
Cllr Maurice Sheehan
Cllr Valerie White
Cllr Bill Withers

13. Minutes - 12 October 2022

The minutes of the meeting of the Advisory Committee held on 12 October 2022 were approved as a correct record.

14. Train Operators' Updates

The Advisory Committee received the following updates from train operators:

GWR

GWR had held a very useful Webinar covering the whole of the region. It was noted that this had focussed on operational issues. Ed Goose had hoped to attend the meeting but had circulated information on the following:

Industrial Action

ASLEF had announced two new dates for industrial action by drivers on the 1st and 3rd February. These would have a significant impact with a very minimal service to run across the network. Talks were continuing with the RMT. It was hoped that a deal could be concluded but a mandate remained for further action, but no additional dates had been announced.

769s:

It had been decided to pause the roll out of the 769's and their lease was not going to be renewed. Services would continue to be provided by the current fleet. The 769 programme, using third-rail, overhead wires or diesel engines along the North Downs route, had anticipated passenger numbers to have grown by around 12% across the network by this year. However, changes in customer behaviour and demand since the pandemic meant the expected passenger numbers had reduced by around 3%

Greenford Battery Train:

Vivarail had sadly entered administration. GWR was working with the DfT and wider industry to understand the next steps to ensure the vital battery train trial could happen. Further details would be provided as soon as possible.

Ed was happy to respond to any questions on these or other matters.

SWR

Phil Dominey provided an update on Infrastructure issues including the landslip at Hook over the last weekend which had left 50m of track hanging in the air. This had had major implications for the network. Most services to the South West were therefore starting and terminating at Basingstoke. A 90 minute shuttle service was running from Basingstoke to Woking. Hook, Winchfield and Fleet were not being served. There were also insufficient buses and drivers available to provide a scheduled replacement bus service. Network Rail was looking at how to overcome a number of logistical issues to enable two track running as soon as possible. They had also sent out an invitation to attend a virtual public meeting about Hook.

Phil also apologised for a series of problems on Monday which had resulted in only the Reading line being unaffected by problems.

There were a number of concerns expressed about communications which were described as poor, both to commuters and councillors. Phil was surprised as he understood that an email had been sent to 2,500 recipients. There were also concerns about the initial estimates of how long it would take to repair the line. It was suggested that it would take several weeks or even months, not the days which had initially been suggested.

Phil indicated that Network Rail was seeking to find a way to restore a service as soon as possible.

It was also reported that there had been chaos and overcrowding at Waterloo on Monday with cancellations and delays. Services from Alton and Aldershot were now crowded and it was therefore suggested that these should be extended from eight carriages to 12. Phil undertook to raise this and capacity on the shuttle service to Farnborough. It was also reported that smart ticketing had not been working properly.

Members of the Committee offered to help SWR disseminate information as it became available.

Phil also undertook to investigate a suggestion that schoolchildren travelling between Whitchurch and Salisbury had been left stranded when a train had not stopped at Whitchurch.

He also drew attention to major engineering works at half term affecting the Reading and Windsor lines as well south of Guildford. Works at Wokingham were likely to impact GWR services too.

15. **Bus Operators' Updates**

The Advisory Committee received the following updates from bus operators:

Stagecoach South

Rob Vince reported that services were relatively stable in the Blackwater Valley. Recovery from the pandemic had been slow but was going in the right direction. Staffing had been a major issue in the past 12-18 months. There were not enough drivers to restore all services reliably. On a positive note, they were not losing so many people now. He was hoping to resume pre-pandemic frequencies as soon as possible.

He confirmed that it was difficult to release resource for rail replacement buses during the week due to their services and other contracts. Some drivers only worked at weekends on rail replacement buses. There were also insufficient buses available.

The company had been given notice to leave Aldershot bus station in May. The company was looking at alternative arrangements. Two stops at the station would be insufficient.

Rob added that the £2 fare cap was being monitored and may influence future fares policy.

In response to a question about whether buses were changing, Rob indicated that the company was starting to invest again but changes occurred as part of the five-yearly repaint schedule.

16. **Local Authorities' Updates**

Rushmoor

It was suggested that the bus company would be wise to talk to Rushmoor Borough Council as the turmoil at Aldershot was likely to be added to by turmoil at Farnborough. There may be different views about regeneration.

Solent Transport Strategy

It was agreed that Derek Morgan would circulate details of the Solent Transport Strategy. A number of councils had got together and put a bid in for connectivity improvements and had received some money. This might be an approach to follow in the Blackwater Valley.

This would be discussed at the next meeting.

17. **Date of Next Meeting**

It was agreed that the next meeting of the Advisory Committee would be held at 2pm on 29 March 2023.

CHAIRMAN