



ANNUAL REPORT 2013-2014

Ian Rivett – Chairman

Nick Walker – Vice Chairman

Chairman's Introduction: This is the twelfth Annual Report of the Chiltern Railways Passenger Board and summarises the key issues affecting Chiltern Railways in the past year and the valuable contributions made by the Board in discussions at each of the meetings and in correspondence. The Board plays an important role in providing the opportunity for Chiltern Railways senior management to present their plans and to be held accountable for any performance issues. The Board also acts as an information source, to enable Chiltern Railways senior managers to understand the issues and concerns that directly affect the passengers who use the services.

Background: The Chiltern Railways Passenger Board was established in April 2002. Facilitating the Board is a requirement of the Chiltern Franchise agreement (schedule 13 – clause 11.7) which requires that:

- The Board meets at least once each year and seeks to ensure that Chiltern Railways conducts its business in the best interest of passengers.
- The Board comprises of representatives from Passenger User Groups and Local Authorities along the Chiltern Railways line of route.
- The Board monitors the operational performance of Chiltern Railways and reviews infrastructure upgrades, passenger's facilities, timetable changes, fares proposals and passenger satisfaction surveys and supports integrated transport schemes proposals.

Chairman's Comment: Another challenging year for Chiltern Railways, particularly with the closure of the Bicester Town to Oxford line for major upgrade works. The procurement of a long term rail replacement bus service between Bicester Town and Oxford with new double deck buses (see header picture), specially modified to carry bicycles and emblazoned with the strapline "Next Stop, London Marylebone".

To enhance the passenger experience on Chiltern Line trains, with the completion of refurbishment of the loco hauled rolling stock, coupled with the procurement of brand new more powerful Class 68 locomotives to haul these trains, to replace the existing Class 67 locomotives and to be in position for possible future train lengthening. The refurbishment of the Class 168 Clubman units and a programme drawn up to refresh the Class 165 fleet, including access for all toilets. Plus, an additional nine two-car Class 170 sets for the Oxford to Marylebone service.

A trial run of providing a Boxing Day train service from Marylebone to Bicester North for the Shopping Village, proving popular and the consideration of operating the service again, subject to track availability.

Platform extensions at five stations to provide for longer trains and a long list of station upgrades for passenger facility improvements, not forgetting the need to build new and enhance existing car parks and facilities for cycles.

PASSENGER BOARD MEETINGS 2013 - 2014

Four Board meetings were held approximately quarterly, at Banbury, Birmingham Moor Street or Marylebone Stations, with additional meetings when necessary.

Detailed meeting minutes were produced, outlining the Board members' views on proposals and progress, ideas for consideration and the responses from the Chiltern Railways management representatives, but were not published at the time to avoid any breaches of confidentiality or commercial sensitivity. The following is a summary of the major topics and projects discussed.

PASSENGER BOARD MEETING (AGM) - 12 JULY 2013

At the Annual General Meeting, Reg Whittome announced that he wished to step down from being Vice Chairman. Ian Rivett was re-elected unopposed as Chairman and Nick Walker was nominated and elected unopposed as Vice Chairman.

The Chairman's Annual Report was presented to the meeting and was met with general acclaim and agreed that the report was very comprehensive and that its length reflected the amount of work carried out over the year. The Chairman was thanked for all his work for the Board and the nature of the comprehensive annual report.

Oxford to Bicester Line Works Programme:

The Board noted that:

- All legal challenges were resolved and preliminary groundwork had started.
- Network Rail had still to provide the formal sign off and approval for existing expenditure was required from the Office of Rail Regulation (ORR).
- There was the possibility of the Bicester junction blockades over three weekends, but these were planned to be late in project, due to the requirement to maintain access to Bicester Ministry of Defence from the eastern end.
- Chiltern Railways confirmed that there would be a disabled access toilet in the new Bicester Town station building.

December 2013 Timetable Change:

There was a possibility of minor changes to the Metropolitan Line timetable section, due to London Underground changes, however, they were not expected to improve the interchange problems being experienced by passengers at Chalfont & Latimer. The Board discussed the pattern of trains and the effects at Neasden South Junction, with southbound trains from Aylesbury (via Harrow-on-the-Hill) frequently having to wait several minutes at a red signal for a path. There were benefits for changing back to the previous timetable structure, where trains from Harrow-on-the-Hill would continue at Neasden South Junction towards Marylebone at a time when no trains on the High Wycombe branch were scheduled at the junction. Chiltern Railways did not express any appetite for such a change.

Train Failures – Reasons & Remedies:

Chiltern Railways provided some technical explanations for some of the recent poor performance issues recorded for the locomotive hauled trains. There were recurring power supply problems and a programme was in place to replace the 'static converters' over the coming year. Chiltern Railways Board approval had also been given for the acquisition of an extra Mark III coach and for an additional Driving Van Trailer.

Company Updates:

Specific comments were made about the continuing improvement in the PPM measure of performance; improved connection arrangements for Arriva buses at Haddenham and the recent 100% PPM on a weekday Wembley event. It was commented on by the Board that the events management at Wembley was very good

The new London Underground 'S' Stock trains were causing problems during times of disruption on the Metropolitan Line due the manner in which the trip cock bypasses work. Chiltern Railways were working with London Underground to resolve the issue, as it inhibits the ability to offer a contingency service in certain circumstances.

Chiltern Railways stated that the Ticket Vending Machines software was to be upgraded, to include the ability to purchase Groupsave tickets. The Board suggested that in the event that a TVM was unable to provide a ticket due to network communication problems a 'Permit to Travel' could be issued on request by a machine.

The Board noted that a final sign off had been given for the Banbury East Side car park and the issue was raised of Car Park season tickets fading in the heat. Chiltern Railways advised that it was investigating making more car park season tickets available via Ringo.

The Board commented that that the quality of the Passenger Newsletter had deteriorated and that they were now more difficult to obtain than was previously the case.

PASSENGER BOARD MEETING - 8 NOVEMBER 2013

The scope of the East West Line Collaboration Works:

The Board were given a detailed presentation on how the works were progressing and the need and cost for protecting any disruption to wildlife.

There were expected to be several weeks of late night engineering works on Mondays to Thursdays, where the line between Princes Risborough and Banbury would be closed for track tamping and coaches would need to be used between those stations.

New stations will have toilets in the booking halls, including disabled access, but will not necessarily close once the booking clerks have finished their shift because there will be security on the station.

Proposed rail replacement bus service - Bicester Town to Oxford:

The Board were given a detailed presentation on the proposed rail replacement bus service to operate between Bicester Town and Oxford, during the line closure and upgrade process, until the route re-opens in 2015/6.

Buses would be at regular intervals, but not all calling at Islip. Stand-by buses would be used for capacity and reliability. Bus operators bidding for the service contract would be asked for innovative solutions with respect to the carriage of bicycles. The Board noted that the route survey had identified that vehicle length of the buses was an issue when serving Islip, due to the tight turn out of Kidlington Road. Chiltern Railways stated that they were working with the Oxford to Bicester Rail Action Group to provide what Chiltern Railways considered to be the best timetable with the resources available.

The Chairman queried that the consultation documents stated that the bus service would run at the same times as the current train service, but the draft bus timetable was nowhere near that specification. In some cases, buses would run either an hour before or an hour after the current off-peak train times. The Chairman also suggested that the utilisation of bus and driver resources was underused and could be better deployed to fill gaps in the timetable. Chiltern Railways stated that their 'bus experts' at Arriva had drawn up the timetable, notwithstanding a clash of commercial interest in being one of the potential bidders for the bus service contract. Chiltern Railways stated that the commitment to run buses at the same times as the trains was not as important as making sure the bus timetable meets the needs of those who use the service.

Company Updates:

Good performance in period ending 12 October 2013, with the 'Mainline' silver sets recording their best period for performance so far. All silver sets were now back in operation. Plans were still on course to procure the additional Mk III Driving Van Trailer by end of 2013. Three refurbished class 168 Clubman units had been completed and a programme had been drawn up to refresh the class 165 fleet, including access for all toilets. The entire fleet of Clubman trains refurbishment was expected to be completed by November 2014.

An extreme weather storm on 28 October brought down trees and blocked lines, causing damage to trains and major disruption for passengers. Chiltern Railways apologised for any lack of information, as there had been difficulties with communications. The Board suggested and Chiltern Railways acknowledged that there are better ways to use Information screens at stations to display disruption details.

Chiltern Railways announced the intention to run trains on Boxing Day 2013 as a trial to judge patronage. This being a joint arrangement with Network Rail's and dependent year-by-year on track access with regards to engineering works. The proposed service would run from 08:00–20:00, with a standby bus to pick up stragglers. Disabled assistance would also be available. Chiltern Railways car parks would be free on Boxing Day.

- At Banbury, the work program had been re-scoped, with a slight delay on receiving pre-cast lift shafts for the multi-storey car park but this would be delivered by end of March 2014.
- At Beaconsfield, the refurbishment would be in two phases, with the facilities for cycles upgrade and then the enhanced facilities.
- At Haddenham & Thame Parkway, the extension of the station building and enhancement of waiting facilities were in progress.
- At High Wycombe, Chiltern Railways confirmed that approval for notice boards had been received, but would need to be held until the next funding was available in April 2014.
- At Leamington Spa, work had commenced for cycle provision and turning steps into a ramp.
- At Warwick, the cycle storage CCTV work had also started.
- On-train announcements were agreed to be reviewed by Chiltern Railways, including a Board request for "Change here for Aylesbury" on arrival at Princes Risborough. Noted also that the Stratford-upon-Avon Parkway announcements were still not in place.

Oxford -Bicester Town Line Update:

Chiltern Railways announced that the full blockade for the line from Oxford to Bicester Town, via Islip will start on 15 February 2014 through to summer 2015 when Marylebone to Oxford Parkway opens. Oxford Parkway to Oxford would be opening in 2016.

The line closure leaflet was discussed, which featured the frequency and timing of buses. Chiltern Railways confirmed that the buses would be brand new and were being converted to be able to take six bicycles. The contract for the bus service had been awarded to the Oxford Bus Company owned by the Go Ahead Group. Several bus routing options had been identified in case of traffic congestion or accidents. The replacement bus service would be closely monitored and changes could be made, if required.

Clarification was sought regarding the ticket types available to be purchased at stations and from bus drivers. Chiltern Railways confirmed that staff would be at Bicester Town at peak times. Some unease was expressed at these restricted hours for staff cover, but after discussion it was felt that the ability of the bus drivers to sell point to point tickets and £5 Transfer Tickets for journeys extending beyond the limits of Oxford to Bicester Town should cover most scenarios.

Company Updates:

Chiltern Railways in conjunction with Network Rail had received ORR approval to lengthen platforms at Beaconsfield, High Wycombe, Princes Risborough, Haddenham & Thame Parkway and Bicester North to accommodate nine-car trains. Work had already begun at several sites.

Chiltern Railways confirmed that the proposal for the minimum Penalty Fare be increased from £20 to £50 was not going ahead.

It was confirmed that car parking tickets will in future expire at 02:30, after arrival of the last train, so passengers returning late would not be led to believe they have to buy a two day ticket.

The new Passenger Information / Assistance booth at Marylebone had received planning permission and it was expected to be operational by the end of March 2014. The Board accepted that positioning may not be ideal, due to planning constraints. Chiltern Railways agreed to provide passengers' feedback at next meeting and also confirmed that the suggestion of making toilet facilities free of charge for season ticket holders was unlikely to be progressed.

The Board reported that building work at Haddenham & Thame Parkway appeared to be progressing very slowly. Chiltern Railways confirmed that work was broadly on track and that the planned opening of the new building would be at the end of March 2014. There would also be a large waiting room built on the London bound platform, after work on the main building had been completed.

Boxing Day 2013 Services:

Chiltern Railways reported that whilst the service had been well used, commercially it had been disappointing. It was felt that passengers had been abstracted from the following day on 27 December, as receipts were down that day compared to 2012. Chiltern Railways confirmed that subject to Network Rail granting train paths, early thoughts were that the Boxing Day service would be repeated, however, that was not a definite commitment.

High Wycombe Ticket Vending Machine Problem:

It was confirmed that there had been problems with a new Ticket Vending Machine installed at High Wycombe, which had been moved from Haddenham.

From a passenger perspective tickets were being correctly issued, but the uploading of bank transaction data had not happened for well over a month, due to outstanding transactions being held in the machine when it was taken out of service at Haddenham. Upon commissioning at High Wycombe, the outstanding transactions were released to debit passengers' accounts and credit Chiltern Railways account, some considerable time after the ticket transactions had taken place. The software had also not been upgraded when commissioned at High Wycombe to reflect different parking fee charges. The Board considered that Chiltern Railways should review the financial accounting processes for the installation and removal of ticket machines, to ensure that all transaction data had been accounted for and not to blame the contractors, who were only employed to move machines and have no responsibility for financial procedures.

Passenger Board Feedback on Train Services:

Chiltern Railways agreed to review whether there could be better co-ordination and provision of services with London Midland at Claverdon and Bearley.

Chiltern Railways acknowledged that there was an ongoing issue with overcrowding on the 08:03 departure from Beaconsfield to London Marylebone, but did not have track access or rolling stock capacity to offer an alternative.

Chiltern Railways had responded to a Board survey report concerning peak hour overcrowding the 07:54 & 08:30 departures to Marylebone from Northolt Park. The response stated that all available carriages at peak times were in use and each train is optimised for the number of coaches that avoids severe overcrowding. However, in the London area, as with all operators, some required standing on trains was unavoidable with the infrastructure capacity being fully utilised.

It was hoped that some diesel carriages will be cascaded to Chiltern Railways in the future, following impending electrification schemes elsewhere in the country. Some increases in passenger numbers would be catered for by lengthening some trains, however, there could be no guarantee that there will still not remain a level of standing on shorter journeys at peak times. Following a survey of passenger numbers, there were no plans at that time to add another coach to those particular trains, nevertheless, the situation was to be kept under review.

National Passenger Survey - Autumn 2013:

The Summary of Chiltern Railways performance was circulated prior to the meeting, with the following aspects of performance noted:

- 4th for perception of punctuality & reliability (92%).
- 5th for Overall Satisfaction (91%)
- 10th for seat availability (72%)
- 15th for Value for Money (48%).

Chiltern Railways stated that the company had just won two "Golden Whistle" awards for consistently being the best Train Operating Company for "Right Time" arrivals.

PASSENGER BOARD MEETING - 25 APRIL 2014

Oxford-Bicester Town Line Update:

Chiltern Railways provided a report from the feedback from the first two months of operation of the bus replacement service from both passengers and stakeholders, which had been positive, however, there had been some specific questions raised:

a): The Timetable was written using the same principles that guide the construction of a railway equivalent. A bus was hired and test runs were undertaken, leading to the development of sectional bus running times, an understanding of traffic congestion and the additional time impact on journeys, particularly during the rush hour.

It had become clear that the Monday to Friday 07:30 bus departure from Bicester Town to Oxford was regularly being delayed by traffic in Oxford and from the 18 May timetable change this bus will be retimed to depart from Bicester Town 10 minutes earlier at 07:20.

b): The choice of route tried to avoid the traffic congestion in the Oxford area. The bus route had been registered via the Botley, Woodstock and Banbury Roads, to give daily operational flexibility to the Oxford Bus Company Controllers, relevant to the levels of congestion on each route. In consequence the flexibility had precluded passengers' requests for a setting down stop at St Giles, as it is not served by all three routes.

The location of the stop at Islip on the Kidlington Road had generated positive feedback. The new bus shelter protected passengers from the worst of the weather and buses stopping to load, unload and maintain departure times will not block Bletchington Road. After some initial difficulties, the bus drivers were now more used to making the turn at the war memorial.

c): Bus facilities had received several comments about the cycle provision on the buses, both positive and negative. All bus drivers had been instructed not to move off until all bicycles were safely stowed and dwell times were not expected to impact the performance of the time schedule.

d): In conclusion Chiltern Railways stated that they preferred the movement of passengers by rail rather than by road, which accords with the passengers' views too.

Unfortunately, the Bicester Town to Oxford line does not have a diversionary rail route. To provide the best possible road service, brand new buses, specially modified to carry cycles were procured, with the timetable geared to meet the needs of to and from work journeys during the rush hours.

Chiltern Railways were extremely grateful for all the feedback, not least from the Passenger Board, both before and after the bus operations commenced.

Future Oxford Service Timetable:

It was agreed that a special meeting with the train planners would be arranged in September 2014, principally for discussion of the Oxford inclusive timetable from late summer of 2015. In addition, it was agreed that the timetable structure for connections to smaller stations from Birmingham would be included, together with the issue of off-peak connections at Chalfont & Latimer for Chesham.

Company Updates:

Chiltern Railways reported the following upgrades to infrastructure and passenger services:

In February a deal was signed with Porterbrook for nine two coach Class 170 diesel trains to deliver additional capacity for the new line between Oxford and London Marylebone. These trains will be refurbished and brought up to the Chiltern Railways specification with power points, tables and free Wi-Fi.

On 9 April the introduction of six new more powerful 'Class 68' locomotives was announced, replacing the current 'Class 67' fleet for the entire 'Mainline' silver train fleet, as part of a programme of continued investment in the Birmingham to London Marylebone Mainline route. A key aspect of the investment was to enhance the reliability of the loco hauled trains and to provide scope for the future expansion of train lengths, station platforms be extended at a later date. The new locomotives, leased via Direct Rail Services, are expected to be in operation in winter 2014.

Discussions had commenced with London Midland, regarding future service provision from Claverdon and Bearley stations.

The sympathetic restoration of the Dorridge station waiting room recently completed and supported locally had received positive feedback.

Good feedback had been received from passengers and staff about the location and design of the new Information Point at Marylebone station. This was part of a larger project to review signage, layout and access issues at the station. Some enhancements for disabled passengers were also planned for Haddenham & Thame Parkway and Beaconsfield stations.

The new multi-storey car park at Banbury station, in replacement of the Tramway facility, is planned to open at the end of May 2014, at the same time as the Tramway facility closes. A communication and station travel plan had been developed.

Enhanced cycle accommodation was being installed at Gerrards Cross station.

Enhanced cycle accommodation was being planned for Seer Green, to be located under the stairs of the new footbridge recently installed.

A CENTRO funded cycle storage scheme was planned for Rowley Regis and Stourbridge Junction stations.

Credit card enabled car park vending machines had been installed at Warwick Parkway station car park.

Fare Levels:

A number of questions were posed by the Board and it was agreed that the details would be circulated by Chiltern Railways for future discussion.

Chiltern Railways confirmed an easement whereby London to Stratford-upon-Avon fares are available direct or via Solihull.

And, Finally.....

The Board appreciates the continued impetus within Chiltern Railways, to procure and implement improvements in the provision of train services and station facilities in a competitive and challenging environment.

I would personally like to thank all the members of the Chiltern Railways Passenger Board for all their invaluable contributions and assistance made during the past year, for the benefit of passengers using Chiltern Railways and also thank the Directors and Managers of Chiltern Railways for the time they have afforded to the Board with the Passenger Board meetings and consultation processes.

Ian Rivett CMILT- Chairman
11 July 2014