

CHILTERN RAILWAYS PASSENGER BOARD 2015-16 ANNUAL REPORT



Bicester Village



Oxford Parkway

Chairman: John Elvin

Vice Chairman: Reg Whittome

Introduction

This is the 14th Annual Report of the Chiltern Railways Passenger Board (CRPB) and summarises the salient issues that have affected Chiltern Railways (CR) during the past year together with the valuable contributions made by Board members at each of the meetings and in correspondence.

The CRPB plays an important role in providing the opportunity for Chiltern Railways senior management to present their proposals and future plans and to be held accountable for any adverse performance issues. The Board also acts as a useful information source enabling Chiltern Railways senior managers to understand, at first hand, the issues and concerns that directly affect passengers using their services.

Background: The Chiltern Railways Passenger Board was established in April 2002 and facilitating the Board is a requirement of the Chiltern Franchise agreement (schedule 13 – clause 11.7, page 393) which can be summarised as:

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

Four quarterly Board meetings are normally held with the venue alternating between Birmingham Moor Street and London Marylebone stations. Additional meetings covering specific issues are convened as and when required.

Detailed minutes are produced after each formal meeting recording Board members' views on proposals and progress, ideas for consideration and the responses to queries from CR management representatives. These minutes are not published at the time to avoid any possible breaches of confidentiality or commercial sensitivity.

The following pages contain a summary of the major topics and projects discussed at Board meetings during the previous twelve months.

PASSENGER BOARD MEETINGS July 2015 to April 2016

July 2015 Meeting

Election of Chairman for 2015-16

John Elvin and Reg Whittome were both re-elected unopposed as Chairman and Vice Chairman respectively.

Q & A Session with Chiltern's Managing Director, Rob Brighthouse (RB)

RB summarised his 15 years working at Chiltern Railways (CR) and noted that since 'Mainline' had been launched, there had been a 25% increase in passengers. Going forward he confirmed the company's key focus is on the customer, both existing and new and that CR's culture is a customer service company. To date, CR had invested over £1billion along the route in stations, car parks and rolling stock and further investment was committed including: replacing the mainline class 67 locos by 68s for improved reliability and faster section running times; additional rolling stock being obtained for the new Oxford service and investing in a new depot at Banbury. RB also confirmed that CR had a good working relationship with Network Rail (NR).

In answer to questions from Board members, RB said the greatest challenge CR faced was capacity issues but that it was a good problem and needs innovative thinking and affects car parks, rolling stock, signals, tracks and stations.

RB expressed the view that the biggest past mistake made on the railways had been selling off the land adjacent to Marylebone Station that constricted the available space for expansion. Also Railtrack did not have enough engineers on their Board and NR could go the same way while more focus was needed to promote civil, signalling and rolling stock engineers.

Concerning cases of dealing with disruption incidents, CR was working with Aston University and involving NR in workshops regarding promoting effective communication during disruption. CR needed to engage more with London Underground (LUL) as well.

In answer to an accusation that the Met Line (Aylesbury via Amersham) sees little investment and LUL staff did not help with service information, RB agreed that more collaboration was needed with both sides trying to 'learn each-other's language' that would help facilitate a more structured relationship between CR and LUL. RB confirmed he regularly talks with LUL's Chief Operating Officer and not just the local team responsible for the Amersham route.

Review of Performance Issues

In Period 4 (April) CR was 3rd in the industry for PPM (95.33%) and MAA (94.85%) while Period 5 results were affected by three separate loco failures. There were also two major signalling outages, one in the morning and one in the evening peak. There had also been an emergency evacuation of Birmingham Moor Street following the discovery of a suspicious device on a bicycle which turned out to be a solar power unit.

Oxford Parkway Services

The new train service from Marylebone to Oxford Parkway would begin running on Sunday 25th October with signalling commissioning taking place on 12th and 13th September.

Oxford Line Station Readiness Day Inspection Visit

Board members and other stakeholders had been invited to attend an inspection visit at the new Oxford line stations on Monday 19th October in advance of opening to the public the following Sunday.

At both Bicester Village and Oxford Parkway stations, members had the opportunity to view and test some of the new station equipment, ask questions of the newly recruited team of frontline staff and put forward comments to the Project and Station Management teams regarding the operation of the stations. Although there were still some minor works to be completed, members were shown around as much of the new station areas as was possible and saw the brand new Ticket Vending Machines (TVM) at Oxford Parkway (see below).

Much useful feedback was obtained and following an informal buffet lunch, members were bussed back to Bicester North station.



October 2015 Meeting

Review of Performance Issues

It was reported that CR's PPM showed a continuing increase in performance over the most recent quarter from June/July's 93.63% to 95.76% in August/September. At the quarter's end on 19 September, PPM MAA was 94.63%, fractionally below the 94.70% target but the period end result was the fourth best in the industry league table while maintaining third place for MAA. A complete failure of the signalling between Warwick and Banbury on 25th and 26th August was the most disruptive incident during the final period and was caused by a rodent damaged power cable.

Ticket Fraud

Following recent publicity regarding a high profile ticket fraud, it was confirmed there were covert operations being undertaken to catch serial fraudsters, but CR is not able to directly interrogate Oyster readers on its stations as the data belongs to TfL who assist wherever possible.

Awards

At the September National Rail Awards, CR had been "highly commended" in the 'Passenger Operator of the Year' category and had since been voted "best train operator" in the world at The 'Independent Travel Awards' in October.

Bicester to Oxford issues

Bicester Stations Fares Structure: CR confirmed that fares from London Terminals to Oxford (GWR) station were currently set by GWR but there would also be a CR only fare from Marylebone via Wycombe. It was also confirmed that tickets from London would be valid to either of the Bicester stations. Passengers going to Bicester Village (BV) from the Birmingham direction would be advised to change at Bicester North and take the existing shuttle bus that would continue to run. Usage of the shuttle buses would be reviewed after six months but, as these buses are a CR franchise requirement, they would continue to operate, possibly at a reduced frequency.

It was confirmed that Islip passengers could travel towards London going via Oxford Parkway (OXP) and that an all day ticket easement would be in place valid on any train giving more journey opportunities than previously. The current PSR at Islip was seven trains each way daily but CR would continue to stop eight services there.

For all journeys travelling on from OXP to Oxford (GWR) station, the rail replacement buses would continue to carry bicycles and passengers would be able to alight in the city centre.

After the new line to Oxford Parkway had opened, staff and managers would be on the ground for the first week to review train lengths and feedback would be obtained on BV station usage after the initial first few weeks.

Although the new Bicester-Oxford line stations will not have ticket offices, staff have been trained in the use of the new TVMs in order to assist passengers when required.

Contactless Payments update

CR said they were looking into the possibility of accepting contactless payment cards for ticket purchases and were also working with TfL with the aim of extending the boundaries for the validity of Oyster cards.

Forthcoming engineering works at Banbury and High Wycombe

The Board were informed that the next major line blockades, in connection with track and signally upgrades, had been planned for July 2016 and would cover engineering works at Banbury and Tyseley with a continuous blockade starting at the end of July.

No further major blocks would be required at High Wycombe except for removal of the temporary footbridge during early 2016. CR said they has applied to extend the multi story car park at Wycombe to cope with continuing passenger growth.

E-cigarettes

It was confirmed that e-cigarettes were included within the existing smoking ban covering trains and stations.

26 October 2015

Opening of new line and stations between Oxford Parkway and Marylebone.

The new service from Oxford Parkway (OXP) to Marylebone was officially opened on Monday 26 October but trains actually began operating on Sunday 25th as part of a familiarisation running day.

Two members of the Passenger Board were at OXP in good time to travel on the first ever public train to depart from OXP for London at 07:49.



07:49 to Marylebone on 25 October

On Monday evening 26 October, many Board members attended a reception and informal supper event at Oxford Parkway to celebrate the occasion of opening the first new rail link between a major British city and London for over 100 years.



Rob Brighthouse welcomes guests to the celebratory Supper at Oxford Parkway

January 2016 Meeting

Dave Penney – Managing Director

New Managing Director, Dave Penney (DB), made his first visit to the Passenger Board since taking up his position at the end of December and gave a brief introduction.

CR's key priorities are to improve right time running, initially at terminating stations, but ultimately en-route as well. After a couple of challenging months of performance following the introduction of the new October timetable, performance is improving and minor changes made to the timetable in December have helped in this regard.

DB suggested that he was interested in seeing how the Passenger Board can develop to help support CR and its customers. There followed a brief Q&A session.

Forthcoming Blockade at Banbury

The Board were given a brief overview of the forthcoming blockade (30 July to 7 August inclusive) when all trains will be replaced by buses between Leamington Spa and Bicester Village (weekdays) and Bicester North (weekends) with additional peak time buses serving Warwick Parkway.

These plans were still at an early stage of development but members were promised more details at the next meeting.

Performance Issues

The Board reviewed four internal Company Briefings that had been distributed to members since the previous meeting and there were lengthy discussions about the impact on performance of the new services and timetable. Train over-crowding issues in the Heartlands region were also discussed with suggestions put forward as to how the situation could be improved.

CR provided an explanation of the impact of the tree incident in December when two Main Line services collided with a fallen tree near Beaconsfield and how the resulting shortage of trains, while the damaged units were sent away for repairs, had impacted on fleet availability.

Bicester-Oxford Progress Update

CR was currently working towards opening through to Oxford (GWR) on 12 December 2016 but there was still much work to be completed

Until then, bus replacement was continuing between Oxford Parkway and Oxford (GWR). An extended discussion took place about the half hourly 500 bus service that was the rail replacement transport until December. CR confirmed this would continue at this frequency until the rail line had opened into Oxford. CR's PSR obligation was to operate just seven buses a day in each direction and CR genuinely felt that the current arrangement of every 30 minutes provided a far better service than the obligatory minimum.

CR also advised that there were plans, still at an early stage and subject to necessary consents and agreements being obtained, to install a new bus stop for arriving passengers outside the front of Oxford Parkway station.

Timetabling update

The Board were briefed, and a short discussion ensued, about a couple of known timetable pinch points. These included the first train of the day from Marylebone to Oxford Parkway, the 07:50 service from Princes Risborough to Marylebone and the 17:15 to Kidderminster.

April 2016 Meeting

Summary of Members' Responses to 'Future Direction of CRPB' Survey

The Chairman read out a summary of members' responses to an earlier request for feedback on the future (strategic) direction of the passenger board and, in particular, whether they were happy with the content and structure of current meetings. The Chairman explained he thought this was a useful exercise and could assist the next chairman in determining the future structure and conduct of future CRPB meetings.

Election of Board Chairman at the AGM

The Chairman reminded members of the strict procedures and timescales involved for any members who wished to be nominated for the positions of Chairman/Vice-Chairman prior to the AGM on 15 July 2016.

On Board Passenger Safety

The Board were informed that, although CR's routes are relatively crime free, the recommended process for contacting British Transport Police', in the event of any anti-social behaviour being witnessed by passengers that could affect their safety on board a train, was to:

Text the British Transport Police (BTP) on '61016' who will then text back and ask if it is safe to contact the passenger by phone. This course of action is often quicker than phoning BTP direct and waiting for them to answer your call.

Performance Issues

The Board were taken through recent internal Company briefings issued since the previous meeting. The PPM MAA (Public Performance Measure – Moving Annual Average) for the year to 31st March finished at 94.4%, which was just slightly lower than the internal target of 94.5%. The public target is 93.75% and Charter Discounts would apply if performance should fall below 92%.

In answer to questions, it was acknowledged that PPM is an imperfect measure of judging time keeping but the rail industry as a whole is looking at alternative measures, including a focus on Right Time arrivals.

After a brief discussion around CR's recent variable performance, it was stated that CR are now offering the most intensive train service ever at certain times of the day. The base plan now has 431 trains running on each weekday. It was acknowledged there had been a small number of incidents that had made a large impact on performance but that was a reflection of the intensity of service. There was now an increased emphasis on train service recovery and a closer focus on infrastructure issues by Network Rail to reduce future delays.

On 3rd April, Oxford United FC had appeared in a 'cup final' match at Wembley Stadium and all the special travel arrangements had worked well with around 7,000 customers from Oxford Parkway and over 3,000 from Bicester North travelling to the game by rail. A hugely enhanced train plan had worked well and CR had received the most 'praise' from travelling supporters than for anything else in recent memory.

Regarding the multi-storey car park at High Wycombe that is often at capacity, funding approval had been gained for an additional 130 space extension but a local user expressed concern at the time taken by motorists to leave the car park at peak times. It was confirmed that alternative options are being investigated to try and minimise exit times.

Station to Station Queen's Celebration

The Board were provided with an overview of a weekend event taking place on 11/12 June with the largest event on the Chiltern Route likely to be taking place at Leamington Spa.

The Board were briefed on Community Rail Partnerships (CRP) and, given the nature of the CR network, it was felt that there is more scope for station adoptions than for full CRPs. It was also reported that there was scope for greater synergy between trains and buses.

Oxford Parkway-Oxford Construction Update

It was confirmed that the target date for opening through to Oxford (GWR) was 12th December 2016 with construction work already in progress at Oxford station. In answer to a question regarding ticketing arrangements, it was confirmed that current anomalies should be resolved once the line is open and CR has the ability to price fares through to Oxford from its own stations.



Present end of the line at Oxford Parkway but opening through to Oxford is due in December 2016

In Conclusion

On behalf of all members of the Passenger Board, I should like to thank the Directors, Managers and Staff of Chiltern Railways for their time afforded to the Board during meetings, consultation processes and correspondence throughout the year.

In addition, I should also like to personally thank all members of the Passenger Board for their invaluable and knowledgeable input on all Board related matters during the year and for their time given in attending meetings.

John Elvin

Chairman
15 July 2016