

## CHILTERN RAILWAYS PASSENGER BOARD: 2020-21 ANNUAL REPORT



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### Introduction

This is the 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Report of the Chiltern Railways Passenger Board (CRPB) and summarises the main issues that have been reviewed and considered at Board meetings during the past year together with 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' (CR) senior management to present their proposals and plans, and to be held accountable for any adverse performance issues. The Board also acts as a useful information source enabling CR senior managers to understand, at first hand, the issues and concerns that directly affect passengers using their services.

I would like to express my thanks to all Board members for their support and respect during the year.

### Background

The Chiltern Railways Passenger Board was first established in April 2002 and facilitating the Board is a requirement of the Chiltern Franchise agreement (schedule 13 – clause 11.7).

The Board comprises representatives of Passenger User Groups and Local Authorities from along the routes served by CR's train services. The Board monitors the regular operational performance of CR and reviews infrastructure upgrades, passengers' facilities, timetable changes, fares' proposals, and passenger satisfaction surveys.

Normally, four quarterly Board meetings are held every year with the venue alternating between Birmingham Moor Street and London Marylebone stations. This year, due to the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, all meetings of the Board have been held remotely by video / telephone conference calls.

It is noted that the Chiltern Railways franchise is due to conclude at the end of 2021. It is likely that the Passenger Board will no longer exist in its current form after that time, though we understand that any replacement passenger / stakeholder engagement is likely to have increased focus on

Accessibility (through the recently established Accessibility Panel) and direct customer engagement (in a form still to be confirmed). Board members are grateful to the management and staff for the courtesy, engagement and help afforded to the Board over the years.

Detailed minutes are produced after each meeting summarising the matters discussed that record Board members' views on performance data, ideas for consideration and the responses from CR management representatives to queries raised by Board members. These minutes are not published to avoid any possible breaches of confidentiality and/or commercial sensitivity.

The following pages contain a summary of the major topics and issues covered at each Board meeting during the previous twelve months. References to Chiltern Railways are abbreviated to CR and similarly Network Rail is NR.

## **JULY 2020 MEETING**

This meeting was via MS Teams at Marylebone with seven people present including two from CR.

### **Election of Chairman for 2020-21**

There were no formal nominations for Chairman. Chris Bates was elected (for a third term) unopposed as Chairman for the year to July 2021. There were no nominations for Vice-Chairman, however Nigel Phillips again agreed to take on the role which was agreed by affirmation of those present.

### **Reg Whittome**

It was noted that Reg Whittome of the Marylebone Travellers' Association had decided to retire from the Board.

Reg Whittome has been an ever present and active member of the CRPB since its inaugural meeting in 2002 and has served as either Chairman or Vice Chairman for a total of ten years. Until his decision to retire from attending meetings, Reg had been one out of only four current members who had originally joined the board at its creation in 2002. [Others are Chris Bates, John Elvin and Susan Sweeting].

Reg became a regular traveller on the Chiltern network from 1970 after moving to Gerrards Cross and was quickly recruited to join the MTA initially as Treasurer and later as Chairman. The MTA had been formed in 1969 to object to a closure proposal covering the line between South Ruislip and Neasden Junction. Had this closure proposal been approved, it would have resulted in all Wycombe line services being diverted into Paddington.

A second closure proposal emerged in 1984 that would have converted the line south of Neasden Junction into a busway with a coach station at Marylebone. Chiltern's Wycombe line services would have been diverted into Paddington while Aylesbury line services would just

shuttle between Aylesbury and Amersham. The MTA, together with many other stakeholders along both routes, strongly objected to this latest closure proposal that was ultimately overturned. The main reason for refusing closure is well known but Reg points out that, in addition to increasing numbers of passengers using Chiltern services into London, the two platforms needed at Paddington to accommodate Wycombe line services were suddenly reallocated for exclusive use by the future Heathrow Express leaving no spare capacity to accommodate any additional traffic diverted from Marylebone.

During over 60 years of rail travel on the Chiltern network, both as a commuter and for leisure purposes, Reg has developed an encyclopaedic knowledge of rail timetables and had proposed numerous changes and amendments, many of which have been adopted by Chiltern. As a result, it was suggested by at least one Chiltern manager that Reg should be made an honorary member of the Train Planning section to acknowledge his many valued contributions over the years.

Reg's intimate knowledge of all matters relating to Chiltern together with his many past contributions to the Board's collective knowledge will be greatly missed at future meetings. Hopefully members of the Board will continue to keep in touch with Reg as he continues to keep an eye on the railway from afar.

## **Company Updates**

The company advised that Customer Services Director Alan Riley had left the company to join another operator. Because of the current health pandemic, Chiltern was party to an Emergency measures Agreement with the DfT. During the EMA it was not appropriate to replace AR so the areas of the business that reported to Alan had therefore been subject to a reorganisation. Stations and 'on-board' had moved to Operations (Mark Goodall) while Customer Relations and Projects had moved to Commercial & Customer Strategy (Eleni Jordan).

Brief Q&As included clarification around refund policies during the pandemic, the potential for expanding the use of carnets (to provide a form of flexible season ticket) and the enforcement of the wearing of face coverings on public transport.

### **Incident at Chalfont & Latimer on 21 June 2020**

It was confirmed that an incident had taken place at Chalfont & Latimer on 21 June 2020, which was subject to an ongoing formal investigation by the Rail Accident Investigation Branch. Due to the ongoing investigation, no information could be given other than what is in the public domain.

Note: The Rail Accident Investigation Branch published its report into the incident on 26<sup>th</sup> July 2021. The report is available on gov.uk at: [Report 04/2021: Signal passed at danger and subsequent near miss, Chalfont & Latimer station - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/94421/Report_04_2021_Signal_passed_at_danger_and_subsequent_near_miss_Chalfont_Latimer_station_-_GOV.UK_(www.gov.uk).pdf)

An update was provided on work going on to convert two trains to become Hybrid diesel / battery powered trains. Units 168329 & 165004 were currently away. It is likely to be many months before either or both trains are back in service. Both projects are technically very complex.

In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, positive clarification was provided by the company regarding access to stations by Friends groups along the line.

During the week of the meeting, press articles had named Chiltern as a TOC that operates trains that allow toilet waste onto the tracks. The company confirmed that the articles were incorrect. Since the old Slam Door train (AL05) was retired at the end of March 2020, all the trains that the company operates have toilet retention tanks. The 'new' slam-door train (AL06) is currently being refurbished and is currently due to join the fleet by the end of September 2020. The train will have retention tanks.

Note: The Passenger Board were subsequently advised that because of the Pandemic, AL06 would no longer be required and there were no longer plans to use a 'Slam-Door' train set anymore.

Board members queried a current ORR consultation following a joint application made by Network Rail and Chiltern to phase out the use of the Automatic Train Protection System ("ATP") in favour of Advanced TPWS. The company ran through the background to the issues. The consultation closed on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2020 with a decision due to be made later in the year.

Note: The application was subsequently agreed by the ORR. The full results are available here: [Application for exemption from train protection duties: Chiltern Railway routes | Office of Rail and Road \(orr.gov.uk\)](#)

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## **OCTOBER 2020 MEETING**

This meeting was held remotely via MS Teams in Birmingham with eleven people attended including three from CR.

Richard Allan, the new Managing Director attended the meeting, having joined CR earlier in the month.

Initial thoughts and priorities shared with the Board were:

- The business is currently having to continuously adapt to new circumstances relating to the Covid-19 global health pandemic. Passenger numbers still very low (dipped as low as 4%, edging up to 25 / 30% now).
- The company has recently entered into an Emergency Recovery Management Agreement ("ERMA") with the DfT which will last until the end of 2021.
- A key part of the ERMA is 'Collaboration'. RA advised that he had earlier met with Malcolm Holmes (formerly Chiltern, now Executive Director of the West Midlands Rail Executive)
- Key priorities are to deliver a safe, punctual and reliable railway, as well as the many commitments and obligations set out in the ERMA.

Several detailed Q&As followed which were answered openly and honestly. These were predominately around the future strategy for CR, likely government direction and synergies across the industry.

Since the installation of the new footbridge and extended platforms at High Wycombe, some years ago, Board Members have continually pressed both CR and NR for amended working arrangements at the Bay Platform (1) where currently trains must stop so that the London bound driving cab stops at the very far end of the platform, causing considerable inconvenience for customers. Board Members were delighted to be advised that the installation of a Banner Repeater signal had been approved, with likely installation by the May 2021 timetable change.

The meeting was attended by a representative from London TravelWatch who provided an update on the current funding issues. Feedback was also requested from Board members regarding proposals to permanently remove the ability to pay by cash at Underground stations. This was potentially an issue for CR customers due to the stations that CR trains call at and the fact that Oyster shops are generally not available outside of the Greater London area.

The wearing of face coverings was once again discussed. CR explained their current plans for improved collateral on trains. Key part of 'Travel with Confidence' messaging. CR also explained plans to introduce automated announcements, which is technically quite challenging, due to constant TT changes. Note: These were subsequently introduced in May 2021 but were withdrawn in late July 2021 due to changes in legislation.

## **JANUARY 2021 MEETING**

This meeting was remotely via MS Teams with twelve people participating including two from CR.

CR notified the Board that Don Barton had advised that he would no longer be able to attend Board meetings and was seeking an alternative representative from SLUG. It was noted that Don had been a Board Member since the inception of the Board, including acting as Chairman in 2009 / 2010. The Chairman proposed a vote of thanks for Don's commitment and contribution to the Passenger Board, which was agreed unanimously.

A representative from London TravelWatch updated the meeting on developments since the previous meeting with respect to the acceptance by London Underground of cash at stations. He thanked members for their useful insights relating to the position on the ground, particularly at the outer extremities of the Metropolitan Line. It was acknowledged that the information provided by CRPB members had been extremely useful in helping London TravelWatch to make effective representations to LUL.

TFL have withdrawn their cashless proposals and LTW are pressing reinstatement at 200+ stations.

An update was requested about flexible season tickets. It was confirmed that these were under discussion with DfT and that the decision was theirs. It was also asked whether the fares would be regulated – while the answer to this question was not known, it was thought that this was likely to be the case.

Members requested an update on auto-announcements on trains (particularly with respect to face coverings). CR advised that the company would proceed with these, but that it was not currently

possible due to the frequent changes to the timetable. A brief explanation of how the various computer systems work to provide onboard announcements was provided.

A company representative briefly explained the work that had gone into the recent production of a comprehensive Business Plan. This was required by the DfT and sets out how CRCL intends to deliver its ERMA / EMA obligations and is also forward looking towards a potential Direct Award at the end of the year.

Accessibility issues were discussed at some length, including evolving obligations for Passenger Assistance. A large amount of time is being spent on website accessibility / features and matters were well in hand to launch a new Accessibility panel. Over time the Passenger Board has provided specialist input and feedback relating to Accessibility issues and members were pleased to note that a new dedicated panel / forum was being set up.

Board members were advised of a significant software upgrade due to be made affecting Customer Information Screens at stations as well as automated announcements. While many of the changes would relate to improved Passenger Information During Disruption, it was highlighted that some information would be seen by all passengers, including the provision of train lengths for all services.

The Board was also advised of the commencement of a 'Data Ecosystem' project. The most visible results from this would be that train loading data would be readily available via the Chiltern App and website.

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## **APRIL 2021 MEETING**

This meeting took place via MS Teams. There were nine attendees including three from CR.

Flexible season tickets were once again discussed at this second meeting of the calendar year. CR advised that discussions were ongoing with the DfT but that development work was ongoing so that the company's website would be able to support the rollout of whatever was decided on by the DfT. The company provided an update on the evolving timetable situation. A new weekday timetable had been introduced during the week of the meeting and was likely to remain substantively unchanged through to December 2021. Weekend timetables would change slightly in May, primarily to attempt to move Buckinghamshire passengers from Birmingham to Oxford trains, where there is more capacity available.

The Board were advised of significant focus on special events over the Summer, notably the EURO 2020 football tournament, with many events due to be played at Wembley Stadium.

The High Wycombe Banner Repeater has now been installed and was due to be commissioned in early May.

The company provided comprehensive business updates relating to footfall, the re-opening of retail, and the general commercial outlook in the context of the global pandemic. Negotiations were continuing with the DfT regarding the provision of services following the expiry of the original franchise term at the end of December 2021.

It was noted that Tim Bellenger had left London TravelWatch. A vote of thanks was passed to thank Tim for his help and support over the years.

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### **Chairman's Comments:**

Finally, on behalf of the CRPB, I should like to express the Board's thanks to the Directors, Managers and Staff of Chiltern Railways for giving their time to the Board during meetings, consultation processes and correspondence throughout the past year.

It is likely that this will be the last Report produced on behalf of the Passenger Board and I would like to thank everyone who has been involved, in any way, with the activities of the Board during the last two decades. All participants have had the interests of passengers at the heart of their deliberations, and it has been a pleasure to participate in these activities.

Chris Bates  
Chairman  
Chiltern Railways Passenger Board 2020-21