

Minutes of Portishead Railway Group members' meeting (PRG152)

Tuesday 2nd July 2019, 7.30 Folk Hall Portishead

1. **Apologies.** – There were apologies from Alan Matthews and 6 members. 40 members attended.
2. **Minutes of the last meeting** - Approved, proposed Colin Howells, seconded by Sue Mason. There were no matters arising.
3. **Update from meetings and correspondence**
To be updated in Peter's presentation.
4. **Presentation by Peter Maliphant – “The next four years”.**

Presentation. Highlights of which are:

- All the money has now been found with the final money having been announced by Chris Grayling, Transport Secretary earlier this year.
- The stages that the DCO has to go through were detailed to explain why it will take 18 months.
- GRIP 4 will be complete by the time the DCO is submitted, but everything will not stop while the DCO is being processed, GRIP 5 and some of GRIP 6 to 8 work will continue while the DCO is being examined, in the anticipation of a positive outcome.
- Discussion had on all the processes that are currently going on to enable the railway to be reinstated. There are 5 processes, each with a number of stages, taking place at the moment. Each takes a significant period of time, which is why the process is taking so long. Because of all of these stages more than £17m will have been spent before a spade goes in the ground. The final process illustrated, the Rail Network Enhancement Pipeline (RNEP), is something that has been recently introduced. We believe that we are at stage three on the RNEP but that WECA may still have to get sign off on stages one and two.
- It won't be until after the DCO has been granted that we can be given the approval of the final business case, and it is only when that has happened, in Autumn 2021, that we can say for definite that the railway will go ahead.
- If for any reason the project does not go ahead then the money spent will have to be taken from Council Tax. The grants already authorised would pay for it if the project goes ahead. While all the council's will incur costs, for North Somerset Council this amount will be £13.5m, 50% of the project cost, which is approximately 10% of all NS Council Tax revenue. So it is in everybody's interests that the project is driven ahead and actually happens.

Q. What happens to the contingency of £22m if it does not need to be spent?

A. We are unsure but will find out.

- The trainline will yield significant benefits, not only in reduced car trips and new job creation, but also value for money which is expected to yield £3 of benefits for every £1 spent on the line. This is an excellent return. On all other projects, £2 benefit to £1 spend is usually considered very good.

Q. Where does the cost ratio calculation come from?

A. It is estimated on data, and may be slightly under or over but we are confident that it is there or thereabouts.

Q. Over what period of time is the value for money calculated?

A. We think that it is three years, but the line is expected to make money in the first year.

- Timetable discussed – which should lead to the start of train services in December 2023. Looking through the details of some reports yields some interesting results with different compounds where resources will be shared e.g. with Hinkley Point power line project.
- Q. With all the land that is now needed, are the current landholders banned from profiteering or developing it, as some of the land plots to be bought has for-sale signs on them?
- A. The compulsory purchase order is fixed by nationally published rates not by the seller. Every parcel of land has been identified and will be bought at a set rate so anybody selling it on hoping to make a profit will be mistaken.
- Q. Why is the Portishead line set to open in 2023 not 2021 as is the Severn Beach to Bath line is?
- A. Because Severn Beach only involves enhancements to an existing line and is not subject to a DCO. Only the Bathampton turn back has got to be constructed which is nothing compared to the work through the Avon Gorge to Portishead.
- Q. In prior times this whole process came to a halt because of a change in Government. How ring fenced is the money for Portishead and what is the risk factor if we have a change in Government now?
- A. While the money is coming from central government it is in Network Rail's budget, and the amount promised to us makes up only one thousandth of their annual budget, so we should be OK.
- Q. What about transport for people that don't want to walk to the station?
- A. We suspect that this will be an issue, but one that we will deal with closer to the time.
- Q. The council has been asked in the past if there could be a 'round the town' bus service that would meet the trains and the council previously said that they would look at this closer to the time.
- A. PRG committee will not be sitting on our hands for the next four years but will be working on these and a number of other issues to try and ensure that everything runs smoothly.
- The whole process is now a lot more defined and logical – even more than it was two months ago. Question asked of the audience what else we can do to get this message out – and if it matters that we do?
- A. Can we have a countdown clock on the website?
- B. Can we get a picture of a train arriving on Quays Avenue on the station site, on the sort of material that is hung over the scaffolding of a new building that is being refurbished to show what the finish will look like? Maybe we could even get sponsorship for it?
- C. Neil Sherreard gave details of what would be required to have such sheeting up and offered to personally pay for it when the DCO goes in.
- D. Colin Howells said that the MetroWest project team originally said that they would give updates every three months but they have been reluctant to do this in case the facts changed. We will encourage them to do so again
- E. Ashley Cartman: Get updates put in North Somerset Life. Response from Colin: good idea but it has a long lead time and we have been caught out in the past when what we have written becomes out of date by publication date.
- F. Roger: we should have a better relationship with Bristol Post. Response from Dave Chillistone– the Bristol Post tends to put a negative viewpoint and so we are reluctant to. General feeling however that this can be overcome.

Treasurers report - £2,769 in the bank which is very static. But we are happy with that as we are not a money making organisation so just need enough for general operations.

Membership – Steady trickle of new members with 10 this year, we now have about 450 family groups.

Facebook – About 1200 people following us. We put all of our updates on the PRG Facebook page but not so much on the more public Hello Portishead ones as we tend to get a barrage of abuse afterwards, although perhaps should be a bit braver.

Webmaster - Problems with the website in the last week. It seems to be working on some browsers but not others. Been hosting websites for 15 years and never seen this. It is not something that the server company can explain so we think it will work its way out as most seem to be showing correctly at this time.

We used to have a countdown clock until it got almost down to three years at a point in the past and then everything changed so we took it off, but we think it is a good idea and as the end date gets closer we will reinstate it.

AOB

Nothing was raised.

Next meeting: AGM - Tuesday 3rd December 2019, 7.30pm at the Folk Hall