



## LOCAL ACTION

### Wessex

By David Brace

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#### ■ ■ Gateway to South Downs

A new community rail partnership has been formed covering a number of stations on the Portsmouth Direct route north of Havant. The stations included in the East Hampshire CRP are Liphook, Liss, Petersfield and Rowlands Castle. These are the four stations within the recently created South Downs National Park. Substantial funding and support has been provided by the national park. The CRP describes the train service as the gateway to the South Downs and follows the format adopted elsewhere in Britain to encourage support for local train services and to help integrate the railway into the community. Several meetings have already been held as well as a public event at Liss, plus some organised walks and cycle rides.

#### ■ ■ Engineering works and bustitution

Network Rail, through the South Western Alliance, has adopted two very different methods of carrying out major engineering works over the winter and spring.

Version one led to minimal disruption for passengers. When the track between Basingstoke and Salisbury was renewed, high output equipment was used on mid-week nights. This approach meant that very few replacement buses had to be run, mainly to cover for lightly used last trains. This also gave the engineers a little more time each night. As a bonus, the last jointed track has now been replaced on this route.

Version two caused major problems for passengers. For the major switch and track renewals at Southampton West and on to Bournemouth and for the commissioning of new signalling west of Poole, more than two months of weekend closures were imposed, with no trains through Southampton and numerous replacement bus services providing stopping and fast services. While well managed and probably necessary given the scale of the works, it did cause substantial inconvenience to passengers, especially those with bikes, buggies and baggage. Railfuture Wessex was asked to give its views to local paper *The Southern Echo* and we supported the need for the works despite the difficulties in carrying them out without the lines being closed. We advised that the paper should view it as a successful investment story. At least rail passengers in our area now have the summer months without any more bustitution.

#### ■ ■ Campaign for better trains to match price of rail travel



Picture: WIKIPEDIA

The branch secretary of Railfuture Wessex was interviewed live on BBC Radio Solent in response to the Office of Rail Regulation's financial report for 2012-13. He was able to make the point that, given the high cost of long-distance commuting in our area, more appropriate long-distance rolling stock

is needed rather than the class 450 trains with 3+2 seating (see picture). This has been a long-running campaign, particularly for commuters on the Portsmouth Direct line who suffer not only the class 450s but also have a poor journey time to London compared with many other routes.

#### ■ ■ IC125 to boost Bristol-Weymouth route in the summer

Railfuture Wessex is pleased to see that First Great Western will run an InterCity 125 train on the Bristol-Weymouth line to provide extra capacity on summer Saturdays. Weymouth is a popular Dorset coastal resort and the normal two-car diesel units cannot provide anywhere near the needed capacity.



# MAKING THE CASE FOR

## Rail Summit One: Wisbech

*Stephen Barclay, the MP for North East. Cambridgeshire, talks to Chris Austin*

The market town of Wisbech in the Fens has attractive riverside buildings, but in economic terms, has become a bit of a backwater.

The economic development that has boosted the corridor from Stansted Airport to Cambridge and Ely has not reached north Cambridgeshire, even though it is within the area of the Cambridge and Peterborough local economic partnership, which has the fastest growth of any local enterprise partnership.

Originally the town was served by two stations, the Midland & Great Northern and the Great Eastern, with direct services to Peterborough and Great Yarmouth until 1959, and to King's Lynn, March and Cambridge until 1968. A freight link on the eight-mile line from March was retained until 2000.

Just 20 miles to the east is the successful Fen line, electrified by Railfuture vice-president Chris Green in 1992 and now thriving, in stark contrast to the moth-balled Wisbech route.

The desire to improve prospects for his constituents is the main factor that convinced MP Stephen Barclay of the need for better links between the two parts of the county. The 4,000 signatures on the reopening petition served to underline his judgement here.

Restoration of the line has been proposed several times before but has never got anywhere. The first problem was that it had no business case and that previous studies had shown little benefit in return for the capital cost of restoration. Looking more closely at the scheme, Stephen

Barclay saw that earlier analysis had focused on the transport case, but not evaluated the wider economic benefits.

In addition, the scheme had no champion, partly because of the poor economic case, and partly because the local authority had run into difficulties with previous major transport schemes, including the notorious St Ives busway.

Stephen Barclay pays tribute to Martin Curtis, the leader of Cambridgeshire, for supporting the wider benefits study which transformed the case for the line. Now the project has a sound business case and full support from the county council and the LEP as a priority.

In political terms, Stephen Barclay has built a strong case for the line, not primarily to link Wisbech to the national network, but in support of the Government's £1 billion Cambridge City Deal, designed to develop the potential of this internationally renowned city.

For this reason he actively supported the new station planned for Cambridge Science Park, despite some local criticism that it was not in his constituency.

But he saw that the political case for Wisbech would be made much more effectively through enabling the wider benefits of the Cambridge project to be achieved, by providing access to affordable housing for the new workforce, rather than the narrower case for a rail link to the town which, on its own, had failed to establish a business case in the past. A 40-minute rail trip in the future compares with a drive of an hour and 40 minutes today. At a crucial point in the discussions, he convened



Picture by courtesy of the ELY STANDARD

**Manea today, Wisbech tomorrow: Stephen Barclay MP, left, at Manea where passenger numbers have tripled since Greater Anglia increased the number of trains calling**

