

Minutes of Portishead Railway Group Annual General Meeting. (PRG154)

Tuesday 3rd December 2019, 7.30pm Folk Hall, Portishead.

1. **Welcome.** Alan Matthews welcomed 42 members to the 2019 AGM
2. **Apologies for absence.** Apologies were received from 9 members.
3. **Minutes of 2018 AGM** confirmed and accepted at the March 2019 members' meeting
4. **Approval of accounts for the year ended 31/10/2019**

Treasurer, Wendy Thorne, presented the years accounts, but said there had been little activity this year. Colin Howells proposed the accounts be accepted, Daisy Bickley seconded and the accounts were accepted by all.
5. **Appointment of Independent Examiner**

Thanks were given to Mike Travers who had been the Independent Examiner for many years but due to ill health was unable to do it this year. Thanks were given to Fiona Pugh for examining the accounts for this year. As Mike Travers can no longer continue, Bob Brimley agreed to be the new Independent Examiner. This was Proposed by Colin Howells and seconded by Wendy Thorne, agreed by all.
6. **Chairman's report presented by Alan Matthews**

8th April - Peter Maliphant was on TV following the announcement by Chris Grayling of the £31.9m grant to complete the funding gap and giving the go ahead for the reopening of the line.

28th May – PRG met with James Willcock to get the latest position following the election of a new North Somerset Council. Also discussed was the latest position of the DCO and progress of the Network Rail GRIP process.

6th September – Dave Chillistone met with Liam Fox and subsequently provided assistance in the formation of the questions Liam Fox intended to raise in an Adjournment Debate in Parliament. In his previous career, Dave has knowledge of writing questions for MPs. This was a positive step forward as questions asked in an Adjournment Debate cannot be sidestepped and must be answered.

12th September- PRG met with James Willcock to discuss when the DCO was going to be submitted and the challenges that the MetroWest project team were facing. GRIP 4 is expected to be completed by the end of the year. GRIP 5 should begin in 2020.

16th October – Liam Fox successfully tabled an Adjournment Debate in Parliament to ensure that the money to rebuild the line would still be there even in the case of a change of government or any other changes. Liam Fox also said thank you to the Portishead Railway Group "*whose contribution has been utterly invaluable*". The record of the Debate appears in Hansard. It includes the accolade, the questions tabled, and the answers received, and can be read here:

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2019-10-16/debates/2A9075F5-FAB6-4EE6-B49C-01F15270D340/PortisheadRailway>

15th November – The DCO was submitted.
7. **Secretary's report**

Our last two Facebook posts about the DCO being submitted have reached 835 and 1390 people respectively. While there are still a few sceptics most people have been very positive about it. Our railway was also mentioned in Private Eye this week.

SIGNAL FAILURES



With Dr B Ching: "Boris Johnson's promise of £500m to reconnect left-behind towns to the rail network won't go far, thanks to the rocketing costs and sluggishness of rail schemes since the privatisation the Tories implemented to make the railways more 'efficient'. One of the simplest schemes would reinstate three miles of disused track between Bristol and Portishead, Somerset, and add two tiny new stations. The estimated cost (£15m in 2008) rose to £145m-£175m by 2017..."

8. Membership report given by Peter Maliphant

Recruiting members has not been our main focus this year as that has been the DCO, so little movement on membership numbers which stand at: 446 members; 432 on email, just 13 still by post.

It's PRG's 20th birthday next year. Looking back to when the group was founded: Google didn't exist, Yahoo was search engine of choice, no one had heard of Facebook, and Twitter wouldn't be invented for another 7 years

9. Webmaster's report given by Paul Gregory

It is the 14th anniversary of the website, when the website was built no-one dreamt it would take this long to get the railway running again. We are getting about 100 page views at the moment. Still the odd problem but that's more to do with browsers.

10. Appointment of committee

Chairman Alan Matthews read out a list of the existing committee members. All the existing members have said that they are willing to stand again. Sue Mason proposed they be accepted, and it was seconded by Terry Lester. It was agreed by all.

11. Presentation by guest speaker James Willcock. *Presentation can be found at:*

<https://www.portisheadrailwaygroup.org/Dec2019%20presentation.pdf>

Main points made by James- he outlined the proposed train service and some recent milestones in what has been an eventful year.

He explained that the Network Change was a really big thing for the rail industry and it was a real positive that we got through this with a real thumbs up from the operators.

There is quite a lot of compulsory acquisition of land. The DCO covered this and what the council is taking on, including the finances and any risks. The DCO is massive and he talked through the facts and processes of the DCO.

The environmental statement is huge mostly due to the Avon Gorge. The book of reference and consultation report is bigger than any others that can be found.

Most DCOs do get accepted first time around but there is also the chance that they may ask for more details or ask for tweaks.

He explained, rebuilding the 4.7km of disused railway is not the most difficult bit; the difficult part is upgrading the freight line through the Avon Gorge.

The DCO will give planning consent and compulsory acquisition of land powers and there is a lot of land needed. The biggest challenge is the temporary land needed to construct the line and the new land rights that are needed.

GRIP 4 is due to be completed at the end of this month. We don't go straight into GRIP 5 as it is not yet procured and will have to go to the whole market. GRIP 6 is construction.

Lots of different funding pots for this scheme. RoI is 3.1 which is very high for a scheme like this. Other benefits from the scheme are not as quantifiable such as personal wellbeing.

Most DCO schemes do get consent, there have only been 2 or 3 that haven't, but we are confident that we will. Inspectors will probably come to Portishead and the public will be able to ask questions of them.

It's very different running a freight train compared to a passenger train carrying hundreds of people. There are high retaining walls and catch fencing required. But where this is required it involves scraping back some of the ecology, but this is a challenge due to very rare plants. Some like the white beam, there are only 32 of in the world and they are all found in the Avon Gorge and 8 or 9 are in the way! The project had to get a specialist QC to contribute to the habitats and ecology process. A lot of work needed to demonstrate that we are not damaging the ecology in the Gorge.

Questions

- Q1. For GRIP 5 are there consortiums that you go out to?
A1. Need to decide how we package it. It will either be a hub and spoke set up, or a tier 1 contractor like a Balfour Beatty who will subdivide it themselves.
- Q2. Would you then go out to tender again for GRIP 6 or will you go to market for design and build?
A2. It will be design and build but we will only go out with a break clause in the contract. We could go to the market for GRIP 5 only, but if you then go to market and the original contract isn't there, that's much more difficult. DCO is a whole level of extra scrutiny
- Q3. One slide shows the cycle network alongside the railway, will this be maintained?
A3. We have 3 bridges: M5, Port Lane and Royal Portbury Dock. During construction the roads underneath will have to be shut, but otherwise the cycle paths will be retained and we will tidy up the alignment. Once the DCO is in, Portbury Dock will have to build their bridge.
- Q4. With HS3 in the pipeline is there likely to be any conflict re contractors and expertise?
A4. Good questions. There have been other schemes of similar size where it has not been an issue. It can be difficult to recruit people, especially with Hinkley, but we are not anticipating a problem
- Q5. How long will it take from Pill if it takes 23 minutes from Portishead?
A5. 17 minutes

Colin thanked James and his team for regularly agreeing to meet with PRG and to speak at meetings.

12. AOB

Rodney Drew previously gave a donation so that when the DCO was submitted we could buy a celebration cake. A cake was purchased and consumed at the meeting, thanks to Rodney.

In 2020 we plan to have only two members meetings instead of three, so the next members' meeting will be on the 19th May 2020. There may not have been much to say if we met in March.

After the meeting the committee was made aware of the sad death of John Dixon. John was a founder member of PRG and regularly attended our members meetings. He was also actively involved in promoting better rail services in our region. He will be sadly missed.

Next members meeting – 7.30pm, Tuesday 19th May 2020 at the Folk Hall