

Minutes of Portishead Railway Group AGM (PRG 165)

Tuesday 30th January 2024 at the Folk Hall, Portishead.

Welcome and introductions. Chairman Alan Matthews welcomed 40 members to the 2023 AGM and introduced James Willcock MetroWest Project Manager as the guest speaker for the evening.

Apologies: Apologies were received from 10 members.

Minutes of the 2022 AGM. The minutes of 2022 AGM were approved during 2023.

Chairman's report

PRG are pleased that the Final Business Case is about to be submitted. The committee meets regularly with the key partners associated with the project including James Willcock MetroWest Project Manager and we also has regular updates from the project team at Network Rail. We also correspond regularly with Sir Liam Fox MP who has been an avid supporter of the project.

Approval of the accounts

Copies of the accounts were circulated prior to the meeting. The bank balance has remained reasonably stable at £2566.64p which included £150 from The Institute of Quarrying and £25 from The Portishead Senior Forum. Our main expenditure was hire of halls, postage and subscriptions to other railway organisations. It was proposed by Rob Emony and Seconded by Terry Lester that they be accepted. The membership agreed by a unanimous show of hands.

It was agreed that the Independent Examiner, Bob Brimley, should continue. This was proposed by Wendy Thorne and seconded by Colin Howells, the membership agreed by a unanimous show of hands.

Communications report

We have approximately 1,800 followers and 1,600 likes on Facebook.

Webmaster

We have averaged 90 page views per day on our web-site, during 2023. We continue to update our web-site on a regular basis.

Membership

Membership has declined slightly, some members have moved away and some have sadly passed away. We still have around 400 family units, with the majority of members on email. About 75% of members live in the Portishead area with the rest of the membership living throughout the UK, and beyond.

Appointment of the committee

All committee members present stood up to be known to the membership. Since the last AGM two members from Pill have joined the committee, Bob Wring and Rob Emony

Terry Lester proposed that the current committee should continue: Dave Lloyd seconded. Agreed

Presentation by James Wilcock

James Willcock, MetroWest Phase 1 Project Manager gave the AGM meeting a very positive update on progress with the reopening project, then answered a large number of questions from the membership. The key points were:

- Everything is progressing well.
- The final cost validation of the project will be completed on 14 February.
- The full business case will be submitted to the Dept. for Transport by the end of March. Having resolved any queries, the DfT are expected to give their approval by the end of July 2024.
- Various stakeholder partners will then need to authorise necessary powers e.g. approval of Compulsory Purchase Orders by North Somerset Council. There are also DCO requirements, which are like planning conditions that will have to be addressed.
- Construction will start in October 2024
- Initially this will be a slow build-up, starting with constructing compounds and access roads.
- In early 2025 construction will accelerate, including work on the four road bridges crossing the line, repairs to Pill viaduct, realigning Quays Avenue and many other tasks.
- October 2026 – Construction completed. Commissioning and testing commences.
- December 2026 – First trains running on track.
- During 2023 all the partners involved in the project have been working well together and there are many individuals and organisations involved with a real desire to deliver a successful reopening.
- One of James' highlights of 2023 was the visit of Mark Harper, Secretary of State for Transport, who came for an hour's visit and stayed for over 2 hours with great interest in the project.
- The detailed design work has gone very well.
- Five car platforms at both new stations are included.
- James gave two examples of some of the challenges found and resolved during the year:
 - The ground at Quays Avenue is very poor and will need to be raised by 50cm or so with a large quantity of ballast.
 - Pill viaduct was found to be in worse than expected condition and remedial

work has been planned to ensure it is fit for 36 daily passenger train crossings.

- James acknowledged that the length of time it takes to make progress can be frustrating, but reminded everyone that “It is the system and we have to work with it.”
- Pill and Portishead station car parks will be kept in North Somerset ownership.
- The journey time Portishead - Temple Meads will be 23 minutes.
- 7 September 2024 will be the 60th anniversary of the Portishead and Pill line’s closure!

A question and answer session followed.

Q. Is the approval of the final business case a formality?

A. Five different technical people will review the final business case. There are likely to be questions that require a response. Then Ministerial approval then Treasury approval hopefully by the end of July.

Q. The DCO paperwork was six foot high, how much more still needs to be written?

A. There is still more paperwork to produce,

Q Are we still aiming for 5 car platforms?

A. Yes, 5 car platforms are the industry standard.

Q. What is the current cost of the business case? What final cost figure is in the final business case?

A. The Final cost update will be on the 14th February, that figure will go in the FBC.

Q. Are Planning conditions being dealt with by North Somerset Council?

A. Yes, planning is North Somerset Councils domain.

Q. Has the fact that Pill Viaduct’s been used for heavy freight caused any damage?

A. Pill Viaduct was built so long ago that Network Rail don’t have any drawings for the viaduct. Engineers are working on the issue to ensure that they can have complete

confidence in the integrity of the viaduct,

Q. Are there cost pressures?

A. There are cost pressures but I can't discuss them tonight.

Q. What do the partners feel about the project?

A. It's positive. The partners are keen to be involved and are committed to completing the project. Mark Harper, Secretary of State for Transport, was positive about the project on his recent visit.

Q. What happens to land that North Somerset Council has bought?

A. It will be sold to Network Rail. The Car Parks at Portishead and Pill will remain in NSC ownership and the Quays Avenue realignment.

Q. The journey time to Temple Meads is 23 minutes is that realistic?

A. Yes, we will have faster trains. The journey has been stress tested by Network Rail.

Q. Will the station platform be designed for disabled people?

A. Yes.

The meeting closed at 9.15pm

The date of the next members meeting to be confirmed.