

Minutes of Rail for Herefordshire meeting held:  
Thursday October 9<sup>th</sup> 2008 at 7.30pm at All Saints Church, Hereford

About 60 people came to hear Christian Wolmar; the renowned rail journalist and author. Janet made a few announcements prior to the talk:

On Sept 22<sup>nd</sup> we held what we hope will be the first meeting of a **Quality Rail Partnership**, attending this were Steve Banaghan, Managing Director, London Midland, Michael Chu; Quality Rail Partnership Officer, London Midland, Richard Rowland, Regional Manager, First Great Western, Ben Davies; Stakeholder Liaison Manager, Arriva Trains Wales. Lianne Wakeman, Route Planner, London North Western Route, Network Rail, sent apologies. The Council were represented by Cllr John Stone; Chair of the Council, Cllr Brian Wilcox; Cabinet Member for Transport, and Jim Davies; Public Transport Officer. Janet, Gerald and Becky were there for our group.

The three TOCs were very positive, giving examples of other QRPs (Milton Keynes, Herts and Warwicks) and what they had achieved. To begin with the Council were more circumspect, but we think we brought them round. We have a follow up meeting for January which we hope will resolve members of group, reporting, and the first programme of aims. We had already circulated the meeting with a list of our short, medium and long term aims.

During this meeting FGW told us they have permanently parked at Ledbury a coach to take passengers on if delays occur on their services during the day. These will become less with the timetable change which gives a longer turn around time in Hereford for the middle of the day. We also have an extra departing train from London, a 19.22 p.m. from December. London Midland also have improvements to timetables, with extra trains from December filling the current gap in the afternoon. Arriva TW are expanding their services, some of which will be helpful to Hereford.

Janet also asked, via the TOCs, that if people have issues about any of the services and they are members of the group writing **for the group**, will they please check with Janet, Gerald or Becky first. This is because the TOCs MDs will answer us personally, because if it comes from Rail for Herefordshire, they think it is from one of us. Anyone can write as an individual of course.

The title of Christian's talk was "**WERE THE RAILWAYS EVER PRIVATISED?**" The inside story of the scandal of rail privatisation". And he talked about just this, the scandal of it all. The haphazard sell off and structure, the ignorance of the people changing it all, the escalating costs, decline of service and difficulty of keeping tabs on expenditure and service. Now the railways are regulated by the DfT it is probably the worst of all possible ways. Civil servants run the show, they are there for their 3 year allotted career move, they don't understand about railways (which takes a lifetime), and tend to reverse earlier decisions. One good decision had been to give TOCs longer franchises; Chiltern is an example of this. But typically this has been reversed; some franchises are even less than five years now. CW felt that within two years the TOCs will be in trouble again. The terms of their

franchises mean they have a minimum service to provide, subsidy is reducing or money must be paid back, and this they won't be able to do.

At the end of the talk I still didn't understand why the railways were privatised and what exactly franchises are in concept (I know what they are in practice). The answer to the first according to CW is that the privatisation ball had started rolling and there was no-one there to stop it. The Labour government didn't want to change it as they didn't want to be held responsible for late running trains all the time. In answer to a question, **what would be the best structure for the railway**, he said, having thought and thought about this, the best would be British Rail with a few changes. Another question on why did Herefordshire Council happily spend £12.5m on a 3km road that is hardly used and useless (the Rotherwas Road) and yet not consider helping with **the congestion on our Hereford-Bham line**, he answered that rail is always left out of Transport Planners minds. For example the multi modal studies commissioned a few years ago didn't take rail into account (Hereford is still working to this study now).

**Next Meeting:** November 13<sup>th</sup>, December 11<sup>th</sup> All Saints Church, 7.30 p.m.  
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