



Friday 22nd May 2015
St Peter's Community Centre

Speakers: Ray Chapmen, High Speed Rail
Howard Martin, Chamber of Commerce
Chloe De Renzy-Martin, Link Road

Displays: Hilary Randall – Town Team
Doug Stevenson – Bexhill Alliance
Roger Crouch – Roaring 20s
Phil McCorry – Rowing Club
Ian Hollidge – Bexhill Wheelers
BRAG – Yolande Laybourne
Railfuture – Roger Blake
Festival of the Sea – Carole Green
Motofest – Howard Martin
Bexhill100 – Lynn Brailsford

Guest: Huw Merriman MP

The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed our new Member of Parliament, Huw Merriman, who then said a few words in which he spoke of his enthusiastic support for Bexhill and his wish to hear from constituents who have any matters to raise.

The meeting then heard from its three main speakers.

Ray Chapman, Specialist Transport Consultant and co-founder of the voluntary group East Sussex Rail Alliance

Ray provided these notes, which supported his presentation.

Poor rail operating performance is due primarily to:

a) Major and minor works on the rail infrastructure between Brighton and the capital (ie Victoria and London Bridge rebuilds, etc) - the direct responsibility of Network Rail - also including broken rails, failed point motors, disruption in signalling and power supply, over-running engineering works.

b) Stock and resources failure (causing cancellations and subsequent confusion) - the direct responsibility of the train operator - timetable shortcomings and late running (Southern and DfT/ORR) - stock shortages and technical failures (overcrowding and late running) - and passenger unrest caused by pricing irregularities, lack of staff, inadequate provision for disruption management and poor public communications.

1. Register constituency issues - Bexhill/Rye poor train performance (East and West) - remedies are support for HS1 to speed London access avoiding BLM congestion, but cut Brighton/Gatwick/London by low cost Willingdon chord rebuild. Need to bring forward key game-changing rail schemes to improve South Coast service performance and accelerate improvements to increase line speeds Eastbourne, Bexhill, Rye and Ashford (HS1).

2. Wider Sussex issues - Aid Gatwick Airport, Brighton and South East regional development with new Willingdon Chord (SCML) and Keymer junction (BML) investment - to cut rail journey times, enable greater access to and from employment pools in Bexhill and Hastings. Aim should be rail journey times from Bexhill to Gatwick 60 minutes; 30 minutes to Brighton; and 75 minutes to London by HS1 (and 30 minutes to Ashford for Eurostar/St Pancras). Both Willingdon Chord and Keymer Junction improvements are essential infrastructure enhancements, as is the Ashford (HS1)-Hastings electrification scheme.

Recommendations to:

1. Press for acceleration of the Keymer Junction and Ashford (HS1) electrification schemes, but demand Willingdon Junction is upgraded in the Network Rail Route Study as it is in a top slot for potential funding by South East Local Enterprise Partnership. (Caution - Eastbourne MP considers erroneously that such would seriously reduce services to and from Eastbourne when in fact they will be enhanced and provide Southern with much increased flexibility when there are Brighton Line interruptions).

Support of Rail Minister and Southern is sought to reinforce the rail network's ability to provide faster entry and exit of south coastal route with Willingdon Chord and the proposal for Bexhill-Hastings-Rye-Ashford HS1)-St Pancras which could then be extended to Eastbourne, Brighton or Gatwick Airport.

2. Press for more rolling stock allocation for the Brighton-Ashford (HS1) route, pending the electrification between Hastings and Ashford. Critical need to reinforce the mainly 2-car Diesel sets by 5 x 3 or 4 car reallocation, to increase resilience of service (highly variable and impacting on connections at Hastings and Ashford) and overcrowding.

Support of Rail Minister and Southern is sought for up to 5 more cascaded Diesel sets - or the attractive VivaRail D-78 re-engineered low-cost Diesel-powered sets (despite DfT resistance!), all required prior completion of Willingdon Chord, Hastings-Ashford (HS1) projects which are both supported in principle by SELEP and East Sussex County Council.

Q. Joe Yusuf: Is anyone able to do anything about simplifying the fare structure for trains?

A. Rail fares go back to the British Rail 1980s system there is an absolute need for reform. They are pitched differently in different areas and sometimes are set to price people off trains that are in demand. To make them uniform would lead to reductions for some and increases for others – a big challenge.

UK fares are higher than elsewhere in the EU as they are they are not funded from taxes. Introduction of the Javelin may help in improving the fares system.

- Q. Doug Stevenson: Rather than rely on a major change such as the High Speed service might it not be better – quicker and cheaper – to re-open the Willingdon Loop, which would reduce the journey to London Victoria by 25 minutes?
- A. Eastbourne won't allow its station to be by-passed and so potential time saving would not be made. There are issues that date back to Barbara Castle closing East Sussex lines in the 1960s, however there are some options for increasing speeds of services and campaigning will continue for those. But even with those improvements we have to look forward to what will be needed in twenty to thirty years' time as well.
- Q. Paul Courtel: Will the infrastructure be up to the standards of HS1 and HS2?
- A. Cannot speak for HS2 but certainly the service between Ashford and London will be of HS1 standard, though not to the same specification.
- Q. Rachel Hills: Travelling from Cooden to Cornwall, if you have the time and patience, you can split your journey and buy tickets for sections of the journey, so saving a lot of money.
- A. Agreed.
- Q. Peter Walker: Improvements to the East Sussex transport infrastructure are needed sooner than High Speed can be delivered. Improvements could be made now with Wi-Fi and general rolling stock upgrades. At present rail journeys are dead time but if we could work on trains then that time could be used effectively.
- A. This presentation has been focussed on future plans but there clearly are current needs as well. Within the current franchises some Wi-Fi proposals have been turned down due to costs though it is available on some, such as Virgin. Also tunnels block reception and so more 4G infrastructure is needed before connection can be maintained in tunnels.

Howard Martin: Chamber of Commerce Communications Officer

Howard provided these bullet point reminders of his presentation

- Introduction to the Chamber of Commerce's support for the high speed trains coming to Bexhill.
- Introduction to the Chamber of Commerce.
- Who we are.
- What we do.
- Who can join?
- Explained that we are in transition from merely a networking chamber to become a lobbying chamber.
- Explained our support for regeneration in Bexhill and that we would like to see some major capital projects in the town to support the trains.
- Took questions on Tourist Information centre, need for Chamber to be more involved in the town centre businesses.
- Explained that Chamber was now proactively lobbying in support of the trains and arranging evening meetings in the town.
- Explained the Chamber was supporting the need for a skills based educational facility and hotel in the town centre.

- Q. Stuart Earl: Over recent years there seems to have been a loss of inclusiveness in the Chamber so it is good that it is now returning. But why do you hold breakfast meetings that retailers cannot attend as they cannot leave their shops at that time of day? Please will you make meetings more accessible to everyone?
- A. Agreed – the Chamber is committing to returning to all areas of the town centre and we hope people from all over will join. It is starting to hold other types of meeting in other areas. Please note that the Chamber’s transition really gets under way in September from when things will start to be done differently.
- Q. Paul Courtel: Bexhill recently lost its tourist information centre – do you have any plans to regenerate it?
- A. We would like to research the value of TICs in today’s world of online information. There clearly is a value in tourist information – see Alastair Hazel’s Discover Bexhill website – but the question is whether there is genuinely a business value to a TIC, it needs to be explored.
- Q. Paul Courtel: People do stop and ask in the street where the TIC is – would one be good for tourism and generate business for the town?
- A. One would cost at least £50,000 per year to operate – question is whether it would generate that amount of value.
- Q. Christine Bayliss, Seafront Group: What is the Chamber’s role in advocating for retailers? The work on the seafront is taking too long – is the Chamber standing up to ESCC to demand completion?
- A. Agreed and have asked this of Cllr Simon Elford, but the Chamber can only take up such matters when the members request it however there are currently too few town centre retailers who are members of the Chamber for us to be able to put the case. The Chamber needs more members from the town centre, without them it is not possible to make a strong case.
- Q. Peter Walker: We lack the presence here of ESCC – it is perplexing that the Bexhill Chamber does not seem to be acting for Bexhill – it does not seem right.
- A. The Chamber is determined to be more representative in future and to lobby more.
- Q. David Knight: There doesn’t seem to be a Vision for Bexhill – we are aware of Visions for Hastings and Eastbourne but not for Bexhill. For example it used to be a centre for education – does the Chamber have a Vision for Bexhill?
- A. We are trying to get to grips with it but you are correct it is lacking here. The (modern) town of Bexhill-on-Sea was built as a holiday destination but it needs to know where it is going in future.
- Q. Stuart Earl: To create a Vision we need a local council, self-governance. It needs someone who can deliver it without relying on RDC.

Chloe De Renzy-Martin

Chloe provided the following notes from her talk as well as a copy of her slides, which are published alongside these minutes.

The Bexhill to Hastings Link Road has now been under construction for nearly two years and is expected to be opened to traffic in the autumn of 2015. This is later than the original date published and has been as a result of several factors including the fourth wettest year on record in 2014 and greater archaeological investigation than was originally anticipated.

There have been several concerns raised regarding the height of the parapets on the Woodsgate Park Bridge. We have confirmed that the design and construction has met the standards laid down in the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) published by Highways England. We also carried out a separate Safety Risk Assessment specifically relating to the height of the parapets which concluded that there was no significant risk that would give cause for the parapets to be raised.

Work has largely been completed at the Bexhill connection of the scheme with the A259 up to the Ninfield Road Bridge. There are still some minor works including further landscaping and there will be snagging at the end of the scheme. This section of completed road has allowed us to use it as a temporary diversion route during the closure and demolition of the Ninfield Road Bridge (aka Sidley Bridge). The reinforced concrete works that form the main structure of the bridge have been completed and the utility companies can now reinstate the gas, water, electricity, sewers and telecoms across the bridge. Once the utilities are complete we will be able to carry out the final waterproofing to the deck, before we can complete the backfill to the structure. We will then carry out the road construction over the bridge as well as the kerbing and paving before surfacing and carrying out road marking. We will also need to reinstate the street lighting and traffic lights for Elva Way and complete the bridge parapets. We anticipate being able to open the bridge to 2 way traffic in August.

In the rural section many of the mainline bridges have now been completed allowing access over them. This has allowed us to move on to building the greenway bridges. We have also completed the majority of the earthworks to provide the cut or fill areas for the road to be carried on. This has allowed us to come through with the drainage. We are also able to continue the works on the numerous ponds and greenway.

Work has been completed to divert a section of Crowhurst Road so it can be carried under the new link road through an underpass and this has now been opened to traffic.

We have also commenced works on the tie-in to Queensway including widening the road to allow additional approach lanes and the installation of street lighting.

Q. Martin Woodfine: Are we in discussion with the bus companies to make sure of effective connections?

A. We are in advanced discussions with Stagecoach and will release information about this as soon as we are able to.

- Q. Stuart Wood: Why does the cycle route across the valley not run alongside the road as was originally said?
- A. The route being separated from the road is safer and pleasanter for cyclists and pedestrians.
- Q. Stuart Wood: The filter for traffic off King Offa Way is already clogged and causing tailbacks – is this going to lead to problems on Barnhorn Lane?
- A. The current traffic is not indicative of the future traffic as the new road is being used at present to get to Sidley due to temporary road closure. We have to wait until the road and its traffic are bedded down to be able to know how it will be. Please note also that it will take some time after opening for people to settle how they will travel in future before it will be bedded down.
- Q. It would be good if RDC were to give a presentation here (Town Forum) on how they see the changes that are being made fitting in.
- A. The Forum will give that consideration.
- Q. Peter Whiting: What will happen if a car breaks down on the new road - are there any lay-bys?
- A. Yes there are lay-bys. The road is quite short so there is no real risk of being stuck without help.
- Q. Mark Plews: Assuming a survey was done before the road was started – what % of vehicles is it expected will be taken off the A259?
- A. A 40% reduction is predicted.
- Q. (questioner not identified): The new road was not designed to be a trunk road.
- A. The A259 is a trunk road, the new road is a link road, not a by-pass. Approval was not given for a by-pass to be built.

The Chairman thanked all who had brought stalls and who had spoken.

The next meeting of the Forum will be its Annual General Meeting, which will be on 17 July at St John's, corner of Victoria Road and London Road. Refreshments and informal chat from 6:30pm, formal meeting to start at 7:00pm.

The next regular meeting of the Forum will be on Friday 2 October at St Peter's Community Centre, Old Town, Bexhill-on-Sea.