

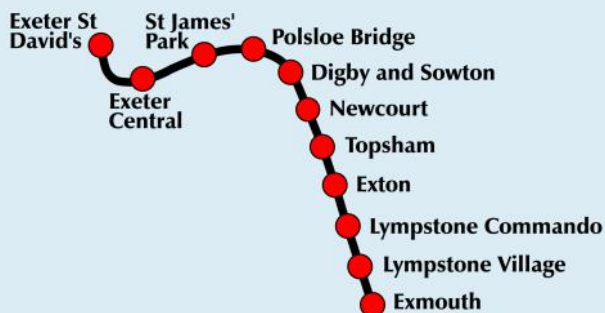


AVOCET LINE

RAIL USERS GROUP

NEWSLETTER





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Cover photo: 166219 leaving Starcross with the late running 1255 service from Paignton to Exmouth on 9 August.



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15th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Friday 21 October 2022 at 19.30

The Ballroom at the Manor Hotel, Exmouth

Following the formal business we will welcome our guest speaker

Simon Jupp MP

Simon Jupp is MP for East Devon and is currently a member of the Transport Committee (House of Commons Select Committee)

This will be followed by questions to a panel of invited guests

Agenda

1. Apologies for absence
2. Agree the minutes of the AGM held on 18 October 2021
3. To receive reports from:
 - * the Chairman (circulated in this newsletter)
 - * the Treasurer (circulated in advance of the meeting)
4. Election of Officers for 2022/23. Nominations for officer posts
 - * Chair
 - * Vice Chair
 - * Treasurer
 - * Secretary
5. Election of Committee for 2022/23. The maximum number of committee, including officers, is 15. Should nominees exceed vacancies there will be an election by show of hands.

Nominations for Officers and Committee MUST be made in writing to the Secretary - Diana Shindler at alrug150@gmail.com or 4 Noble View, West Malvern Road, Malvern, Worcestershire, WR14 4NB.

Nominations MUST be submitted to the Secretary no later than Thursday 13 October 2022.

The Chairman's Compartment



Mike Reddaway

Annual Report 2022

We have had a busy year, with a major concern being the train service. The first half of the year suffered from the effects of covid with a reduced number of services because of so many staff being on sick leave. The many timetable changes meant there were no timetable posters on stations until the May timetable change. Poster timetables have returned but we have complained against a Department for Transport decision to not print any paper timetable leaflets.

Rolling stock provision has become worse through the year. There have been far too many instances of only two carriages often resulting in overcrowding and passengers left behind.

We have seen more cancellations or trains skipping stops due to late running. Skipping stops is where a train misses most stations to gain time. We have argued that following trains should stop at missed stations but it has not happened. GWR tell us that they are looking at all aspects of the service to get to the root cause of the challenges they are currently trying to manage.

Passenger numbers are now higher than before the pandemic and we need a reliable train service. Trains need to run on time and have enough carriages. There seem to be daily problems, big and small, with numerous causes. And whatever your views of industrial action, it is a shame that passengers suffer the most in such disputes.

New services

It is not all bad news. We have had three extra trains added on weekday evenings to allow shorter connections at St Davids. In December GWR introduced one extra evening train and then two more with the May timetable change. This gives us a half hourly service from St Davids until 2153 and from Exmouth until 2224. The earliest train of the day was reinstated in May.

The Dartmoor Line to Okehampton reopened in November and has had an hourly service since May. It's good to see a new train service in Devon and it's being well used. Within the next year we should see Marsh Barton station opened too.

Meetings

We were delighted to see many members at our AGM last October and to welcome Sir Peter Hendy as our guest speaker over Zoom. Our Members' Meeting in May was again well attended, with representatives of the three train operators giving a presentation and taking a lot of questions. We apologise for the online problems we had throughout a very interesting meeting. Committee meetings have continued to be held in Lymptstone Village Hall.

Committee membership

Through the year we co-opted Neale Harvey and Geoff Kerr onto the committee. They are standing for election at this AGM. Diana Shindler is stepping down from the post of Secretary but I'm pleased to say she will remain on the committee. She has done an excellent job organising meetings and communications and all the little things that no one notices. Thank you Di.

My thanks go to all the committee members and our President for all the work they do throughout the year. We all wish there were less problems to deal with!

Other organisations

We take part in regular meetings of the Exmouth Transport Partnership, the Devon Rail Forum and TravelWatch South West. We attend GWR's Stakeholder and Community Conferences. We regularly communicate with GWR, Network Rail, DCC and the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership. We have taken part in several consultations and an online discussion with the Great British Railways transition team.

Website

We have been working with a designer to create a new website. We were not happy with the design and, after discussion, we decided to end the project. We have had to pay the designer for the work done and negotiated a reduction in the original invoice. It is still around £1200 which has been paid over two financial years. The officers are not happy with the situation but accept there were faults on both sides. We shall monitor similar business relationships more closely in the future.

Passenger counts

We counted passengers on Tuesday 24 and Sunday 29 May. This was shortly after the new timetable started and was the first count since the lockdowns. Further details can be found in the article on page 8.

Vandalism

We don't normally suffer vandalism but this year our noticeboards at Lympstone Village and Digby & Sowton were damaged and then stolen. They have been replaced. Someone tried to set fire to the acrylic cover on the Newcourt noticeboard but being fire resistant it only suffered melting and singeing. Plants have been thrown onto the track, stolen or damaged at Newcourt, Digby and St James' Park. All this results in work and cost

Finally, my thanks go to managers and staff at GWR, Network Rail, Devon County Council and other organisations who happily answer our questions and complaints. And, of course, thanks to our members. We are always happy to receive your questions and comments.



150207 passing through Exton with the 0853 from Paignton service to Exmouth on 1 August.

Service interruptions

Tony Jackson

This time I take a look at GWR's performance on what I refer to as the Devon Metro Lines. The first table shows the total number of incidents that I have recorded for the period to the end of August. Data is extracted from RTT (Real Time Trains) and while generally numerically accurate, it isn't 100% so. But the overall picture that is painted is more than good enough.

For both tables, 2022 actually means from the start of the new timetable in December 2021.

A note on the number of replacement services shown. The figure reflects the number of instances where a replacement train has been provided for the whole or part of a particular service. For example, a Paignton to Exeter service replaced by a train starting from Newton Abbot or for the whole of the journey.

Summary of problems on Devon Metro Lines							
GWR trains only 2022							
Including 89 instances where replacement services ran							
By responsibility	Avocet	Axminster	Paignton	Okehampton	Tarka	Totals	%
Great Western Railway	210	9	193	49	106	567	65.7%
Network Rail	41	3	32	36	76	188	21.8%
Other operating	27	0	21	12	18	78	9.0%
Other issues	8	0	2	16	4	30	3.5%
Totals 2022 to 31st August	286	12	248	113	204	863	100.0%

The second table goes into the detail and as usual Motive Power and staffing issues take the two top spots, but track/signalling issues feature strongly as well. Remember we have a pretty elderly signalling system as well as ancient rolling stock. Comparative figures for 2021 have not been shown as, due to various timetable changes, to do so would be meaningless.

We can but hope that better times lie ahead but I feel that we may have a long wait.

Summary of problems on Devon Metro Lines							
GWR trains only 2022							
Including 89 instances where replacement services ran							
By cause	Avocet	Axminster	Paignton	Okehampton	Tarka	Totals	%
Bridge strikes	1	0	0	0	0	1	0.1%
Derailments	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%
GWR depot problem	5	0	0	0	0	5	0.6%
GWR request	7	1	3	2	10	23	2.7%
GWR unexplained	7	0	4	3	2	16	1.9%
Late running issues	6	0	4	0	0	10	1.2%
Leaf fall season	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%
Motive power problem	82	2	55	25	45	209	24.2%
Other problems	13	0	10	12	13	48	5.6%
Overcrowding/congestion	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%
Passenger issues	14	0	11	0	5	30	3.5%
Person hit by train	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%
Single line issues	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%
Staffing issues	103	6	127	19	49	304	35.2%
Track/signalling/power supply	41	3	32	36	76	188	21.8%
Trespass (people or animals)	6	0	2	16	3	27	3.1%
Vandalism	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%
Weather	1	0	0	0	1	2	0.2%
Totals 2022 to 31st August	286	12	248	113	204	863	100.0%



Cascade Watch

Tony Jackson

Once again I have to start my regular article by stating that there is little new to report. By little I really mean nothing.

The introduction of the Class 769 Flex trains (pictured below) remains in the balance but as things stand at the moment their use on the North Downs Line is currently our only hope for more Turbo diesel units heading west to ease pressures in the Bristol and Exeter areas. The plan remains for six Flex units to be put into service this coming December but, as ASLEF has still not agreed to drive the units due to cab issues, that date is becoming increasingly unrealistic. Cabs are apparently being modified. These units are all over 30 years old and to many it beggars belief that so much time, effort and money has been (and continues to be) spent on this project. Had new stock been ordered they could well have been in service by now.

Just for the record the Turbos (Class 165 & 166) will all be 30 years old come next year, so the Avocet Line is not being allocated spring chickens. The oldest will be 33. Just good enough for the West Country – even though they are becoming increasingly unreliable?

There is also no news on plans to replace the Castle Class sets running between Penzance and Cardiff. Class 158s from Transport for Wales remains the most likely option and it would not be a surprise if this issue were to be resolved before the Flex trains enter service. Of course, the micro managers of the DfT may have other thoughts on the stock reallocation. But why? Surely, more than ever, we need professional people running the railways, not pen pushers.



Crunching the numbers



Tony Day and Noel Harrison

ALRUG conducted two full-day passenger counts in May, the first since the Coronavirus pandemic. The figures bear out what we have observed when using our trains – the Avocet Line has made a full recovery, indeed usage is up on 2019 levels.

The counts, funded by Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership, were originally planned for February, but Covid numbers were still high enough to warrant caution and a temporary timetable was in operation.

ALRUG has undertaken many counts over the past 10 years, which have contributed greatly to our knowledge of line usage and have shown up changes in travel patterns over time. In the past Saturday counts

have shown the effect of sporting fixtures and Sunday counts were a plank in ALRUG’s successful campaign for better Sunday services on the line.

Our squad of experienced counters are rostered to ride each train from the start to end of service, noting the numbers getting on and off at each station, plus the number on board between each pair of stations. We are also able to deduce the number of ‘cross-city’ passengers, travelling from the Avocet Line stations to St Davids and beyond.

The 2022 count

This year’s count was taken on Tuesday and Sunday in the second week of the summer timetable, which saw restoration of the full pre-pandemic service for the

first time, plus two additional evening trains (and an additional early morning train since the 2019 count).

Although not directly comparable to past February counts, the May counts were during term time and out of the main holiday season – and past journey figures have shown numbers in February and May to be similar. The Sunday count was the first since a full half-hourly Sunday service to St Davids/Paignton was introduced.

In the event we were blessed with two ideal days – no cancellations or service disruption occurred and the weather was neither bad enough to deter travel nor good enough to swell numbers to untypical levels.

CONCLUSIONS

The most obvious conclusion is confirmation of evidence from other sources that local rail use has fully recovered from the effects of the pandemic. In fact, passenger numbers are now significantly higher than pre-Covid: the total number of journeys for the weekday count was 5674 compared with 3894 in 2019, a 45% increase.

Sunday

The Sunday figures are equally encouraging: a total of 4022 journeys is 70% of the weekday figure, although the service has 66% of the trains on weekdays. The data shows high weekend use of

Lympstone Village and Polsloe Bridge stations, but lower use of Digby & Sowton.

Peak demand

There is some evidence of flattening of the morning peak, but this is not conclusive.

Cross city

There has been a significant increase in cross-city traffic (53% up on Tuesday, no comparable Sunday service in past years).

Seating capacity

The regular use of 3-car Class 166s or 4-car Class 150s provides adequate seats for the foreseeable future, but overcrowding on a peak service arose because a train was short-formed. Single Class 150 units should not be rostered during the working day, as each of the seven diagrams (operating patterns) for the Avocet Line takes in at least one peak service during its three-hour cycle.

Evening services

The May 2022 timetable includes new services that give the Avocet Line a half-hourly service between 0700 and 2200. Despite little publicity, it is encouraging to see that they are already proving useful. The count provides a baseline to measure future growth in use and an evening count later in the year would be interesting.

Scope for promotion

There is now sufficient capacity on off-peak services to make promotion of leisure use of Devon Metro services a sensible investment.

KEY FINDINGS

- Pandemic has not affected local rail usage
- Total weekday journeys up 45% compared with 2019
- Little change in peak demand
- Sunday journeys 70% of weekday, despite fewer trains
- 'Cross-city' journeys up 50% compared with 2019
- If trains aren't short-formed, seating capacity now adequate
- New evening services – encouraging start

Driving towards sustainability...by the minute

Helen Scholes



If you live, work or travel along the Avocet Line you may already be familiar with – or even use – Co Cars’ fleet of shared white and orange cars and e-bikes.

Co Cars is a cooperative social enterprise based in Exeter who provide innovative, on-demand shared mobility services. Their aim is to give people access to sustainable transport options that are low-carbon, reduce costs and lower pollution, helping make our towns and cities better places to live.

The company was started in 2005 by Mark Hodgson, a Topsham resident who was frustrated by the growing number of vehicles crowding the small estuary town. To address this, Mark launched a community car club. This meant people could book and use cars only when they needed them, removing the cost and hassle of owning a car whilst also helping tackle congestion and pollution.

His vision was always to expand the club to include the wider Exeter area and in this he and his team have been wildly successful. Co Cars now has a network of nearly 40 electric and low emission cars that cover not only Exeter but locations across the South West.

The company also runs the Co Bikes on-demand e-bike network which comprises of a fleet of 200+ e-bikes available to hire from 40 locations centred on Exeter and expanding to include locations outside of the city.

Both services are straightforward and cost effective to use. Co Cars members can book any car in the network from a few minutes to a few days. Prices start from £4.25 per hour or £32 per day plus mileage and everything is included in the price. Co Bikes can be booked by app and ridden for just 5p a minute. Because the bikes are electrically assisted, members use them for longer trips that would have previously been done by car.

A key factor of the company's success is the integration of its shared mobility solutions into the wider public transport network, including train stations, some of which are on the Avocet Line. To achieve this integration, Mark and his team invest considerable time in building a network of partnerships that includes local authorities, transport operators, businesses and housing developers.

Through these partnerships, Co Cars connect the dots between where people are coming from, where they are going to, the purpose of their journey and how it can be done without resorting to using a private car.

Wherever possible, the company will co-locate their services. For example, at both Central and St Davids train stations, commuters, residents and visitors can choose from trains, buses, Co Cars and Co Bikes all within a stone's throw of the stations' doorsteps.

These co-located services are now becoming commonly known as 'mobility hubs' – places that bring together shared transport with public transport and active travel whilst reducing the dominance of the private car.

The train companies are also enthusiastic about supporting these initiatives,



Key Co Cars facts

- Collectively Co Cars/Co Bikes have over 10,000 members.
- Each shared Co Car removes on average 8.5 private cars from the road.
- **In 2021:**
Co Bikes members pedalled over 45,000 miles –almost twice round the Earth.
- Co Cars travelled over half a million miles – further than the distance to the moon and back....

understanding that as people's travel patterns continue to evolve post-Covid, providing shared, sustainable onward travel options is a key point of difference.

Looking to the future, Co Cars is experiencing a massive surge of interest in introducing their services at more locations across the South West. From an Avocet Line perspective, a new Co Bikes station has recently opened a few minutes from Exmouth train station. Other notable train station locations due to open this year are Pinhoe, Salisbury and the long-awaited new station at Marsh Barton.

In conclusion, as we all face a squeeze on our living standards alongside the ever more urgent need to address climate change, Co Cars shows that there is a way to do things differently that not only benefits our pockets but the planet too.

You can find out more about Co Cars' services by visiting www.co-cars.co.uk and www.co-bikes.co.uk.

Helen Scholes is the Marketing Manager of Co Mobility, inc. Co Cars/Co Bikes

Switzerland revisited

Ross Hussey



For me, this was a return visit to the Bernese Oberland, 49 years after a school trip in the summer of 1973. But we began with an unscheduled day in Geneva, having flown out a day early after EasyJet informed us that our planned flight would be cancelled. In Geneva and other Swiss locations, you get a local public transport pass from your accommodation for the duration of your stay. It's free (or perhaps paid for by the tourist tax) but in any case it's very useful.

As in 1973, we stayed in Wilderswil near Interlaken. To get there we travelled via the scenic Golden Pass line from Montreux. The trains have a panoramic compartment at the front, with the driver in a cab upstairs above the passengers. On our train the compartment was empty, enabling me to take photographs out of the front of the train.

For this day and the last three days of the trip, we bought a single country Interrail, valid for any four days within a month. There's a reduced price for those aged 60 and over; different from the days when you had to be under 26! Note that the Interrail app has a journey planner that works offline; useful as few Swiss trains have wifi.

Wilderswil has a station on the Bernese Oberland Bahn giving easy access to the towns of Lauterbrunnen and Grindelwald, with onward connections via the Wengernalp Bahn to the mountain villages of Wengen and Kleine Scheidegg. These and other narrow gauge railways, together with various cablecars, boats and a funicular, gave access to plenty of walks through spectacular mountain scenery which in June was carpeted with wild flowers and capped with snow. We bought the five-day Jungfrau Travel Pass,



Main picture: Schynige Platte summit.
 Above: driver's eye view from the Golden Pass panoramic coach.
 Right: single car train at Murren.



misnamed because one of the few things it didn't cover was the Jungfrau Railway, other than to the first station!

After our stay in Wilderswil, we headed south to Brig and travelled along the route of the Glacier Express to Chur, following in the footsteps of David Tozer and Jim Beed (see NL46, Winter 2020). From Chur we took a day trip south on the Bernina Express route as far as Poschiavo, returning via a circuit through Davos. For our final day we travelled back to Geneva via Zurich and the shores of Lake Neuchatel.

So what are Swiss trains like? The main operator is still state owned, but doesn't serve the whole country because there have always been numerous private railways and still are. You would expect it to be very disjointed but mostly it is well co-ordinated. Without exception the trains were clean, although not always modern. The Swiss timetable allows for tight connections which suggests all trains run on time, but they don't!

The trains did generally perform well, though. There were a couple of train defects, resulting in one cancellation and



Above: broken down en route to Chur.
Left: Wengernalp Bahn train at Kleine Scheidegg, with the Eiger behind.

one delay. The difference between Switzerland and the UK seems to be that there is more capacity in the system, such as more passing loops on single track sections, so that one problem doesn't disrupt the whole service for several hours. For our longer delay (one hour because we missed an onward connection) we received drink vouchers from the conductor – easier for us as tourists than Delay Repay.

There are lots of request stops and the onboard displays can cope with them,

unlike GWR's. To stop a train you press a button on the platform or in the carriage (just like in a bus - how revolutionary).

Like everything else Swiss, the trains aren't cheap, but otherwise this is as good as public transport gets, and it's a pleasure to use. It's not exclusively public or private sector – UK politicians take note. What matters is that it's properly resourced, joined up, and designed by people who have thought things through.



Above: Landwasser viaduct on the Bernina Express route.
Right: Golden Pass train.



Know your railway terms

Tony Jackson

Here are the explanations of the two terms published in newsletter 56.

1. CWR: continuous welded rail. A form of track made from rails welded together with a thermite reaction or by flash butt welding to form one continuous rail that may be several kilometres long.
2. Loop: a second parallel track (running for a short distance) on single track railway lines, allowing a train to pass another.

Here are two new terms to ponder until the next newsletter.

1. Narrow gauge
2. PICOP

I-Spy guide to Avocet Line rolling stock

A new member wrote suggesting a 'beginners guide' to identify our rolling stock and aid the understanding of references in articles. The three main types of train used on the Avocet Line are quite distinctive in appearance, and also the first three numbers at the front indicate the class. So here goes:

Class 150 (specifically type 150/2)

Built in 1986 and widely used by GWR throughout the West Country. There are two variants with differing layouts and seating capacities, 122 or 136, both 2-car units ideally paired to provide a 4-car service on our line.



Class 166 'Turbos'

Built in 1992-93 3-car Class 166 trains are regulars on the line, though the similar Class 165 makes rare appearances. They have a seating capacity of 244. Originally plying the Thames Valley routes, giving them the nickname 'Thames Turbo', they have recently been 'cascaded' to our region as electrified rolling stock replaced them.

Class 158

Built in 1990-92. Designated for mainline services and the Barnstaple line they are now often used on our services as well. Usually seen locally as a 3-car formation with a capacity of 192 or 198. There is also a 2-car version with a capacity of 130.



Exmouth protest to save ticket office



Protesters against potential ticket office closures set up their stall outside Exmouth station for a day in August. See Tail Lamp on page 23.

Picture: *Mike Reddaway*



A couple of gulls busy themselves as 150261 prepares to depart with a 2-car 1757 service from Exmouth on 25 August. Photo: *Neale Harvey*

Always something to do...

Railway infrastructure continuously needs maintenance both major and minor. Over the past year all sorts of jobs have been done on the Avocet Line, perhaps not noticed by most of us as much of it happens at night.

The most obvious is at Polsloe Bridge where the whole structure has been strengthened, including installing new steel fence panels. At Topsham the down platform has been resurfaced as has the parking area outside the station entrance. Platforms at all our stations other than Polsloe Bridge have had new yellow warning lines painted on them and edges painted white. There has been a lot of overgrown vegetation cut back particularly at St James' Park around the bridge and paths.



Clockwise from top left: Vegetation well cut back at St James' Park; sparkling new railing panels between refurbished concrete pillars at Polsloe Bridge; new white and yellow lines contrast with the old surface at Exton; the outside smartened up and also the down platform resurfaced at Topsham.



150239 crossing the Clyst bridge at Topsham with the 0815 Paignton to Exmouth service on 1 August.



166216 arrives at Exmouth to take the 1223 service back to Paignton on 25 August.

Right: the holiday seems to be over for this passenger aboard the 1756 from Exmouth on 1 September.





At St James' Park on Tuesday 30 August, 166218 forms the slightly late 2119 service to Barnstaple while 165101 forms the on time 2024 departure to Exmouth. Around 25 people joined each train after Exeter City's game against Newport County.

Photo: Mike Reddaway

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

This is my last report for this membership year – currently we have 201 members.

Renewals are due on 1 November and at £5 for an individual and £8 for a couple we are still incredibly good value.

Renewal letters will be emailed or posted to you depending on your normal delivery method.

The majority of our members pay by standing order but for those paying by cash/cheque or bank transfer (our bank details are on the renewal letter) please pay promptly as this helps greatly with the admin. If using the bank transfer option please make sure you put your surname followed by your initials in the reference box plus your membership number if known. If you do not include these details we will not be able to trace your payment.

Mike Holbrook
Membership Secretary

HOW TO JOIN ALRUG

By email — you can download a membership form from our website at www.avocetline.org.uk (look for the 'join us' heading) and either scan and email the completed form to me or post the completed printed form. Alternatively I can email a form directly to you.

By post — write to me at the address below and I will send you a form.

At our meetings

By payment in person at the door by cash or cheque (payable to ALRUG)

Contact details – mikeholbrook1@btinternet.com

Membership Secretary
ALRUG
60 St Johns Road
Exmouth
EX8 4DD

Subscription rates on joining are £5 per year for an individual or £8 per year for a couple at the same address. You can pay by cheque payable to ALRUG and post to the address above with your application.

Alternatively you can set up a standing order via a form downloadable from our website with the membership form – please complete with your application and post, or scan and email to the above.

ALRUG MEETINGS 2022

Meetings start at 7pm (AGM 7.30pm)

Friday 21 October	AGM	Manor Hotel, Exmouth
Monday 14 November	Committee only	Lypstone Village Hall

AVOCET LINE RAIL USERS GROUP COMMITTEE 2022

President:	Tony Day
Chairman:	Mike Reddaway <i>alrug.mr@gmail.com</i>
Vice-Chairman:	Noel Harrison
Secretary:	Diana Shindler <i>alrug150@gmail.com</i>
Treasurer and timetables:	Tony Jackson <i>tj@exmouth.plus.com</i>
Communications Secretary:	Diana Shindler
Membership Secretary:	Mike Holbrook <i>mikeholbrook1@btinternet.com</i>
Notice boards:	Mike Goom
Committee Member:	John Colby
Committee Member:	Andrew Parker
Committee Member:	Jenny Ellis
Committee Member:	Martin White
Committee Member:	Ross Hussey
Committee Member:	Neale Harvey
Committee Member:	Geoff Kerr
Newsletter Editor:	Rob Cousins <i>alrugeditor@gmail.com</i>
Newsletter Distribution:	Mike Holbrook

TAIL LAMP ...

.... the last word from the Editor



A hot ticket item

There have recently been widespread protests locally and nationally, including at Exmouth, against potential ticket office closures. Although there are no hard and fast published plans there is no doubt that the rail companies are keen to reform the system.

Purchase of tickets has significantly moved away from over the counter transactions, but judging by recent queues witnessed at Exmouth (pictured below) then there is still plenty of demand for a face to face service. And it's not just for buying tickets. People still need advice on journey planning, dealing with cancellations or, as in one notable personal situation, turning up for an advance booking on a service that had subsequently been removed from the timetable altogether.

Not everyone is a regular rail user and therefore may not be inclined to navigate app downloads and online bookings for infrequent travel, and would welcome buying a ticket from an actual person (or they could try to get to grips with the interminable nightmare menus of some ticket machines and miss several trains in the process).

The unions certainly think that changes are in the offing, with the RMT stating that 'mass closures' are 'imminent'. There is little light to be shed from the train companies but I have, however, unearthed

a response from GWR to a protest in Penzance. They said in a statement to the local press that they are in talks 'about enabling staff to move out from behind the glass window of a ticket office and into other areas of the station, where they are closer to customers and better placed to help'.

It would be churlish to say that things can never change for the better. If customer service is to be maintained or improved then the staff emerging from 'behind the glass' will have to be equipped to: sell tickets; have access to all the information on the network and be able to plan journeys; deal with tickets needing to be changed or altered; and answer all the multifarious queries that the travelling public can throw at them.

If that could be achieved then all well and good, but if not then there is likely to be quite a crowd of lost souls milling around in the foyer at Exmouth on a busy summer's day.



Completed articles (maximum of 700 words), photographs or suggestions for future articles are always gratefully received, preferably by email. Send to Rob Cousins: alruggeditor@gmail.com



A well-loaded 2-car Class 165 165127 working the 1420 Paignton to Exmouth service on 2 August.

Photo: *David Tozer*