

# GOING FORWARD!

## News from GO-OP!

Issue 6

June 2013

In this Issue we review the fallout from last year's rail-franchising problems, visit Westbury – another of the towns and cities on our projected MainLine route, take a look at GO-OP's social policies, and meet Alex Lawrie.

### RAIL FRANCHISING FIASCO & ITS IMPACT ON GO-OP

You will doubtless have been following in the news the fiasco with the issuing of railway franchises.

This should not of course directly affect us, as we are seeking an open access operation. However, it has had a seismic impact on the rail industry, and several companies that hoped to supply successful bidders in the next year or two have got into trouble.

One of these is the company from which we hoped to secure our rolling stock. We had a concrete and very attractive proposal on the table which is now no longer available. We have had to take several steps back to re-open the whole question of what type of rolling stock to use, and from which supplier. This means that issues of profitability, stabling and support from Wiltshire Council, which we had thought were settled, must also be reconsidered.

It is hard enough to find suppliers of rolling stock that can assure us of delivery within two years; all of the options are likely to be more expensive than we would like. What is more, 80% of our route is slated for electrification. This means that we have to consider how we can start running a service under diesel power, but be largely electric from 2019.

Happily, we are now finding that our contacts with Network Rail are becoming more constructive; if we can solve the rolling stock problem, there are good grounds to think we can make progress fast.

Alex Lawrie  
Deputy CEO

## WESTBURY

After visiting Oxford and Birmingham in Issues 4 and 5, we now visit the southern end of our route: Westbury in Wiltshire, on the western edge of Salisbury Plain. It boasts an impressive history, with evidence of habitation since the Iron Age (600 BC), it also being mentioned in the Domesday Book (1086 AD).



Westbury's chief claim to fame is its White Horse on Bratton Hill, believed to be around 300 years old. It has also been a major centre for the woollen industry, the production of high-quality gloves and, rather less glamorously, cement. Today the neighbouring West Wilts Trading Estate houses a number of enterprise companies. Westbury's indoor swimming pool, opened in 1888, is one of the oldest in England.

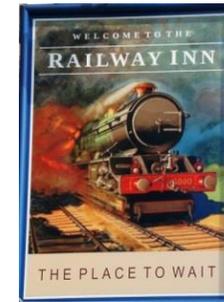
### RAIL LINKS



Westbury is an important rail junction, and GO-OP passengers will probably be using the station as an interchange on a journey to/from one of the following: Brighton, Portsmouth, Salisbury, Southampton, Taunton and the West of England, and Weymouth (for the Channel Islands). There is also a service to Newbury, Reading and London Paddington.

### QUESTIONS FOR QUIZ NIGHT

Here are a few questions that might be suitable for Quiz Night at the Railway Inn, located 300 yards from the station, and describing itself as the 'Alternative Waiting Room'.



Q Why was the station built so far (about a mile) from the town?

A In some towns and cities (such as Oxford) there was early hostility to the construction of stations in the vicinity, because of the perceived influx of 'undesirable' persons. In the case of Westbury, however, the answer is probably more straightforward. Initially the

only line was the branch from the main London-Bristol route through Westbury to Salisbury. An easy gradient was required, with minimum earthworks, and the line could not have come closer to the town without major difficulties. The direct London-Westbury-Taunton line was not built until 1901. If it had been the first route, things might have been different.

Q Which Westbury institution used to be officially termed *peculiar*?

A In the Church of England, almost all churches are led by a bishop. Until the mid-19th century, All Saints' Parish Church was *peculiar* in that it reported instead to a member of the clergy at Salisbury Cathedral. (Incidentally, Westminster Abbey is a *royal peculiar* in answering directly to the monarch.)



Q *There's many a slip 'twixt cup and lip* is an old saying. But in what particular way can Westbury have been said to have experienced 'many a slip'?

A For some 50 years a coach was detached each day from the westbound *Cornish Riviera Express* as it approached Westbury at speed. This was known as a 'slip coach', providing a through service from London for stations to Weymouth without delaying the express. It is perhaps fortunate that the converse (catapulting a coach onto the back of a moving train) was never adopted. . .

Dr Robin Rees  
Editor & GO-OP Member

## SOCIAL IMPACTS

When planning our transport services, we want to ensure that we are not just 100% co-operative, but 100% social enterprise too. That means asking ourselves: what can we do that is extra and additional, that other rail companies would not do? Our recent consultation produced some very helpful feedback – thank you to everyone who responded. This is a digest of the new policy, adopted by the board. Please email me ([alex.lawrie@go-op.coop](mailto:alex.lawrie@go-op.coop)) for the full paper.

Only half of disabled people of working age are in work, compared with 80% of non-disabled (20% of the population having some form of disability). Hourly wages are significantly lower.

Also, women make up a disproportionately small part of the rail workforce, despite being just as capable of doing a good job as men. Again, the process of recruitment and training is important: previous surveys suggest that concerns about career progression, work patterns and personal safety have put women off applying for frontline jobs in public transport – all issues that we address.

GO-OP's HR strategy will stress developing the capacity and applications for employment for women and those with physical disabilities. This will include special training programmes, and apprenticeships financed by low-interest career-development loans.

Other train companies have run initiatives to help travellers on low incomes, such as the offer to job seekers by C2C in London. We can emulate and improve on this.

### ADVERTISING INITIATIVES

Community and social enterprises tend to have lower profiles than conventional businesses – even though they may have a really good story to tell. Our vehicles and stations are great places to advertise their work, and we should make display space available for local organisations. We can also publish an on-board magazine and provide other media such as wi-fi and entertainment systems; these should also advertise co-operative and charitable endeavours that need the participation of our passengers.

Community enterprises often struggle in their early stages – as we know to our cost! As we become better

established, there are a number of ways that we can help them follow us: making small grants, supporting co-operative development bodies and investing in early stage social enterprises, for example.

We have always aimed to be multi-modal, and cycling is a transport mode that we need to work particularly hard to link up with. We're going to make sure that cyclists have a champion at board level so that there are as many ways as possible for cyclists to change smoothly on and off our services.

### GO-OP & THE ENVIRONMENT

Much of our environmental impact is predetermined by the roads and rails that are available for us to operate on; and biofuels have proved to be at best a mixed benefit for the climate. However, there are some things that we can do. We can engage and support the growth in waste-derived biofuels such as anaerobic digestion to create biogas that could fuel buses and trains in the future. We can probably achieve most by working in partnership with the community energy sector and local authorities.

Perhaps the biggest gains result from electrification. This may mean our taking a proactive role in making the case for more investment in overhead lines, as well as taking advantage of the opportunities created by the government's pledge to electrify much of our Mainline route to Birmingham.

*Alex Lawrie*

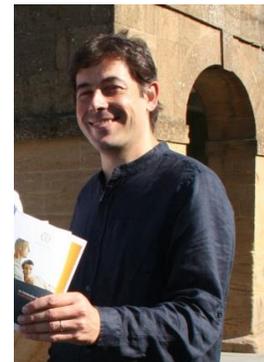
## MEET THE DIRECTORS

### ALEX LAWRIE

**GF** What is your role?

**AL** My role has changed in the last year; I was focusing on member participation and share issues, but when our CEO Keith Vingoe found himself dealing with chronic ill health, I took on the role of Deputy CEO. Since then, I have been standing in for him.

I see the CEO's role as principally about making sure that the information flows in the business are right – it is vital that everyone with jobs to do knows what is



happening elsewhere in the organisation. That said, it is not enough to be a detached observer of those flows. I frequently see problems arising, or opportunities to coordinate activities better, and I'm the person who must react to them. Of course, with a small and largely unpaid team, I also need to take on a fair few jobs myself – and pester myself to get them done quickly!

What I don't do is decide where the co-operative is heading; that's the Board's job, and while I am a Director as well as an Executive I have to remember that setting strategy is something we do together, not alone.

**GF** Why were you attracted to GO-OP?

**AL** I remember living in Leeds many years ago, looking at the rail network and wondering why some of its loose ends couldn't be tied up. I suppose I started thinking about a co-operative solution even then. Later, living in Somerset, it frustrated me how many rail lines existed with barely any useful trains on them. For me, it started to become urgent: fortunately, I was in a position where I could start bringing together a team of people to work on the problem.

**GF** How do you see GO-OP developing in the next five years?

**AL** I struggle to contain my frustration that so little of what I would have said in answer to that question five years ago has actually happened! In truth, I think I have in the past been way too optimistic about how quickly things can be arranged: people keep trying to tell me that timescales for most tasks involving rail are measured in years, not months.

Still, I feel that five years is long enough for some bold predictions. By 2018, we will not only be running trains, but they will have just started running profitably. We will not just be planning a second route, but be preparing for two or more new routes to begin operation. And I think we will be properly multi-modal: local buses will feed train stations, trams will be reviving some branch lines, and we'll be working closely with co-operative car clubs.

### GOING FORWARD!

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