

Going Forward!

In this issue we:

- feature 'What's the SoAR Panel?' Alex Lawrie explains the role of this important panel and how we aim to achieve their approval for our Route #1
- meet Director Andy Spring
- pay a visit to another town along our Route #1 - Chippenham

And a date for your diaries: GO-OP AGM Chippenham 2pm Saturday 18th July 2015

Feature Article: What's the SoAR Panel?

The next stage of our progress depends largely on the deliberations of the 'Sale of Access Rights' (SoAR) Panel. This committee brings together some of the key functions of Network Rail to consider new operations in the context of the operational efficiency of the whole rail network.

Last year, it was chaired by Paul McMahon - Network Rail's freight Director - and it includes Representatives from Group Strategy, Network Operations, Asset Management and Group Investment.

Its purpose is described as *'approving the proposed sale of access rights where:*

- *sales could have a material effect on the deliverability and performance of other services;*
- *there is a risk of sub-optimising network efficiency;*
- *there are competing applications from operators or prospective operators.'*

It has met every four weeks since 2012, and later this year (once we have completed work on an updated timetable and thoroughly tested it to see if it affects the robustness of other services) it will be approving our service - or not.

Should we worry? It is all in the preparation. The Railway Consultancy is hard at work checking whether we have comfortable turnaround times; where freight movements could reasonably adapt to our timetable; how to make best use of passing loops; and where other operators could make small adjustments to make the flows smoother. If we have answered all the possible questions ahead of time, the deliberations of the panel should not be hostile to us.

Meet the Director

Andy Spring: I joined the Go-op board at the 2014 AGM, to offer some of my 20+ years' experience in the rail industry, mostly in the fields of fares, revenue and retailing. Having started with British Rail in 1991, I've worked as a contractor on and off for rail franchises of all shapes and sizes, concentrating on back office tasks and the systems that support them.

Although the most pressing issue currently facing the directors is securing timetable paths from Network Rail, which is not my special subject, the board are also looking ahead to updating revenue forecasts and building a business plan. So my current contribution is to provide railway knowledge to the board, as well as taking a view on the practicalities of the planned activities before us.

I was drawn to invest in Go-op back in 2010, as I strongly support the idea of a co-operatively run transport company, which could be more responsive to its passengers. I've banked with the Co-op since the mid-80s to support co-operative values as a consumer, and have this year finally made the move from Vodafone to the Phone Co-op. Go-op is my first experience of working with a co-operative, and of being a director.

It would be nice to think that in the fullness of time Go-op can grow to become a respected transport operator, either remaining in its niche as an Open Access operator or perhaps even bidding for franchises depending how the political debate about ownership of the railways evolves. But there is much to do to secure our first route before we get ahead of ourselves!

Chippenham

Passing through ... Chippenham

Located towards the south-western end of the Westbury-Birmingham route, Chippenham has grown rapidly in recent years with a population today nudging 45,000. In keeping with modern trends, there are well established patterns of local commuting, to Swindon, Bath and Bristol and south to Trowbridge, with a few early risers reaching London daily.

The first settlement on the site is reckoned to be Saxon, from the 7th century, on raised ground near a crossing over the Avon. The Domesday book population is put at around 650 souls. Prosperity from the important local cloth trade ensured its place on the 14th C road network linking London and Bristol, and was still important enough in the late 18th century to fund extensive new buildings leading to the nickname 'little Bath'. The modern town retains the feel, but without the press of tourists. The local museum contains finds from Neolithic times onwards (but sadly is closed on Saturdays).

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The Wilts & Berks Canal arrived in 1798 with a branch, mainly trading coal from Somerset via the Somerset Coal Canal and Kennet & Avon Canal.



Less than 50 years later the Great Western railway arrived in 1841, carried across the town on an imposing viaduct, imitating a Roman triumphal arch, with a large central span flanked by two smaller pedestrian spans. By 1848 the line heading south that Go-op services will use was open to Westbury as part of the Wilts Somerset & Weymouth railway, which remains open and increasingly busy. This ambitious scheme to link Chippenham with Salisbury and Weymouth was supported by the Great Western, who took over the line within a few years and negotiated the tortuous process of gaining parliamentary approval and raising capital for the new line.

By 1859 a public meeting in Calne led to an independent railway company building a branch from Chippenham which was absorbed into the GWR in 1877.

The arrival of the railway led, as so often, to the growth of related industries, in Chippenham's case the Westinghouse Brake and Signal Company located just north of the station. Westinghouse's successors Siemens (for signalling) continue on the same site, with Knorr-Bremse (for brakes) nearby in Chippenham.

Andy Spring

Tim Pearce

It is with great sadness we must report the death of GO-OP founder member Tim Pearce. Tim died peacefully in St Austell after a long and courageous fight against cancer. He is survived by his wife Maggie and daughter Eleanor. In the next issue we will write a full obituary detailing Tim's lifelong commitment to solidarity with working people and with the co-operative movement.

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A date for your diaries

GO-OP Co-operative AGM will be held at 2pm on Saturday 18th July at The Citadel Hall, Bath Road, Chippenham SN15 2AB. The Hall is 5 minutes' walk from Chippenham Railway station and there is a large car park right next door.

All papers - including our Annual report as well as detailed joining instructions - will be emailed to members in due course. There will be home-made cake!