

Going Forward

News from

Spring 2017 – Issue 11



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Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting is to be held in the Somerset Room of the Albemarle Centre, Albemarle Road, Taunton, TA1 1BA. The date is 6 July commencing 2.00pm. The Albemarle Centre is just a few minutes walk south from Taunton station. Papers and joining instructions will be sent out soon.

We are looking for a Finance Director. Please get in touch if you would like to support GO-OP at this crucial time and we will send you information on standing for the Board.

Progress Report - Alex Lawrie, Operations Director

It is hard to imagine how the tension could be much greater for GO-OP. We have just received a feasibility study focusing on performance testing of our timetable by Network Rail (carried out at their own expense – they would have been within their rights to ask for us to pay for it) which has led them to refuse (again) to put our timetable to the Sale of Access Rights panel for approval.

The refusal is based on 'clashes' between our timetable and the current allocated paths – and our obvious objection is that most if not all of these paths will change between now and the start of our operation. In particular, the most substantial obstacle they have identified results from a GWR train that they moved into a path we had requested, without telling us, after we had submitted our timetable to them.

This leaves us little option but to ask the Office of Rail and Road to overrule Network Rail – something that they have done before, when they believe it is in the interests of the travelling public.

We have of course conducted our own tests of capacity, and there is no indication we can see that the timetable will be unable to accommodate our route. We are very conscious that by 2019, when the whole of our route comes into operation, many of the existing operators will have come to the end of their contracts and electrification will mean a wholesale revision of timetables – our bid for access rights should then carry as much weight as anyone else's.

Rolling stock is no less critical. We are learning more about the potential of the 319 Flex – an electric-diesel bi-mode that would certainly get an initial operation running between Taunton and Swindon and may very well have the capability to operate the entire route. This will be our quickest route to operation, and also offers the opportunity to make use of the growing electric network. Our ability to commission new Class 195 DMUs may still be relevant – it is

very cost effective to run small two car sets. However, starting with a lot of spare capacity would mean we had to do more to tempt drivers out of their cars, and make off peak travel enticingly cheap for our members – and these are the right challenges to take on. Extra space might also enable us to be more accommodating for cyclists, and worth the extra expense (and emissions).

More use of the 319 Flex would be compatible with a 10 December 2018 start date for Taunton - Swindon, and then the route extension to Swindon could follow just five months later. There are significant technical issues to clarify around fuel capacity, internal layout and financing that we will continue to negotiate with the ROSCOs; but this certainly represents a solidifying of out operational planning.

We are also pleased to report that Lightweight Community Transport (who we provide consultancy for) are making progress themselves, with plans to provide leasing to the Preston Trampower project and possible applications for their newly-refurbished Class 139. We continue to support them in their work.

I have to ask you, our members, to be ready for a final attempt to win support from the industry regulator. It can be done, but there is no guarantee – and if they refuse us too, we really do face existential problems.

There is something you could do to assist. We'd like to include in our business plan brief testimony from as many of our members as possible – why you support GO-OP, why the service would make a difference in your everyday life, what it means to you to see a co-operative operating rail service.

This is your chance to speak directly to the ORR – please send just a sentence or two to me at: info@go-op.coop.

Share Capital

The board is very conscious that some members have for some time been wanting to withdraw their share capital. We regret that due to the extreme importance of completing our application for access rights - a process which can generate unpredictable expenses - and the need to demonstrate financial robustness as part of that application, it is not possible to permit share withdrawals for the rest of this year. Our goal remains to plan our fundraising such that normal levels of turnover in share capital are possible at the earliest time that we can - but this is very much dependent on the success of our application.

Meet the Director – Martin Bond



I worked for British Rail and Railtrack for thirty years, almost entirely in the area of rail operations. During that time I was mostly concerned with the various computer systems used by the railway for the management of vehicles and trains.

I have had a lifelong belief in the principles of mutuality, so when I read of the formation of GO-OP shortly after it was founded it seemed to combine several of my interests and I immediately became a member. After a number of years regularly attending AGMs I was asked to stand at the last AGM and was elected to the board

New Editor – Martin Bond

As I have some experience with producing newsletters I have now taken over from Kate Whittle the task of producing this newsletter. I'm sure we all appreciate the fine work that Kate has done with Going Forward over the years, but due to other pressures she has had to cut back on what she can do for GO-OP. I hope that I can maintain as good a record.

There are a number of other changes in responsibilities and personnel currently being made to the board which we shall report on when finalised.

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