

Railway Electrification - Update

Following our full report in last month's issue (page 33), there has been a major change in Network Rail's electrification programme. The Chairman has 'resigned' following the government's intervention on 25 June to 'shelve' two of Network Rail's three main electrification projects. Transport Secretary, Patrick McLoughlin, said that rising costs and missed targets make the £38.5 billion plan untenable. He blamed Network Rail (NR) for not foreseeing the difficulties and has significantly cut down the electrification programme. The Midland line (York - Sheffield) and Trans-Peninne route (York - Manchester) are 'shelved' but the Great Western main line to London, passing through Goring, is to be a 'top priority'. The government said NR "should concentrate its efforts on getting that right".

'*Getting it right*' is the big issue that the Railway Action Group (RAG) has with NR. The day after the government's announcement we sent a letter to the CEO, Mark Carne, again pointing out to him that the headlong rush to install infrastructure in order to catch up on missed deadlines has put speed above quality and this has resulted in NR failing to carry out a proper consultation processes and a failure to implement good design or the mitigation measures (set out in their own Environmental Statement). We said this has resulted in cutting corners and has put at risk NR's statutory obligation to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Chilterns AONB. We have urged him to take this opportunity to step back and take a fresh look at the GW mainline project, accept past failings, move forward with a new, more realistic time-table, and produce a revised, less visually obtrusive infrastructure design. Only these changes to their current plan will ensure NR will adhere to its statutory duties for the highly environmentally sensitive Goring/South Stoke stretch of the line where it passes through the Chilterns AONB.

RAG has now arranged another meeting with NR executives on 15 July in Goring. This is to challenge NR's responses at our last meeting, particularly about its lack of proper consultation. We will also take the opportunity presented by the new reduced electrification plan to get assurances that our local environment is protected as far as possible and request that NR will undertake new consultations with the statutory authorities. We have managed to extract from NR a potential concession in writing in that the company will "... undertake any **remedial work** that may be required once our consultation with the appropriate authorities is concluded". What this may mean in practice is anyone's guess, but at least there is a glimmer of hope that they may be listening to us.

RAG is still seeking a lawyer with planning or environmental experience, willing to work on a *pro bono* basis, as NR's Permitted Development Rights could be legally challenged as they have not yet conducted the required consultation process properly.

Again, we ask all concerned residents in the general area to write to Network Rail to keep up the pressure. The key contact for this is the CEO: **Mark Carne, Network Rail, 2nd Floor, One Eversholt Street, London NW1 2DN.** mark.carne@networkrail.co.uk. It would be helpful to copy in the clerk of GPC (clerk@goringpc.org). Our Facebook group enables you keep up to date and make any comments: <http://www.facebook.com/groups/ssandggrag/>

Ian Haslam & Ron Bridle (Railway Action Group).