



AVOCET LINE

RAIL USERS GROUP

NEWSLETTER



61 Autumn
2023

www.avocetline.org.uk



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Cover photo: 166209 arrives at Marsh Barton with the 0854 Exmouth to Paignton service on 26 July.



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16th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Monday 16 October 2023 at 19.30

The Ballroom at the Manor Hotel, Exmouth

Following the formal business we will welcome our guest speaker

Joe Graham

Business Assurance and Strategy Director, Great Western Railway

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 21 October 2022
3. To receive reports from:
 - * the Chairman (circulated in this newsletter)
 - * the Treasurer (circulated in advance of the meeting)
4. Election of Officers for 2023/24. Nominations for officer posts
 - * Chair
 - * Vice Chair
 - * Treasurer
 - * Secretary
5. Election of Committee for 2023/24. 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 - Geoff Kerr at alrugsecretary@btinternet.com or
24 Honeylands Drive, Exeter, EX4 8QP**

**Nominations MUST be submitted to the Secretary no later than
Friday 6 October 2023.**

The Chairman's Compartment



Mike Reddaway

Annual Report 2023

The train service is discussed in our committee meetings and many emails. We have too many 2-car trains often resulting in overcrowding and passengers left behind. Trains are cancelled or miss stops to catch up time. Our services are operated with old units which are wearing out and breaking down far too often. Finding similar trains is not a solution. Ideally GWR need to order new trains but this is unlikely to happen as they have little leeway in their management contract with the Government. Our trains will have to be replaced sometime soon.

Ticket offices

Exmouth ticket office has excellent staff who help passengers get the information and tickets they need. The proposal to close ticket offices and redeploy the staff elsewhere on the station is not popular. ALRUG's response (you can find more details on page 6) is that staff could be working in the open but they should be able to sell the full range of tickets available and have access to the information they currently have. Ticket machines do not sell many products nor the full range of tickets.

Strike services

It is a great shame that the strikes are still happening. On most strike days we have not had any trains on the line. On strike days where trains have run, there have been some surprisingly high numbers of passengers with trains overcrowded. On one such day a 6-car train ran the last service of the day. Whatever your views on

industrial action, it is a shame that passengers suffer the most in such disputes.

Worries for the future

Although we are suffering problems with the service, we now have the greatest number of trains per day since the line opened. ALRUG has worked hard with GWR and Devon County Council over a long time to increase the train service and it would be terrible to lose services through Government cuts. It's possible train services and staff hours could be reduced to save money. We are already seeing the withdrawal of the recently refurbished HSTs because they cost too much to run.

Meetings

Our guest speaker at the AGM last October was Simon Jupp MP who showed support for the introduction of Great British Railways and for keeping Exmouth ticket office open. Our Members' Meeting in April heard from John Heaton, former Area Manager for Exeter in the 1980s. His talk, 'Still Waiting for the Golden Age', covered railway history and how it led to the current situation. Committee meetings have continued to be held in Lypstone Village Hall.

Station standards

We have reviewed the Station Standards study first created in 2014 under the auspices of the now disbanded Avocet Line Community Rail Forum. The standards set reasonable aspirations for smaller stations and was discussed and agreed with GWR. The review reflects the many improvements great and small that have happened over the years.

We were pleased to see the opening of Marsh Barton station in July.

Manifesto

We produced a Manifesto in 2010 and again 2015. Both took a strategic look at present and future needs on the line. We have achieved additional trains on Sundays and recently half-hourly into the evenings. We have been considering a new Manifesto but feel this is not the right time to produce one given the uncertainty in the rail industry.

Other organisations

All of our achievements have come through working with rail industry organisations. We regularly communicate with GWR, Network Rail, Devon County Council and the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership. We take part in regular meetings of the Exmouth Transport Partnership, the Devon Rail Forum and TravelWatch South West. Our Secretary

met with members of the Campaign for Better Transport as part of their Better Transport Week.

Contact from members

Our thanks go to members who contact us. In the past year subjects included overcrowded trains, confusing announcements for the request stops, the inadequate shelter at Exton, closure of ticket offices and the scaffolding remaining at Polsloe Bridge after the refurbishment appeared finished. We are always happy to receive your questions and comments.

Thank you

Our thanks go to managers and staff at GWR, Network Rail, Devon County Council and other organisations who answer our questions and complaints.

And finally, my thanks go to all the committee members and our President for all the work they do throughout the year.

A Paignton to Exmouth 4-car 150 in front of the famous atmospheric railway pump house on 23 August.



Ticket office closures— ALRUG responds

This is an edited version of the ALRUG submission to the consultation on ticket office closures.

This proposal has had an almost entirely negative reception both from our members and the general public, not least because it has come across simply as a cost cutting measure. It reflects the current lack of trust in Government, Treasury, Department for Transport, Train Operating Companies and unions over the management of the railway.



Exmouth ticket office

This is unfortunate, as the basic premise of widening the responsibilities of ticket office staff in response to a steady decline in ticket sales is sound, particularly as applied to Exmouth station. We do not have confidence that – as presented by GWR – the proposal will improve the situation for passengers, and at worst will leave them disadvantaged.

The long-term trend of declining ticket office sales is recognised, and these will be eroded further as smart ticketing systems are rolled out. We note the success of changes at London Underground stations where concerns about the elderly, the disabled and inexperienced travellers seem to have been overcome without significant lasting implications.

The main issue is the apparent reduction in the range of tickets available at manned stations. Passengers currently expect to have access to the full range of ticket products at a manned station, particularly railcards and tickets for future travel. GWR guidance suggests that the station operatives will have no more facilities than a normal ticket machine user. Is this really the case? Of course, passengers at the other unstaffed stations along the line have learned to travel without such assistance, but there is still an expectation that ticketing problems can be resolved at major stations so re-assurance is needed here.

If there is no ticket office, the question also arises as to how to find staff for assistance. Will they have some means of being contacted? Will there be a clear indication of what help is available? It might be helpful for staff to have a work station where they might normally be found or be contacted in the passenger waiting area.

A further concern is that once staff have been moved out of the ticket office, there is little to stop staffing hours being reduced or eliminated altogether. Many consultees perceive this to be a longer term aim – further evidence of mistrust. We feel that there should be suitable safeguards, notably that the National Rail Contract, in addition to specifying staffing hours for each station, should not permit alterations without stakeholder consultation.

Outside the scope of this proposal, but mentioned frequently by consultees, is a need to reform the fare structure.

In summary, while we accept the basic principle of widening the responsibilities of ticket office staff in response to a changing methods of ticket purchase, we have serious reservations about the way this is to be implemented, and in particular:

The range of tickets on offer at manned stations and precisely how these are to be sold.

The way any passenger assistance can be accessed.

Safeguards to prevent arbitrary changes to staffing levels and reduction of staffing hours.

This proposal could in due course lead to an improvement in the passenger experience, but these reservations need to be addressed, with appropriate attention to detail, before any closure of ticket offices and deployment of staff takes place.



John Colby



I'm sorry to report that ALRUG committee member John Colby died in the RD&E hospital on 5 July after a long illness. John joined the ALRUG committee in 2013 and was a Vice Chairman from 2016 to 2019. As an ex-director of planning, John took a keen interest in planning matters affecting the railway, particularly around and at Exmouth station.

He was born on 8 October 1945 in Lowestoft, Suffolk. He developed a passion for cricket, playing for Suffolk Schools and hockey for Lowestoft's First Eleven. He continued playing both games while studying geography at Kings College London. After university he pursued a career in town planning, rising to become Chief Planning Officer in Blackpool and then Director of Planning and Housing for the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. He served as President of the District Planning Officers Society.

John was married twice to wives both called Judith. He had two children and four grandchildren. He married his second wife in 1990 and after his retirement they moved to Exmouth in 2011. He soon became involved with planning matters, assisting the Exmouth Civic Society and, of course, he joined Exmouth Cricket Club as well as continuing his membership of Somerset County Cricket Club.

For ALRUG there was a lot for a planner to take interest in. The area outside the rail and bus stations was remodelled, followed closely by Marks and Spencer developing the bus station site. Through the planning stages he met with architects and railway managers to ensure that passengers' interests were covered. John kept an eye on small details such as public access through to the car park and toilets and the tatty look of the old bus station offices which were eventually given a lick of paint.

Plans to rebuild Exmouth station rolled slowly along over several years, with John regularly meeting with railway managers. With the work finished, John again found details to question. The big black monolith in front of the station with screens listing bus stop departures caused John some work. There was no map showing the bus stops so he stuck a paper map under the screen as the official map was far away on the M&S wall.

John also attended meetings of the Exmouth Transport Partnership on behalf of ALRUG. He kept in touch with Devon County and East Devon councils. He worked with Exmouth Town council on plans and funding for what is now the Exmouth Gateway plan. So many things that John did for ALRUG may have gone unnoticed, just a comment or question in an email, but most will have achieved a reaction or an improvement in something.

John was a gentle man who worked in a quiet and professional manner. He had a great sense of humour and a broad knowledge. He was interested in what was going on, interesting to talk to and always able to laugh. He did a lot for ALRUG and we will miss him. Our condolences to Judith and the family.



Above: The 18.40 Paignton-bound service awaiting departure at Newcourt on 21 August.

Right: Passengers sit it out as 166207 breaks down at Exmouth on 10 August.



Below: The 14.57 Exmouth to Paignton service at Starcross on 23 August.

Photos: Neale Harvey



Service interruptions

Tony Jackson

Since our last newsletter I have taken the decision to stop the daily monitoring of services other than those on the Avocet Line. With many services being affected by industrial action of one kind or another the figures would not have been compatible with those of previous years, making for impossible comparisons. Also, the main purpose of my monitoring was to highlight general deficiencies, be they unit reliability or signalling/track issues.

A sample of my new output is shown below, detailing all trains leaving from Exmouth. Entries highlighted in green merely show that the type of unit employed is not what is intended for our line, but there are no significant capacity issues. Those highlighted in mauve show short-formed trains, with potential capacity problems. However, for the last few trains each day 2-car trains are adequate. Any cancellations or trains starting other than at Exmouth (eg Topsham) would also be highlighted.

Once the strike issues have all been settled I will return to full monitoring, but at the moment your guess is as good as mine as to when that will be.

Head	EXM	Tue	EXM	Tue
Code	Dep.	08/08/23	Dep.	08/08/23
2T05	05:51	Turbo 3 car	2T23	14:57 158 3 car
2T06	06:15	150 x 2	2T24	15:23 150 x 1
2T07	06:55	150 x 2	2T25	15:55 150 x 2
2T08	07:24	Turbo 3 car	2T26	16:23 Turbo 3 car
2T09	07:54	158 3 car	2T27	16:57 150 x 2
2T10	08:24	150 x 2	2T28	17:26 Turbo 3 car
2T11	08:54	150 x 2	2T29	17:56 150 x 2
2T12	09:24	Turbo 3 car	2T30	18:26 158 3 car
2T13	09:57	150 x 2	2T31	18:56 150 x 1
2T14	10:23	150 x 2	2T32	19:25 150 x 2
2T15	10:57	Turbo 3 car	2T33	19:56 Turbo 3 car
2T16	11:23	158 3 car	2U34	20:24 158 3 car
2T17	11:57	150 x 2	2B86	20:54 Turbo 3 car
2T18	12:23	150 x 2	2T36	21:26 150 x 1
2T19	12:57	Turbo 3 car	2E37	21:56 158 3 car
2T20	13:23	150 x 2	2T38	22:25 150 x 1
2T21	13:57	150 x 2	2E39	23:20 Turbo 3 car
2T22	14:23	Turbo 3 car	2E41	00:19 150 x 1



Cascade Watch

Tony Jackson

In reality this article should be headed Shuffle Watch. By this I mean that there are no units available to be transferred to GWR, even if the Treasury/DfT were to sanction such moves. No, for the immediate future GWR are stuck with what they have, namely a fairly ancient fleet, which they shuffle as best they can so as to provide our services, and in fairness they do a pretty good job.

Thankfully BR knew how to build solid reliable units and I doubt that we will ever see their likes again. But they can't go on for ever. With an age range between 30 and 37 years, all GWR's units are at, or near to, the end of their useful lives.

GWR are currently engaged in Operation Churchward, which is looking at their future rolling stock needs. It is not known when their deliberations will be concluded, and of course there are hurdles labelled DfT and Treasury to be negotiated. Even if agreement is reached on a future fleet, I would be surprised if any new units could be in service much before 2028.

So, are there any hopes of cascades from elsewhere in the immediate future? The only possibility that I see are two Class 150 units from Transport for Wales. These units were involved in an accident when they hit a mini digger on the Marches line in May 2022 and have been out of use ever since. Reports suggest that they are now being repaired, and bearing in mind that TfW have managed without them for over a year and have new rolling stock coming on stream, I really can't see that they have a greater need than GWR. In due course TfW will shed all their 150s. Remember, GWR is the only train operator not to have received new or post BR diesel units.

Talking of repairs, the saga of unit 150202 comes to mind. This GWR unit was last noted in use on 18 February 2022, after which it was despatched to Wolverton Works for some serious attention, as it had become quite rusty underneath. It eventually returned to Exeter over 17 months later on 2 August this year. On inspection, GWR found unsatisfactory issues with the work that had been undertaken and the unit was promptly returned to Wolverton, which is where it resides as I write (see below). To complicate matters, another unit is meant to be heading to Wolverton. GWR really can't afford to have two away at the same time.



Now you see it: 150202 returns to Wolverton on 5 August after just three days back in the West Country following 18 months away. It returned again to the region after a few days.

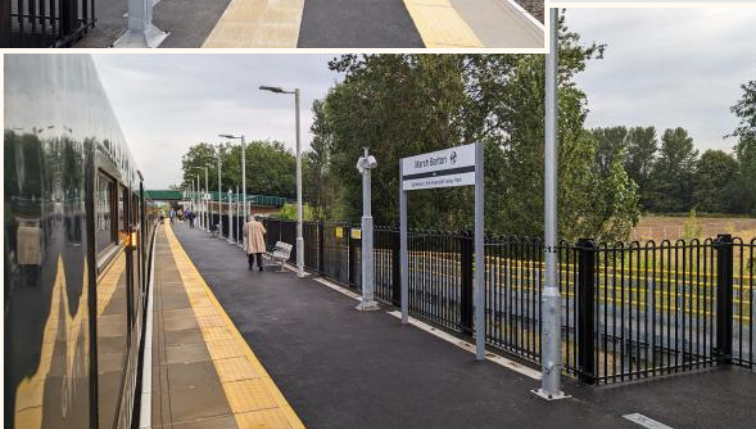
Photo: *David Tozer*

Marsh Barton station open for business





A picture round-up of the new station and its facilities which include plenty of bike parking space, good-sized shelters and ramp access.



A day out at Marsh Barton?

Peter Cowper tries his powers of persuasion



Did I hear that correctly... You went for a day out at Marsh Barton?!

Indeed yes.

Well, you had better sit down quietly and tell me all about it.

I feel you are being a bit cynical about my choice, though it is always good to see a new station opening. And Marsh Barton is smart and brand new. It even has an indicator with graphics showing little squares to depict the number of coaches to expect.

Well okay, but did you need to visit a particular company?

Yes, but we tried to make the visit more interesting. So, walking from the station towards the canal and Riverside Park, we turned left alongside the canal before Clapperbrook swing bridge. Then turned left onto Footpath 25 which goes away from the canal towards the industrial estate. FP25 is narrow – listen for cyclists as there is a dogleg in it – and it goes under the railway, so mind your head as the roof is low. Here is the clever bit of our day out.

I can't wait!

At the road (Marsh Green Road North) we turned left and then right into Marsh Green Road East, which brought us to the Hidden Coffee House, which is part of the

Exeter Trading Hub. I will say no more about that other than that it was an outstanding find and well worth the extra bit of walking. So, try it for yourself.

Apart from that possibility, I would still find it difficult to have a day out in March Barton.

I quite understand. Here are three alternatives...

Don't go down FP25 but keep walking towards Exeter Quay – it's just over a mile from the station.

Alternatively, cross the canal via the Clapperbrook swing bridge and follow the signs to the Double Locks pub.

Want to get back to Exmouth on the 57 bus? Follow the path across the park to Ducks Marsh Bridge and then via Salmon Pool bridge and Salmon Pool Lane, bringing you out just a little way beyond Barrack Road. You can cross at the lights to get to the 57 bus stop.

PS If you return by train from Marsh Barton leave plenty of time to get to the platform which you can see, but there is about 200-300 yards of ramp to cover before you get to it.

Enjoy your day out!

Peter Cowper is Chair of the Board of Trustees of Exmouth Museum.

Know your railway terms

Tony Jackson

Here are the explanations of the two terms published in newsletter 60.

1. Flat junction: A junction in which all track crossings take place at grade, and routing must therefore be controlled by signals and interlocking.

2. Bullhead rail: A steel rail section commonly used in 60ft lengths on almost all railway lines throughout Britain until c1950, which due to its shape must be supported in cast iron chairs that are screwed to the sleepers. It is still found on some London Underground lines, on secondary and preserved lines and in yards.

The rail has two heads (shaped somewhat like a vertical dumbbell) which led some people to assume that when one side became worn, the rail could be inverted and reinstalled for further service rather than be replaced. In reality it can't, because the two heads are different sizes and by the time the top became worn down sufficiently to fit in the chairs when the rail is inverted, both the top and bottom of the rail would be too small for further use.

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

1. Train register
2. Slack

Interrail app passes the test

Rob Cousins



Inspired by friends who had tried it, we decided to give an Interrail Pass a try for a recent European trip.

We went for the Global pass which allows access to 33 countries as opposed to a single country pass, as we were taking in parts of France, Switzerland and Austria. The vast majority of passes are sold in the form of an app on a smartphone but paper passes are still available.

There are a variety of passes to choose from, catering for Youth (under 28) Adults and Senior (over 60). Children under 12 go free but still need a pass over 4 years old. There are several choices of the number of travel days in a month or two month, either as consecutive days or any

combination of days. Entire month passes are also available for up to a three months duration. See table for sample prices of the one month passes. If travelling in a group all passes can be added to one device if desired.

A little homework has to be done to determine whether the cost of a pass is cheaper than buying separate journeys direct. Also, some countries are more 'pass friendly' than others. The pass really comes into its own if long distances are to be travelled as an awful lot of ground can be covered in a day, possibly using several trains. You might want to save the pass for the 'expensive' days and buy ordinary tickets for short local journeys on other days, for example.

Eurostar is now included in the scheme, though supplements are payable. Seat reservations are required on some trains, particularly in France, and reservations may also be advisable on busy routes. These are all made through the Interrail website subject to a modest fee. Within the allotted number of days you are allowed one outbound and one inbound journey in the home country, eg Exeter to London at the start of a trip and return at the end.

Cost is one factor but convenience and flexibility are others. The app, or website, has access to all participating timetables and so your travels can be lined up in the 'Planner' and added to your 'Trip'. You can put as many journeys as you like into the Trip section, including alternative trains if you wish. Nothing goes 'live' until you toggle the 'switch' as you are about to board your chosen train, which produces a

digital ticket to be scanned by the train staff in the familiar way.

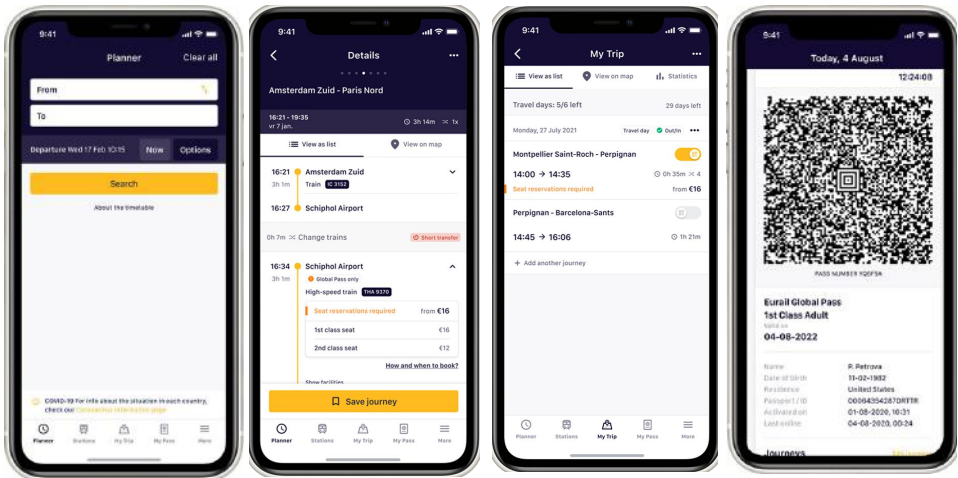
This flexibility can be useful in the case of cancellation, or a change of plan, as new journeys can be searched and loaded at the last minute without the stress of getting advance tickets altered or losing money on a redundant ticket. When familiar with the way it all works we found everything went very smoothly and will definitely use it again.

See overleaf for a 'quick guide' to the app and some sample prices for the passes.

More information at www.interrail.eu. The 'Man in Seat 61' website is full of info on the passes, as it is with so many other rail travel matters.



Opposite: Lake Geneva viewed from the train to Zurich from Bellinzona.
This page: Boarding the 'Tren Gotthard' at Lucerne.



Steps in using the Interrail app

From left:

Search for a particular journey and save one or more possible services into 'My Trip'. Nothing goes 'live' at this stage.

When about to catch the particular train you want toggle the yellow 'switch' and a QR ticket is produced.

Below: some sample prices.

Number of days in one month	Adult	£	Senior	£	Youth (under 28)	£
7	2 nd Class	304	2 nd Class	274	2 nd Class	228
7	1 st Class	385	1 st Class	346	1 st Class	289
5	2 nd Class	256	2 nd Class	230	2 nd Class	192
5	1 st Class	325	1 st Class	292	1 st Class	243
4	2 nd Class	223	2 nd Class	200	2 nd Class	167
4	1 st Class	283	1 st Class	255	1 st Class	212

The above sterling currency amounts are conversions from pricing in Euros at the time of writing. More information: www.interrail.eu

The days of the Commando specials



For a number of years in the 1980s and 90s special troop trains ran in the holidays to Lympstone Commando.

They ran about three times a year, were never advertised and had MOD police on board. They took personnel to Birmingham and then further north.

These pictures show HST set 43178 making its way along the line and passing through Topsham, below, in September 1994.

Pictures by Robin Coles





The late running 12.55 from Paignton to Exmouth passing Cockwood harbour on 19 July.

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

Our current membership stands at 184.

Membership renewal takes place on 1 November and details will be sent or emailed to you according to your normal delivery method.

If you pay by cheque please send in as soon as possible. We bank with Nat West and the local branch is closing in mid-October and I would like to pay in as many cheques as possible before closure. Don't forget you can pay by bank transfer which saves posting a cheque – bank details are on the renewal slip. Use your surname, initial and membership number (if known) as the reference for us to trace your payment.

Last year we lost a number of members, which appeared to be down to cost of living issues (accumulative savings as opposed to our very modest subscription) so if you are able to persuade someone to join that would be most helpful to rebuild our numbers back to over 200.

I can post or email details and a sample newsletter to anyone interested – contact me via the details below.

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 2023

Meetings start at 7pm (AGM 7.30pm)

Mon 16 October	AGM	Manor Hotel, Exmouth
Mon 13 November	Committee only	Lympstone Village Hall

AVOCET LINE RAIL USERS GROUP COMMITTEE 2023

President:	Tony Day
Chair:	Mike Reddaway <i>alrug.mr@gmail.com</i>
Vice-Chair:	Noel Harrison
Secretary:	Geoff Kerr <i>alrugsecretary@btinternet.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:	Andrew Parker
Committee Member:	Jenny Ellis
Committee Member:	Martin White
Committee Member:	Ross Hussey
Committee Member:	Neale Harvey
Committee Member:	Diana Shindler
Newsletter Editor:	Rob Cousins <i>alrugeditor@gmail.com</i>
Newsletter Distribution:	Mike Holbrook

TAIL LAMP ...

.... the last word from the Editor



Rolling on

Continuing on the theme of rolling stock shortfalls from the last Tail Lamp, there is one significant factor which should be taken into account, among many, in our region. We've been told several times by GWR that South West passenger numbers have recovered post-Covid, well ahead of the rest of the country and sometimes exceeding 2019 levels. This should be a strong argument for more new or cascaded trains to come our way when the 'bean counters' have to be persuaded.

A 2-car 150 unable to cope with the crowds at Dawlish Warren.



When it comes to replacing diesel traction there is one glimmer of light at the end of a very long tunnel – rapid-charge battery trains. GWR are now heavily invested in this technology. For example, this would enable quick top-up charging to take place at either end of a branch line during the turn-around time. Ideally suited to our region though this would be, it is still a work in progress and other parts of the GWR network would probably take priority.

The realistic best we can hope for in the short term is older stock cascaded down from somewhere else. Not perfect but an old train is still a train...

Un-sustainable?

Very sorry to hear that Co Cars, which featured in newsletter 57, has gone into administration. They ran the car share and e-bike schemes in Exeter and the wider area. It was a social enterprise company set up to offer more sustainable transport alternatives, something sorely needed for the future. It can only be hoped that a rescue can be effected and the infrastructure saved.

Back to the future if ticket offices close?

The good people of Dilton Marsh had no need of one in times gone by, provided that the stalwart Mrs Roberts didn't decide to go on holiday.



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



158765 and 158771 approach Marsh Barton with the 1038 Paignton to Exmouth service on 8 July. Later these two units were replaced and shown as working the 1456 Paignton to Paddington service.

Photo: *David Tozer*