



April 2024

Welcome to the Rail User Express

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8 years and 4 months since I took over from Tony Smale as your editor, this is my 100th edition. It has been a real privilege to chronicle the hopes, fears and achievements of my contributors over the years. I continue to be indebted to Tony, who now does a sterling job as my proof reader, and to Jerry Alderson and Neil Middleton, who do the distribution. So keep your contributions coming!

Roger Smith

We start with news from groups around Great Britain. All contributions are gratefully received.

Furness Line Action Group

Both the Westmorland and Furness UA and Cumberland UA support reinstating the Penrith to Keswick railway line - a refreshing change from Cumbria CC. Cedric Martindale of CKP Railways welcomed their support: "CKP looks forward to helping the new UAs and the Lake District National Park Authority coordinate their plans and policies to welcome a modern railway with expanded inter-regional train services which can bring a whole range of economic, environmental and social benefits to the north Lakes and the rest of Cumbria."

Money saved from cancelling the HS2 Northern Leg allocated to local authorities should be used to improve rail travel and public transport in general. As well as the Penrith - Keswick reinstatement, FLAG's priorities are for improved access to the southbound platform at Ulverston and at Arnside; step-free access between train and the full length of the platforms at every station on the Furness and Cumbrian Coast lines, and improved bus connections at key rail hubs.

Energy policy also needs monitoring. Nuclear (Sellafield) and possibly coal traffic (Whitehaven) form much of the business case for the Cumbrian Coast upgrade proposed by the Government, although the demand for coal is weakening. However, any move to tidal energy in the form of road bridges or barrages would pose a long-term threat to the rail link.

With enhancement funding, a new chord could provide a passing loop and allow local trains to access Carnforth station via the Barrow-in-Furness line and return to the West Coast Main Line to travel north. Main line trains could also call again. Up traffic from Morecambe - Lancaster has to cross the WCML twice within two miles; making the down line fully bi-directional between Lancaster and Morecambe South Curve would alleviate the timetable constraints.

Lakes Line Rail User Group

The On Time Trains [website](#) shows reliability figures for every station on the national network. For the 12 weeks to 11 March 2024, Oxenholme occupies position 2,618 out of the 2,623 stations. During a slightly earlier 12-week period, it was served by three of the four worst performing train operators: Avanti, Northern and TransPennine. This shocking result reinforces the impression that it is not worth planning to go by train if it is an important journey.

Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester lines

NR is to replace the 2000-ton bridge that takes the Calder Valley line across the M62 south of Rochdale. Rail replacement buses will run between Manchester Victoria and Rochdale from 6-24 September. Freight trains to Drax power station in Selby carry 6% of the UK's energy supply over the bridge.

Rochdale Council has approved the start of work on the technical design of plans to transform the area around station. A new public square will form a gateway into the borough.

A study commissioned by the Mayors of the West Midlands and Greater Manchester concluded that the most cost effective option to relieve the WCML following cancellation of the HS2 link would be a new 70-mile line from HS2 at Handsacre in Staffordshire to Manchester Airport via Crewe and Northern Powerhouse Rail. The DfT said it awaited proposals to secure the funding. Its [vision](#) for NPR is a 'turn up and go' service cutting Liverpool - Manchester Piccadilly journey times from around 50mins to 35mins, and trebling capacity between Liverpool and Leeds.

Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association

The rebuild of Northwich station after the roof collapsed in May 2021 is still ongoing. The original architecture is being closely matched, with the builder's stone 'CLC 1897' replaced in its original position above the main entrance. NR said originally that the structural work would complete by August 2023, then by 30 January 2024, but that date too has been missed and it has yet to say when Northern can re-occupy the building to fit it out. MCRUA and local bodies have been asked what they wish for. A ticket office and waiting room will have the same opening hours as before: closed in the afternoons and evenings, and on Sundays.

Progress on improving access to the Chester platform is also tardy. The DfT refused to allow the upgrade as part of the rebuild project, and has yet to respond to the Access for All application made instead in early 2022. Cheshire West & Chester Council sponsored an architect to design the required lifts and a new bridge, along with tactile paving, better signage, and space in the forecourt for buses to turn. The scheme aims to address all disabilities, but the line is far from being usable by people with any form of disability.

Cheshire & Warrington LEP's Restoring Your Railway bid for a passenger service on the Middlewich line from Northwich to Crewe, aka the Mid Cheshire Rail Link, has fared no better. After evaluating the business case, the DfT requested another, which suggested that it was minded to approve. This was submitted in October 2022, but again no response has been received. MCRUA contributed to the proposals for all of these projects, and will continue to monitor developments.

East Suffolk Travel Association

Nigel Wall updated ESTA's Spring meeting on the campaign to improve the service at Westerfield. It lost most East Suffolk Line stops over a decade ago to improve punctuality, but modern bi-modal trains are more efficient. And as the Garden Village develops over the next 20 years, its residents could well become Westerfield passengers. Southbound trains calling would aid commuting to Ipswich, as well as anyone changing for London, or onto the Cambridge/Peterborough line.

Local councils were told at a three-monthly Sizewell Forum, which members of the public can attend as observers, that track work at Saxmundham Junction would take place in 2025.

With no spare capacity for construction trains during the day, there was a “probable campaigning window” to press for infrastructure improvements, or they may need to run at night. Rail is taking aggregate imported at Lowestoft to Staffordshire, and now also to Whitemoor in the Fens, while Ipswich Docks could have to handle aggregate for Sizewell, as the mostly single-track Felixstowe line is “the busiest freight railway in the UK”. In 2022, ESTA advocated remodelling Westerfield Junction as a minimum.

Windsor Lines Passengers’ Association

The planned [West London Orbital](#) line from Hendon and Brent Cross/West Hampstead and Cricklewood to Kew Bridge and Hounslow could bring more people to the Hounslow loop, especially if it is easy to get from HS2 to the Orbital station at Old Oak Common. The new line will presumably need a name, like the others on the Overground. Any ideas?

A recent SWR stakeholders’ conference had exciting developments in matters of inclusion, accessibility, and community partnerships, but rather less on what ought to be the core business of a railway company. There were no thoughts about a southern link to Heathrow or Crossrail 2. New schemes are often rejected for a lack of money, but it is important to keep the ideas on the shelf as they could be implemented eventually.

More SWR stations need turn up and go frequencies, and the Windsor line needs clock face times restored in the morning, while short-formed trains at the weekend sometimes leave passengers on the platform. However, the new Class 701s have started to appear, with two extra services each way between Waterloo and Windsor.

RAILFUTURE

Rf welcomes new members, both individual and groups: the more we are, the more weight to its campaigns. Join [here](#): from the “Membership Types” menu top right, select either the appropriate category of individual or, to affiliate, select “RUG or similar”. Read the latest from Rf on [News and views](#), [Press releases](#), [Railfuture in the news](#), and [Consultation responses](#).



The call for nominations for this year's RUG Awards has now closed. Rf’s Honorary President Christian Wolmar will present the Awards and Commendations after the national AGM in Edinburgh on Saturday 13 July. Full details are on Rf’s dedicated [website page](#).

The four categories receiving nominations this year are familiar, with three named in honour of past members and their dedication to our cause of rail development campaigning:

- The Adrian Shooter award for Best Website
- The Paul Abell award for Best Newsletter
- The Clara Zilahi award for Best Campaigner
- The award for Best Campaign.

The Judges' Special Award is made at the sole discretion of the panel of Rf Vice-Presidents who will judge all the nominations, maybe in some cases after paying them a visit! Following the presentations, the winners of the Judges' Special Award and the Gold Awards are offered the platform to tell their stories - with any tears of pain as well as of joy.

NEWS

Rf branches in England can lobby candidates in the local elections on 2 May that will also choose 10 directly elected mayors. Rf London's [Manifesto](#) sets out ten key tasks to deliver a reliable rail service with fair prices. And the Infrastructure and Networks group is always open to new opportunities, particularly in communities with a population of over 25,000 but no rail access. There are no local elections in Scotland or Wales this year.

RAILFUTURE YORKSHIRE

The Manchester Piccadilly to Huddersfield stopper runs to/from York via Wakefield and Castleford four times a day, with another to/from Wakefield only, a start in restoring Northern's hourly Huddersfield – Wakefield - Castleford service. The long overdue plan is to increase the Wakefield - York frequency to 6/day this summer and then to a full hourly service in December. Intermediate Stalybridge - Huddersfield stations have just a peak hours link to Leeds; Mossley, Greenfield, Marsden and Slaithwaite badly need a more frequent service.

The Leeds - Lincoln weekday service via Barnsley and Sheffield takes almost 2½ hours. The West Yorkshire Combined Authority [rail strategy](#) proposes a more direct route via Castleford, Pontefract, Askern (new station) and Doncaster, as well as Leeds - Goole hourly, and Sheffield – York via Pontefract. The trick will be to bring developments like this about, as the DfT/Treasury are squeezing the train operators' budgets whereas, if they were serious about levelling-up, they would be increasing them.

RAILFUTURE EAST MIDLANDS

Stephen Chaytow of the Manchester and East Midlands Rail Action Partnership (MEMRAP) and the RfEM committee told a public meeting that restoring the Peaks and Dales line (Matlock - Buxton and Chinley) could help to alleviate the overburdened WCML following cancellation of HS2.

Both MEMRAP and Rf support the Buxton Town Team's proposal for a Very Light Rail connection along the existing freight line from Buxton to Blackwell Mill, at the western end of the Monsal Trail using battery-powered vehicles being developed by RevolutionVLR. Another candidate for a VLR service is the line from Buxton to Hindlow quarry, to connect with the High Peak Trail.

RAILFUTURE WALES

Programme manager Alison Walker says that the Westminster Government's union connectivity fund would cover the £250m cost of the proposed Cardiff East (Newport Road) station. Up to four trains per hour would link Cardiff to Cheltenham and Bristol Temple Meads.

RAILFUTURE THAMES VALLEY

RfTV supports NR's TWAO application to replace the level crossing at Tackley with a bridge that, together with two others north of Oxford, will allow for increased capacity on the Thames Valley - Midlands route. It also welcomes GWR's plans for a trial Bristol – Swindon - Oxford service: as well as avoiding a change at Didcot, it would enhance the case for a Wantage/Grove station.

RAILFUTURE DEVON AND CORNWALL

The Government has promised funds to work with Devon CC on reopening a station at Cullompton as part of the Devon Metro, and giving Tavistock a rail link to Plymouth by rebuilding the five miles of track to Bere Alston.

CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT

CBT thinks that not being able to book train tickets more than 12 weeks in advance is frustrating for potential passengers, but also bad news for the environment because of the advantage it gives flying or driving over train travel.

Imagine you live in Manchester and fancy Cornwall in August. You go online to book train tickets, only to find they won't be available until May! But you can book return flights to Newquay for August, no problem. So is it any wonder that a lot of people end up flying?

TRANSPORT FOCUS

TF's presentation to the 'Rail Scotland' conference in Glasgow covered the importance of delivering a reliable and punctual railway with challenging performance targets, satisfaction with ScotRail services, and motivations and barriers to rail use. TF also gave evidence to the Scottish Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee on value for money, performance, passenger priorities, consulting with passengers to inform future timetables and personal security, as it explored a wide range of issues relating to the rail industry including how ScotRail and the Caledonian Sleeper have organised and delivered rail services since the transfer of operations into public ownership.

...and now the rest of the news...

Trespass on the railway is a huge problem: around 19,000 incidents/year, jumping every Spring with the Easter holiday and the onset of British Summer Time. Last year saw a 40% rise in incidents involving young people under the age of 18. The electricity on the railway – 25,000 volts overhead and 750 volts in the third rail – is on all day, seven days a week, and you don't have to touch the source to be at risk of harm, as the electricity can jump and arc.

Scotland's rail unions and environmental groups want a permanent end to peak train fares. A pilot scheme making ScotRail fares the same all day has been extended to 28 June. Transport Scotland said the additional data on travel patterns would help to inform the final evaluation: "The Scottish Government will consider the impact of the pilot and the long-term sustainability of such a proposition before committing to any further measures after June 2024".

ORR has approved Grand Union Trains' application to run four daily services between London and Stirling from June 2025, the first open access services on the WCML. The route will include stops in Milton Keynes, Nuneaton, Crewe (potentially), Preston, Carlisle, Lockerbie and Motherwell, giving several towns their first direct connection to London. Passengers should benefit from the increased competition, with more choices and potentially lower fares.

When booked assistance is delivered successfully passenger satisfaction is high, but any failure can significantly impact the well being of passengers, and their overall travel experience. An ORR report calls for the more widespread adoption of the Passenger Assist staff app to improve communication between departure and destination stations when delivering assistance.

Scotrail has confirmed that from 2 June Leven and Cameron Bridge have an hourly rail service to Edinburgh via Kirkcaldy.

Rail Minister Huw Merriman visited Dore & Topley station on 8 April to mark the completion of the £150m Hope Valley Railway Upgrade through the Peak District between Manchester and Sheffield. He opened the new, fully accessible platform, while the existing platform has also been extended to accommodate 6 carriage trains. Other key improvements include improved signalling along the line, a 1 km loop between Bamford and Hathersage so faster services can overtake slower ones, and additional track to the south of Dore & Topley station to relieve a longstanding freight train bottleneck.

A 325ft-wide "green bridge" that will take a road, footpath and bridleway over the HS2 line near Turweston on the outskirts of Brackley in Northants will also have hedgerows and vegetation to create a space for wildlife. 16 will be built along the line between London and Birmingham.

Drivers are being fined for parking at Long Buckby station near Daventry, Northants, even though they have paid online. The car park has two sections run by different companies, but this is not made clear online or at the site itself.

Corby Station celebrates the 15th anniversary of its reopening on 27 April. North Northants Council is said to be considering an elevated extension to the station car park.

EMR has a £60 million programme to refurbish three of its fleets: the Class 360s that run between Corby and London St Pancras, Class 170s that operate many of its regional services, and Class 158s used mainly on its Liverpool to Norwich route. The project is being delivered in partnership with Angel Trains, Siemens, Porterbrook and Eversholt, and leverages significant private sector investment. All the work will be carried out in the UK. With the new Aurora Intercity bi-mode trains entering service in 2025, every EMR fleet is either being replaced or refurbished.

From 7-24 May, East West Railway Co is holding a series of nine [drop-in events](#) along the route between Oxford, Milton Keynes, Bedford and Cambridge to explain the statutory consultation and Development Consent Order (DCO) processes. The consultation starting in June will set out the proposed design for the route.

GTR has an option to lease up to 30, 4-carriage Class 379 Electrostar trains from Porterbrook for use on its Great Northern network. It expects to introduce the former Stansted Express fleet over the rest of the year. As well as additional GN services, the extra capacity will allow the transfer of Class 387 trains, which can run on the third rail power supply, to meet passenger growth across the wider GTR network.

A [planning application](#) to redevelop Liverpool Street station has so far attracted 2,206 objections with 29 in favour. Plans include its partial demolition, a 20-storey tower with offices and a hotel cantilevered above the Grade-II* former Great Eastern Hotel, and more lifts and escalators. Property developer Sellar said the project would "help London maintain its status as a world-class city - at no cost to passengers or the taxpayer".

CONSULTATIONS

- Wealden District Council: [Draft Local Plan and Sustainability Appraisal](#). Closes 10 May.
- DfT: [Adapting the UK's Transport System to the Impacts of Climate Change](#). Closes 31 May.

Please advise [Roger Blake](#) of any other consultation, eg that of a local transport authority.

EVENTS

Please keep your events coming, and update websites with any changes as soon as they are made. Also copy [Roger Blake](#), who maintains lists of [Events](#) and [Rail Dates](#) on the Rf website.

Blob colour indicates the type of event:

- Rf events (RUGs are cordially invited).
- National & regional rail events.
- Local Group events.

April

■ Saturday 20. Rf London & South East regional branch AGM, Wesley's Chapel, 49 City Road, **London**, EC1Y 1AU, 1100.

■ Saturday 27. Rf West Midlands AGM, St Martin in the Bullring, Edgbaston Street, **Birmingham**, B5 5BB, 1030.

■ Saturday 27. Rf London & South East, Herts & Beds division, St Paul's Church, Hatfield Road, **St Albans**, AL1 4JP, 1100 (Also 29 May and 27 June Online at 1930).

■ Saturday 27. Rf Yorkshire AGM, Priestly Hall, Mill Lane Chapel, City Square, **Leeds** LS1 5E, 1300.

■ Saturday 27. Rf Wales AGM, **Shrewsbury** station, 1400.

■ Saturday 27. British Regional Transport Association, Unitarian Church, Worthing Road, **Horsham** RH12 1SL, 1400.

May

- Saturday 4. Rf Scotland AGM, Friends' Meeting House, Victoria Terrace, **Edinburgh**, 1400.
- Wednesday 8. Rf London & South East, Eastern division. **Online**, 1900 (Also the second Wednesday of alternate months).
- Friday 10. Friends of the West Highland Lines AGM, Commodore Inn, 112-117 West Clyde Street, **Helensburgh**, G84 8ES.
- Saturday 11. Ontrack - Tendring Transport Users AGM, Gospel Chapel, 62 Old Road, **Frinton-on-Sea**, Essex, CO13 9BY, 1030.
- Saturday 11. Rf North East AGM, Newcastle Art Centre, 67 Westgate Road, **Newcastle**, 1400.
- Monday 13. Friends of Littleborough Stations, History Centre, **Littleborough**, 1900.
- Monday 13. Ribble Valley Rail, The New Inn, Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, 1900 (Also the second Monday of alternate months).
- Tuesday 14. Chesham & District Transport Users' Group, Town Hall, **Chesham**, 1930.
- Thursday 16. Rf London & South East, London Metro division, 75 Cowcross Street, **Farringdon**, 1900.
- Thursday 16. Friends of the Barton Line, No.1 inn, **Cleethorpes** station, 1900.
- Saturday 18. East Suffolk Travel Association AGM, St Mary's Church, **Halesworth**, 1400.
- Saturday 18. Rf East Midlands AGM, **Nottingham**, 1430.
- Tuesday 28. Levenmouth Rail Campaign, Fife Renewables Innovation Centre, Ajax Way, **Methil**, Leven, KY8 3RS and Online, 1830. (Also the last Tuesday of alternate months).

Further Ahead

- 21-22 June. European Passengers' Federation, Ibis Hotel, **Warsaw**.
- 8 July. Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association AGM, Golden Pheasant, Plumley Moor Road, **Plumley**, Cheshire, WA16 9RX, 1900.
- 13 July. Rf National AGM and RUG Awards, Holyrood Hotel, 81 Holyrood Rd, **Edinburgh**, EH8 8AU, 1100.

Disclaimer: unless otherwise stated, views expressed are those of the contributor, and not necessarily shared by Rf.

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