

Welcome to this edition of Rail User Express.

As always, feel free to forward RUEX to a colleague, or to reproduce items in your own newsletter (quoting sources). If you want further details of any of the stories mentioned, look on the relevant website or, failing that, get back to me so I can send you the full text.

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We continue with the usual roundup of news from rail user groups around the UK. I'm grateful to RUGs that send me their magazines and bulletins.

GUEST RAIL USER GROUP OF THE MONTH

Chesham and District Transport Users' Group

I've recently made contact with this group and hope to bring you more news of their activities in future editions of Rail User Express. C&DTUG is affiliated to the Federation of Metropolitan Line Users' Committees and normally meets monthly at Chesham Town Hall. A major concern for the group is the overall time it takes to get into London by Underground due to the number of stops, with the result that rail users are attracted to neighbouring stations which have a faster service provided by Chiltern Railways. Poor information and unhelpful announcements are other sources of complaint. It is hoped that the Met line service can be speeded up from 2013 when all the slower "A-Stock" trains will have been withdrawn from service.

...next, news from our regular contributors (from north to south)...

Dornoch Rail Link Action Group

[website](#)

DORLAG reports there very visible evidence of work progressing on the rail freight terminal at Georgemas Junction in the form of a very large gantry crane; the group's Convenor feels that the development represents the best opportunity for rail freight and consequent line improvements they've seen for a generation.

At their June AGM, the group were treated to an excellent and upbeat presentation from a representative of Direct Rail Services, and it was encouraging to note that the Company considers that the removal of speed restrictions and journey time reductions are as important for freight users as they are for passenger traffic.

Friends of the West Highland Lines

[website](#)

Clearance of selected trees to reveal "iconic views" from the West Highland Line has been continuing through the winter and spring, with contractors often working in appalling weather. FoWHL gratefully acknowledges the enthusiastic, professional support provided by Network Rail staff.

NR's "Alternative Solutions" consultation document gave FoWHL the opportunity to press home some of their campaign aims, eg: the need to market the line internationally as happens for Switzerland's Glacier Express and Canada's Rocky Mountaineer, and to use bespoke tourist carriages rather than cascaded ex-commuter rolling stock. They also commented that micro-franchising is unlikely to be appropriate for rural routes in Scotland, but there should be a franchise requirement for the train operator to liaise regularly with formally-constituted local community rail groups.

With financial support from ScotRail and HiTrans, the “Friends” have published a new set of four large postcards depicting scenes along the line, taken by FoWHL’s assistant secretary, Norman McNab; they’re available at £2 incl postage from [Glenfinnan Station Museum](#). Norman’s masterful photos can also be seen on travel posters depicting the glories of the West Highland Lines at major stations around Scotland, and on the cover of ScotRail’s new booklet “Scotland’s Greatest Rail Journeys”.

A creditable total 49 members trekked to the remote Corroul Estate on Rannoch Moor for the FoWHL’s 2012 AGM, perhaps attracted by the promise of a venison lunch. The surprise special guest was local MP, Charles Kennedy, in convivial mood.

St Andrews Rail Link Campaign

[website](#)

An update on the progress of the Starlink campaign was greeted with approval at the annual meeting of the St Andrews Partnership Forum in the St Andrews Golf Hotel in June. The partnership, who had invited Starlink convenor Jane Ann Liston to report on developments, heard how the Community Council were helping to carry out the consultation and also of the positive responses from the rail industry.

The General Manager of another hotel in the town has been quoted as saying “Reinstating the railway to St Andrews would be only commonsense. Trains would be most convenient for our visitors, not to mention the staff. You simply cannot get four golf-bags and their owners into one car.”

Since the railway closed in 1969, the permanent population has increased from 9,500 to 14,000 and that of the University from 2,000 to over 7,000. Starlink surveys have found that 72-73% of visitors who had driven to St Andrews would be willing to use a train.

Furness Line Action Group

[contact](#)

FLAG’s “Furness Better Connected” campaign to preserve through services to Manchester after 2014 stepped up a gear with the local MP setting up a petition on [www.change.org](#). The campaign has widened to become “Cumbria Better Connected”, business partners have been brought on board and another local MP has tabled a motion in Parliament. Meanwhile, FLAG has joined forces with the neighbouring Lakes Line Rail User Group to influence decisions in advance of the 2013 timetable changes. Later this year, FLAG hopes to carry out a passenger survey, partly to gauge views about the possible loss of a through service to Manchester.

News that the Furness Line between Carnforth and Barrow has been granted community service designation is seen by FLAG as a “two-edged sword” – will the line be downgraded to a rural branch and rely on volunteers as part of the “Big Society”? The newsletter quotes the Archbishop of Canterbury’s assertion that the Big Society is “aspirational waffle designed to conceal a deeply damaging withdrawal of the state from its responsibilities to the most vulnerable”.

A recent fiasco involving the provision of an emergency bus replacement service reveals an underlying problem: Northern stations still have no public address system and passengers are therefore unaware of any delays or cancellations. Uncertainties over Sunday bus services in the area serve to underline the need for a Sunday train service north of Barrow, which remains a key campaign aim for FLAG. However, there’s some encouraging news about a new minibus service connecting Seascale Station with Wasdale Head, which is bound to be popular with walkers heading for Scafell Pike.

On 1 June, FLAG’s committee attended the unveiling of 12 impressive artwork panels at Barrow Station, created by students from Furness College. FLAG had funded one of the panels showing open and closed railways in the area.

Ormskirk, Preston & Southport Travellers' Association [website](#)

The consortium of central Lancashire councils has completed its Local Plan, which includes the policy to reopen Midge Hall station ... OPSTA's chairman resolves to "get involved in this again". The group is continuing to receive evidence from its members about problems with the collection of fares via its dedicated email address: opstafare@gmail.com

Fifty years on from the Beeching era, one member argues in an article in OPSTA's newsletter that we now need a "Railway Restitution Bill" to begin to rebuild all those important railway routes that were lost. At the very least, we should copy the USA policy of "railbanking" whereby disused lines are conserved for future use. We are urged to remember that the rail lines in question were originally authorised by parliament which gives them a certain legitimacy.

There's a report that the Friends of Croston Station are plodding on with the clearing of a disused platform and relaying old paving slabs; progress is slower than they would have liked due to working under strict Network Rail rules (eg: no power tools can be used). Meanwhile the Friends of Meols Cop Station undertook their most challenging project yet, dubbed "Muffin Monday", when free coffee and muffins (and information leaflets) were handed out to early morning commuters to thank them for their support of the station. The Meols Cop group say that their new status as ACoRP affiliates enables them to get more support and funding from Northern Rail.

Support the Oldham-Rochdale-Manchester line [website](#)

A press release issued by STORM welcomes the return of rail services to the Oldham line [after conversion to Metrolink] and the addition of some new stops, but it contains some criticism for Transport for Greater Manchester who failed to mention concessionary travel and some key bus connections in their press statement. STORM's press release concludes: "[we] look forward to the early extension of services to Shaw and Derker with provision at [Oldham] Mumps for Park and Ride or at least an adjacent facility for bus passengers as a priority."

There's a warning for anyone using Northern's Timetable Leaflet 36 (Leeds-Manchester via Bradford): STORM says it shows the full service at only five of the stations listed; for other stations, it's necessary to consult other timetable leaflets, but there is no mention of this fact on Leaflet 36.

A report in STORM's weekly bulletin says that work is progressing apace on the long-awaited Todmorden Curve, which will dramatically slash journey times from the town's Manchester Road station to the city. Four decades of vegetation has been removed from the track bed between Stansfield Hall and the main Todmorden - Hebden Bridge line. Driver training is scheduled to start early in 2014, with the first passenger services running from May 2014.

East Norfolk Transport Users' Association [website](#)

In a bid to raise the group's profile, ENTUA has launched its own website (see above) and produced a stock of promotional leaflets – they're asking the help of members in getting these leaflets out to the travelling public.

In advance of a hoped-for Government announcement of new rail infrastructure in their region, ENTUA issued a press release calling for selected Norwich-to-Cambridge trains to be extended to Great Yarmouth; this would have the added benefit of giving the resort better connections to Stansted Airport. ENTUA is campaigning for a half hourly service between Great Yarmouth and Norwich at least during the peak period. They would also like to see their daily through train to and from London Liverpool Street restored.

A feature article in the group's newsletter claims that Great Yarmouth is self-evidently a deprived public-transport area, citing the deplorable state of Yarmouth Railway Station to illustrate the point. Despite a clean-up by local folk, the station looks bare and unwelcoming. There is no bus link to the town centre nor any of the holiday camps, and the main pedestrian route into town is via the dilapidated Vauxhall Bridge (although long-awaited repairs to the bridge have, at last, begun).

East Suffolk Travellers' Association

[website](#)

ESTA is counting down the weeks to the start of the hourly service between Ipswich and Lowestoft, made possible by the installation of a passing loop at Beccles; the committee has booked exhibition space in the autumn so that they can mount publicity displays, and is asking members to lend a hand.

At the beginning of July, ESTA's Chairman and Secretary attended a meeting with Suffolk County Council officers to begin work on a sustainable transport plan for Lowestoft station, which aims to make it easier for people to walk, cycle and catch buses to and from the station.

In recent weeks, ESTA members have taken part in a day trip to Bressingham Gardens and a sponsored cycle ride in aid of group funds, and there are three walks from railway stations to look forward to in the coming months.

Felixstowe Travelwatch

[website](#)

FTW has issued a special edition of their newsletter to update members on the group's response to the suggestion from Hutchison Ports that the passenger service on the Felixstowe branch should be cut back to allow more paths for freight. The committee has been busy lobbying MPs, councillors ... in fact "anyone and everyone". This and various other issues from around the region have prompted stakeholders, including various user groups, to put together an "East Anglian Rail Manifesto". Following on from this initiative, FTW's local MP secured a debate in Parliament about rail services in East Anglia.

There was heartening news for FTW when, during the debate, Transport Minister Theresa Villiers said: "As to what goes into the [next Greater Anglia] franchise, I emphasise that we have no plans to remove daytime passenger services from the Felixstowe branch." However, FTW does not regard the matter closed; it is urging members to get out and use the train, and to write to their MPs.

Bedford Commuters' Association

[website](#)

In advance of submitting its response on the Thameslink Franchise consultations, the BCA committee has had time to set out the issues for its members and invite their feedback. There's frustration that the contract for new Thameslink rolling stock has yet to be finalised, and the BCA warns that if it doesn't happen soon, all the infrastructure work will be completed but with no new trains to run on it, adding: "pity the poor commuters on other routes in the country that were expecting a timely cascade of trains from our Thameslink routes."

Central Bedfordshire Council published their draft [Development Strategy](#) on 20 June and is inviting comments by 8 Aug. The BCA was annoyed that the section headed "new infrastructure" deals mainly with roads, and asked why there's no mention of all the rail projects in the area, eg: Thameslink, MML electrification, a new station at Wixhams, the rail freight interchange and various station upgrades. However, they've since learnt that high-level discussions are taking place about possible routes for a future phase of the East-West Rail Link eastwards from Bedford, with a view to safeguarding the chosen alignment – it's hoped that this will be built in to the final Development Strategy.

Association of Public Transport Users (Herts)

[website](#)

Prior to their annual meeting with First Capital Connect and Network Rail, APTU invited its members to submit written questions for the company representatives and then circulated the answers received. One question and answer caught my eye as being of interest to rail users nationally. Many of us have argued that ticket vending machines provide a somewhat unsatisfactory alternative to a manned ticket window, and in the following exchange it seems that the train operator agrees! ...

Question: Why can child/half rate tickets not be purchased from ticket machines at Luton, and possibly other stations? We are supposed to purchase correct tickets before travel!

Answer: Ticket vending machines at all stations, Luton included, do sell child rate (half price) tickets. However the £2 “accompanied child” tickets can only be purchased from ticket offices. This is to avoid fraudulent travel using these tickets, which was rife when they were available from ticket vending machines.

Windsor Lines Passengers' Association

[website](#)

The WLPA remains unimpressed by the enthusiasm of local authorities in their area for “Airtrack Lite”, the reduced-cost scheme which promises to connect Heathrow with the Waterloo-Woking rail corridor without adding to holdups at level crossings. They argue that overcrowding would be intense and existing rail users would be inconvenienced, adding: “the level crossing problem can be solved - some crossings could be closed and overpasses or underbridges could be built.”

Noting that planning permission has been granted for interchange improvements at Twickenham, the WLPA is nonetheless disappointed that an opportunity to create a proper transport hub fit for this century has been lost. The group has revised its 23-point list of aspirations as a result of some recent developments, and has had the chance to debate a number of issues with South West Trains.

The WLPA’s representative who attended a local user group meeting in Guildford organised by the London & SE Branch of Railfuture reports that the meeting was useful. The WLPA committee is keen to be involved with any new “Surrey” campaign grouping, as proposed at the meeting.

Bexhill Rail Action Group

[website](#)

In the summer newsletter, BRAG tells its members about alterations to services during the Olympics, but expresses disappointment that there will be no additional late trains to Bexhill via the East Coastway route, nor from Ashford via the Marshlink route. There’s also concern that the ticket office at Bexhill is regularly closing early due to staff shortage, and BRAG intends to take this up with Southern.

BRAG has attended meetings with two of the bidders for the Thameslink franchise and looks forward to meeting the others. The group’s priorities are (1) The maintenance of 7 day a week services between Bexhill and Ashford, Brighton & Victoria (2) The end of division and attachment of trains at Haywards Heath (3) More carriages on the Brighton-Ashford service (4) Better services for Normans Bay (5) Continuation of a growth model for the business, particularly the retention of cheap off-peak fares.

BRAG is delighted to report that a refreshment trolley service is once again available on the Hastings Line, provided by a cooperative venture called “Grub on the Go” and featuring local produce. The group wishes them well and urges members to “use it or lose it”.

West Sussex Rail Users' Association

[website](#)

The WSRUA committee is going to be very busy in the coming weeks, working with Railfuture, Passenger Focus and neighbouring rail user groups during the process leading up to the new combined Thameslink, Southern & Gt Northern Franchise – they’ve already attended a briefing meeting held by the Dept. for Transport, and hope to meet up with the five bidders. They’ve also set up an online survey at <http://survey.wsrua.org.uk> so that supporters can log in and give their priorities for the new franchise. A postal option is available for those without internet access.

Elsewhere we read that the trolley service has suddenly been withdrawn from Arun Valley trains, and WSRUA thinks it’s the first time for over 100 years that passengers on the line have been without refreshments. They’ve suggested various options to Southern and hope to see the facility restored. [*Another opportunity for “Grub on the Go” to grab? – Ed*]

South Hampshire Rail Users' Group

[website](#)

SHRUG responded in detail to the Dept. for Transport's recent consultation on fares and ticketing with a number of thought-provoking comments and ideas, including the following:

- For people who work flexibly, introduce carnet-style tickets as an alternative to season tickets.
- Dearer season tickets in the "high peak" would disadvantage workers in low-paid jobs (eg retail and catering) who generally cannot work flexibly.
- Weekly and monthly seasons should be pro-rata the annual rate so as not to disadvantage those who cannot afford the annual season outlay.
- Reduced staffing hours at their local stations encourages rail users to drive to a larger station, leading to reduced footfall and perhaps further reductions in staffing or train service.
- Permit-to-travel machines should be compulsory, with the right to pay the balance for the cheapest fare to the guard or at the destination.
- The trend to less-prescriptive franchises will lead to greater fares complexity as individual operators increasingly go their own way.

TransWilts Community Rail Partnership

[website](#)

TWCRP is a group of like-minded organisations seeking to achieve positive, sustainable and imaginative development of the TransWilts (Swindon to Salisbury) railway. They've issued a statement expressing immense pleasure that the Dept. for Transport has approved Wiltshire Council's bid for £4.25m from the Government's Local Sustainable Transport Fund for its "Improving Wiltshire's Rail Offer" package. It means that the funding is in place to upgrade station infrastructure and to introduce a regular train service from Swindon to Chippenham via Melksham, and on to Trowbridge and Westbury.

TWCRP is in touch with the four bidders for the new Great Western franchise, advising them of local factors and how the service could be run, benefitting the community as well as being viable both operationally and financially. A 2-hourly frequency is envisaged, and there's the possibility of extending the service to Salisbury; no start date has been decided at this stage. The Partnership sees the line as an essential link for the local communities and businesses along the route, and as part of the projected strategic north - south rail link through an area experiencing major expansion.

Avocet Line Rail Users' Group

[website](#)

ALRUG has been working in conjunction with Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership on a bid to obtain Community Rail status for the Exeter-Exmouth Line. The team is making good progress and has formulated a list of objectives for the Route Prospectus covering the line. Top of that list is improved Sunday services, but also included are a marketing plan to stimulate tourist traffic, easier ticket purchase away from staffed stations, station improvements including social enterprise initiatives, integrated transport solutions, and supporting the Devon Metro proposals. An announcement is expected in September, and ALRUG plan to "hit the ground running", with a launch event and a proposed work programme for the new Avocet Line Rail Forum. Railfuture's Community Rail Officer, Chris Austin, has agreed to chair the Line Forum for its initial year; Chris lives locally and is a member of ALRUG.

After the four shortlisted bidders for the new Great Western Franchise were announced, ALRUG successfully obtained clearance from the Dept. for Transport to allow each of the bidders to contribute a page about themselves for publication in ALRUG's newsletter. Members of the group that opt to receive the newsletter by email have the advantage of getting it 5 days earlier at the time when copy is sent off for printing. Members can also choose to receive email alerts via the website.

Late news: ALRUG has issued a press release following the Government's spending proposals for rail in the period up to 2019, expressing disappointment that "once again, life ends at Bristol". They go

on to say that electrification will reach west Wales, but Exeter and Plymouth seem set to wait for ever; the South Wales valley lines are to be electrified, yet none sees as many passengers a year as does Exmouth; and the metro proposals for the Exeter area creep forward at a snail's pace with no overall plan and no-one in charge.

...next, news from Railfuture...

RAIL DEMAND CONSISTENTLY UNDERESTIMATED

Delegates at Railfuture's conference in Stirling heard how recent rail reopenings in Scotland have consistently exceeded passenger forecasts, leading to fears that some schemes have not gone ahead because the consultants have underestimated demand.

"The message that came out of the conference is that we're really underestimating patronage, and all the openings in Scotland have proved this. They opened Larkhall-Milngavie, Airdrie-Bathgate and Stirling-Alloa, and they were all a great success" said conference chairman Jerry Alderson.

Jackie McGuire, former lead officer for the Stirling - Alloa reopening, explained that they predicted 85,000 when they were producing the business case, but following the experience of the Larkhall Milngavie reopening they then revised their figures to 155,000 before they constructed the line. Once the line was opened they again revised the estimate, based on the initial patronage, to 400,000, and by the end of that year they'd exceeded that too.

"Some of the estimates have been woefully inadequate and potentially schemes have not gone ahead because the consultants have underestimated patronage." said Mr Alderson. "We have the evidence of how successful rail reopenings have been in Scotland and how quickly lines can be built from scratch - not one of them took more than two years to construct after powers had been granted - and there's no reason why this success can't be repeated south of the border." Mr Alderson added. "A room full of people, mainly from England, came to find out how the Scots had achieved success and now want to do exactly the same in England." – *Railfuture press release*

WARM WELCOME FOR MIDLAND MAIN LINE ELECTRIFICATION

In a statement dated 15 July, Railfuture gave a warm welcome to the widely-anticipated announcement of electrification of the Midland Main Line. Railfuture's chair of network development Ian McDonald said "This is something that we've been pushing for for a long time, and it's long overdue. Britain has one of the lowest levels of electrification in Europe, so we have a lot of catching up to do. However, this investment should not be used as an excuse to further increase ticket prices. Rail improvements have an excellent business case and this project will be more than paid back in the long-term." – *Railfuture press release*

BUS USERS HELP DISTRIBUTE AIRPORT SURVEY

We're grateful to Bus Users UK for distributing Railfuture's *Airport Links* survey to its members – those of us that are members of both organisations will now have received it twice! For anyone still wanting a stock of survey forms or just a single copy, please email [Trevor Garrod](mailto:Trevor.Garrood@railfuture.org). The deadline for responses is the end of September.

RAILFUTURE NORTH WEST

The lead story in the NW Branch newsletter is entitled "Electrification for Growth?" and begins: "The arrival of electrification on many new routes in the North West ought to present opportunities for both growth in existing services and addition of new ones, but it seems the opportunities are being missed at the first hurdle."

The article goes on to give an example: "Bolton Trinity Street station used to have regular through services to London but alas no more. With the arrival of electrification in just a couple of years, it would easily be possible to run Pendolino's from the very long platforms at Bolton, but it seems this is not even being mooted." The Branch suggests that some Manchester-Euston services could start from Bolton (population 262,800), and they will be urging local councillors to start pressing for this.

Elsewhere we read that the NW Branch will be joining forces with the East Mids and Yorks Branches to oppose the speculative proposal that the disused Woodhead railway tunnels could be used for a second trans-pennine motorway.

RAILFUTURE SEVERNSIDE

At the recent public inquiry into the controversial Bus Rapid Transit scheme in Bristol, Nigel Bray from the Severnside Branch urged the inspector to reject plans to concrete over the harbour railway and convert it into a busway. He told the inquiry that it would be a mistake to allow such a valuable transport asset to be wasted when light rail had so much potential. "I explained that Sheffield, 20 years ago, was in the same position that Bristol is in now. Today, Sheffield has an extensive tram network which has proved to be huge success. Guided buses, on the other hand, are a bit of a dead-end"

The Department for Transport recently authorised a trial of tram-trains in Rotherham, and these will be able to run both on light and heavy rail lines. "Such a scheme would be ideal for the greater Bristol area, now that government policy seems to be changing".

Nigel explained to the inquiry that government policies were no longer biased against rail. Under previous rules, reducing car use was treated as a disbenefit because the government received less fuel tax, and that therefore rail schemes were not taken forward. "Fortunately that has now changed".

RAILFUTURE EAST ANGLIA

Although pleased that, after many years of lobbying, work is progressing on the new passing loop at Beccles, the Branch is disappointed that users will still be left with a dilapidated station building without waiting facilities and just four parking spaces – hardly conducive to attracting new business for the promised hourly service. However, there's encouraging news from Newmarket, where campaigners are having some success in persuading the train operator and local authorities that something needs to be done about the poor station facilities.

RAILFUTURE LONDON AND SOUTH EAST

The decision to hold a series of rotating "regional forums" for all branch members and fellow campaigners is proving popular – the next will be in Robertsbridge, just a few minutes from Robertsbridge Station on the Hastings line, on Sat 18 Aug. The idea is to focus on specific themes of immediate interest locally, and to invite representatives from other organisations, especially line user groups. At the Guildford forum in June, for example, the theme was "developing rail services in and around Surrey", and the foundations for a new Surrey Division of Railfuture were laid at the meeting. You can find dates for future regional forums in the [Events](#) listing below, or contact londonsoutheast@railfuture.org.uk.

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

GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCES RAIL INVESTMENT FOR CONTROL PERIOD 5 (2014 to 2019)

The ministerial statement by Transport Secretary Justine Greening on 16 July 2012, announcing her High Level Output Specification (HLOS) that sets out objectives for the rail industry during Control Period 5 (April 2014 – March 2019), can be seen [here](#).

Alongside HLOS, Government publishes an “illustrative option”. This sets out the list of projects that Government considers might be required to deliver the high level outputs that it specifies. Government looks to the rail industry to improve and find better ways of delivering the HLOS outputs. The various documents, including lists of projects, can be seen [here](#).

CURRENT DEPT. FOR TRANSPORT CONSULTATIONS - see <http://www.dft.gov.uk/consultations>

- Abolition of the Disabled Person’s Transport Advisory Committee. The Dept. for Transport is inviting views on what successor arrangements should be put in place if DPTAC is abolished. They are seeking to ensure that any successor arrangement will continue to provide consensual, pan-disability advice in a flexible way, and that any arrangement represents value for money. The DfT has developed a number of options for securing specialist advice on disability transport issues if there were to be an Order to abolish DPTAC. The closing date for comments is 14 Sept 2012.
- Intercity East Coast Franchise. This consultation closes on 18 Sept 2012 and the new franchise is expected to start in Dec 2013.
- South Eastern Franchise. This consultation closes on 13 Sept 2012 and the new franchise begins in Apr 2014.
- Combined Thameslink, Southern and Great Northern Franchise. This consultation closes on 23 Aug 2012.

GREAT WESTERN FRANCHISE TO BE EXTENDED

The present Great Western franchise is to be extended because the DfT's franchise renewal programme is running behind schedule. The contract, which is held by FirstGroup, was due to end in April next year after First declined to take up an option to keep it until 2016, so saving the payment of an estimated £800 million in premiums. But the Invitation to Tender has yet to be issued to the shortlisted bidders. A DfT spokesman conceded that a new franchise cannot now start on 1 April 2013, and said an announcement would be made shortly about an extension. He declined to give a precise date, but said the extension would probably take the present contract to July. - *Railnews*

ESSEX THAMESIDE FRANCHISE OFFERS BIDDERS MORE FLEXIBILITY

The Government’s Invitation to Tender (ITT), published on 2 July for the new 15-year Essex Thameside franchise, will give bidders much more flexibility to develop their own train timetable to better suit passenger demand. The proposed Train Service Specification represents a relaxation from the rigid timetable specification of the past, while retaining obligations that protect the key outcomes, such as principal first and last trains and minimum numbers of station stops per week and per day. This marks a significant shift from the micro-management that has prevented operators from maximising capacity and optimising timetables to react to the changing demands of their passengers in the past.

The introduction of new requirements on passenger satisfaction will mean the operator has to focus strongly on the issues that matter most to passengers. New Service Quality targets have been set and based around stations, train services, train facilities and customer services. The indicators have been weighted to reflect local priorities and will be revised to capture any changes during the franchise. Full repairing responsibilities of the 25 stations, including Fenchurch Street, will be transferred from Network Rail to the new operator.

The new franchise will run for 15 years from May 2013 to May 2028, with an option for the Department to extend for up to 7 months. The four shortlisted bidders are Abellio, First Group, National Express and MTR. – *dft.gov.uk*

So is the pendulum swinging towards more flexible franchises? ...

...well no, not if our city authorities have any say in the matter...

CITY AUTHORITIES SEEK LOCAL DECISION MAKING

Authorities in **Greater Manchester** and **South & West Yorkshire** have formally proposed to the Government that decisions about rail services in the north of England should be devolved to the north of England. A combined franchise to succeed the current Northern and TransPennine franchises should be specified and managed from the north of England, rather than from London.

The proposals will focus on economic growth through more capacity for people to get to work, more frequent and faster services between the main centres of the north, and improvements at stations and in rolling stock. With over 80 per cent of local and regional train services running through their areas, West Yorkshire and York, South Yorkshire and Greater Manchester would make up the core members of the new franchising body, and work with authorities across the North to develop strategies, specifications and manage future franchises. – *Transport for Greater Manchester press release, spotted by STORM*

An aspiration to take over control of the local rail services in its area in line with the Government's devolution policy was endorsed by a meeting of Centro, the **West Midlands** Integrated Transport Authority on June 25. Centro will now submit to the Dept. for Transport a formal expression of interest in obtaining devolved powers, with the aim of taking over the commissioning and management of local rail services when the current London Midland franchise expires in 2015. – *Rail magazine*

London Mayor, Boris Johnson, submitted a takeover plan to Government on June 28 that would see him take control of West Anglia and Southeastern inner-suburban services. – *Rail magazine*

PASSENGER NUMBERS AND CROWDING IN MAJOR CITIES OF ENGLAND AND WALES

The Department for Transport has published a plethora of statistics on its website relating to passenger numbers and overcrowding on trains to and from major cities on typical weekdays; see this [link](#).

Figures are given for overcrowding in terms of "passengers in excess of capacity", with historic data alongside to show whether the situation is improving or getting worse. Also of interest is the "[notes and definitions](#)" [paper](#) that explains the rail industry's methodology – user groups may wish to challenge some of the statistics if they think the counting process to be flawed. Towards the end of the "notes and definitions" paper, the DfT provides a number of reasons of their own why the statistics may differ from passenger perceptions. – *from info on dft.gov.uk*

NEW RULES PUBLISHED FOR CHANGING TICKET OFFICE OPENING HOURS

A [newly-published document](#) from the Dept. for Transport provides a summary of the rules which apply when train operators propose changes to ticket office opening hours. It includes links to documents which contain recent changes proposed by train operators and the full rules which apply to these changes. – *dft.gov.uk*

MERSEYRAIL INCREASES TICKET SALES OUTLETS!

"[The National Passenger Survey tells us that] satisfaction with ticket issuing facilities on Merseyrail has grown from around 65% four years ago to 90% now. I am convinced this is down to our [MtoGo shops](#), the combined retail and booking offices manned by Merseyrail staff." – *Merseyrail representative quoted in Paul Salveson's "Salvo" newsletter.*

GIVING TRAIN PASSENGERS MORE INFORMATION ON PUNCTUALITY

Passengers will be able to find out if train services run on time to within one minute under plans to make more detailed punctuality information available for the first time, Transport Minister Norman Baker has announced. Already-published Public Performance Measure data currently shows how many trains arrive within five or ten minutes of their scheduled time. Now new statistics published by the Office of Rail Regulation will show the percentage of trains arriving early and within one minute of being on time. However, PPM will remain the Government's and industry's key measure of rail punctuality and reliability. – *from a DfT press release*

CONSULTATION ON PROPOSALS TO FORMALISE THE RAIL DELIVERY GROUP

On 18 July 2012, the Office of Rail Regulation published a [consultation](#) on proposals to formalise the Rail Delivery Group (RDG) by including new conditions in the operating licenses of train operators and Network Rail requiring them to be members of, and participate in the work of, RDG. The RDG was established in June 2011 in response to Sir Roy McNulty's review of how the efficiency and value for money of the railway could be improved for railway users and taxpayers.

The ORR is seeking the views of stakeholders on the way in which this group should be formalised in order to strengthen its ability to lead change that will benefit the whole industry and improve the value for money the industry delivers to passengers, freight customers and funders. The closing date for responses is 14 Sept 2012. – *ORR website*

BRING BACK BRITISH RAIL?

I get the occasional email bulletin from [bringbackbritishrail.org](#), the campaign to renationalise the railways, but I resist including news about this campaign group in Rail User Express because Railfuture takes a neutral stance on the issue.

On the subject of private versus public ownership, Railfuture's vice-chairman, Jerry Alderson, says: "The fundamental nature of our campaigning is that we argue for the outputs not the inputs. We say what services we want, what the railways should achieve and what the passenger/freight customer experience should be like, but we don't tell the rail industry or the government how to deliver them."

Norman Bradbury of Railfuture's Policy, Lobbying and Campaigns committee warns that "Railfuture policy is not to comment on political rhetoric. It is important that we maintain our non-partisan status and we therefore have a legal obligation NOT to take sides on political matters." Norman's research reveals that "The notion that operators make huge profits out of fares is wrong; for every £1 collected in fares they make an average of just 3p profit. Furthermore, the amounts of money paid back to government by the rail industry as a whole from taxation, loan guarantee fees, premium payments and revenue share agreements is very significant and in most cases these did not apply to British Rail. Most of these taxes did not even exist in BR times and BR did not pay corporation tax! The cost of today's railway cannot readily be compared to BR."

Press officers of rail user groups will know all too well that journalists love to extract a quote about renationalisation (often as a crafty follow-up to questions on local issues) and they need to have a cautious attitude about being drawn into such arguments. Most RUGs have a clause in their constitution about being independent of political bias. Furthermore, RUG committees will be aware of the differences of opinion about renationalisation amongst their members and the travelling public, and are mindful of the practical need to deal with representatives of the various private rail companies.

However, that doesn't mean that RUGs shouldn't speak out about the disadvantages of a fragmented railway industry, highlight any evidence of a lack of public service ethos, and complain about sums of money being diverted elsewhere that could be used to improve trains services.

WARWICK PARKWAY CAR PARK EXTENSION GIVEN GO AHEAD

Commuters are to benefit from extra car parking spaces at Warwick Parkway station thanks to a £1m Government contribution to the investment to build a new multi-storey car park. The substantial car park extension will boost capacity for passengers, increasing the current number of spaces to 959, from its current capacity of 737 spaces. The Department for Transport will provide £1m, working in conjunction with Chiltern Railways, towards the total cost of the £2.5m project. Work has already started on the new extension to the car park scheduled to be opened by December 2012. – *DfT press release.*

[Warwick Parkway opened in 2000 after a sustained campaign by the Railway Development Society. Its enormous success is evident from this press release.]

BITTERN & WHERRY LINES KEEP YOU UP TO DATE

The Bittern and Wherry Line Community Rail Partnerships are using smart phone technology to keep in touch with line users. If you scan the QR code that appears on publicity material, it takes you to the relevant “App store” where you can download the application to your mobile phone. Once loaded, you can use the App to view rail and bus timetables for each station, and to access special offers. – *thanks to Peter Wakefield for this*

“I DON’T WANT TO BE YOUR FRIEND, JUST TELL ME WHEN I’M GOING TO GET HOME!”

Passenger Focus has recently released research into how passengers want to be communicated with via social media such as Twitter and Facebook. The research found that passengers did not want an informal ‘mate-like’ tone, but wanted information delivered in a direct and professional manner. Passenger Focus research shows that information during delays is passengers’ fifth highest priority for improvement, behind value for money, punctuality, frequency and being able to get a seat. More [here](#).

THE FUTURE OF CHEQUES

Lionel Shields from Tonbridge Line Commuters, who started us all thinking about this issue a few months ago, reports: “We have now published details of our bank account in our bulletin and invited existing members to renew using BACS and the membership numbers we gave them. This has been popular and we are happy to recommend the method to other groups. We are now considering offering the facility to ordinary members of the public who are not already members of our group.”

[Of course, which bunch of spivs and fat cats you choose to look after your group funds is another matter you’ll need to decide – Ed]

AND FINALLY...

Prize for *Joke of the Month* should go to the editor of FLAG’s newsletter for the caption alongside a photograph of a young lad, wading through the flooded subway at Carnforth Station with shoes and socks in hand...

“It’s a good job the water wasn’t any deeper or we might have had a **Briefs Encounter!**”

EVENTS

National & regional rail events are highlighted in **yellow**. Community & environmental events are in **green**.

Wed 25 Jul [OPSTA](#) AGM at Burscough Wharf from 19:30. Speaker from Transpt for Gtr Manchester.

Wed 1 Aug [ENTUA](#) public meeting at St Paul’s Church Hall, Caister Rd, Gt Yarmouth from 19:30. Guest speakers from Norfolk County Council and bus & train operators.

Mon 13 Aug [BRAG](#) meet at the Sckville Hotel, Bexhill from 19:00.

Sat 18 Aug Railfuture [London branch \(Sx & Kent\)](#) meet in Robertsbridge from 11:00.

Tue 4 Sep [SARPA](#) meet at the Sportsman, Newtown from 18:30.

Thu 6 Sep Railfuture [London branch \(Coastway\)](#) meet at The Station, High St, Uckfield from 18:00.

Sat 8 Sep Railfuture [NW Branch](#) meeting at [Littleborough Station history centre](#) from 1300.

Wed 12 Sep Railfuture [London branch \(east\)](#) meet at Stratford from 18:30.

Sat 22 Sep Annual [World Car Free Day](#) helpfully falls on a Saturday this year. *Get 'em on the train!!!*

Sat 22 Sep Railfuture [Yorks branch](#) meet in Hebden Bridge Town Hall

Fri 28 Sep [ACoRP](#) Community Rail Awards at the Steam museum in Swindon.

Sat 29 Sep [ACoRP](#) Community Rail Festival, Bristol.

Sat 29 Sep Railfuture East Anglia meet at Chapelfields Chapel, Norwich from 14:15. Guest speaker from East Midlands Trains.

Sat 6 Oct SW TravelWatch autumn meeting at the Somerset College of Art & Tech in Taunton.

Sat 6 Oct [SARPA](#) AGM at Shrewsbury Station from 13:00.

Thu 11 Oct [TravelWatch NorthWest](#) conference at Merseytravel's new office, One Mann Island on Liverpool's waterfront from 11:00, preceded by the AGM.

Sat 13 Oct [ESTA](#) autumn meeting at the Friends Meeting House, Beccles from 14:30.

Mon 22 Oct [ALRUG](#) AGM at the Manor Hotel, Exmouth from 19:00.

Sat Oct 27 [CSV Make A Difference Day 2012](#). A day for recruiting volunteers from the community, setting them to work and reaping the publicity. Register your event on the CSV website.

Tue 30 Oct [Felixstowe Travel Watch](#) public meeting

Sat 3 Nov Railfuture [Rail Users' Conference](#) "Railways in the Heart of England" at Carrs Lane Church Centre, Birmingham from 10:45 with guest speakers from Network Rail, Centro, Chiltern Railways and Birmingham City Council. Fee only £30 (£5 discount for members booking before 31 Aug).

Sat 17 Nov [Railfuture NW Branch](#) meet at the George & Dragon, 422 Manchester Road, Stockport (nr Heaton Chapel Station); lunch from 12:00, then meeting at 13:00.

Sat 11 May, 2013 Railfuture AGM at the Town Hall, Durham

More events on the Railfuture and ACoRP websites.

Please say if you no longer want to receive Rail User Express, or if someone else in your organisation wishes to be included on the circulation list.

This bulletin has been sent by

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