

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.

**Best wishes for
Christmas and
the New Year**

RAIL USER EXPRESS

As previously announced, this edition of Rail User Express is to be my last. I don't have a record of how many bulletins I've done over the years, but it must be well over 100.

I'm very pleased to say that Roger Smith, Chairman of Hitchin Rail Users' Group, has volunteered to take over as editor of Rail User Express. He says he's looking forward to taking it on as a "fulfilling sideline" after his retirement at the end of this year.

Roger tells us that, as well as being HRUG's Chairman, he's currently taking an active interest in the route of the Central Section of East-West Rail between Bedford and Cambridge.

I will be handing over the ruglink@railfuture.org.uk email address to Roger, so those of you that send in material by email will not need to make any alternative arrangements – just keep those newsletters and press releases coming in!

We will be writing separately to those groups that send me their magazines and newsletters by post, asking them if they would kindly send them to Roger's home address instead.

I will carry on maintaining the lists of Rail User Groups and Reopening Campaign Groups on Railfuture's website. After I've relinquished the "ruglink" email address, you will be able to contact me on tony.smale@railfuture.org.uk.

Please give Roger your full support while he settles in as your new editor.

I never cease to be amazed at the tireless work being done by hundreds of volunteers around Britain on behalf of the nation's rail users. Keep it up!

Tony Smale

We continue with the usual roundup of news items from rail user groups around the UK. As always, I'm very grateful to RUGs that send me their magazines and bulletins. One or two reports have been held over to 2016 due to the large number of newsletters received.

Furness Line Action Group – resorting to extreme measures!

FLAG begins its newsletter with dire warnings about the shortage of rolling stock for the coming years and say the group will be pressing local MPs to lobby the Dept. for Transport on the matter: "...we have a rough ride coming up – and not just sitting in ageing rolling stock!" The loco-hauled trains on the Cumbrian Coast introduced as a stop-gap measure, continue to suffer from poor punctuality and cancellations - FLAG is monitoring the situation and presents its findings to date in the form of a week-by-week bar chart.

Having tried every other form of campaigning, FLAG is resorting to extreme measures: they've written a note to Santa Claus, which is reproduced in their newsletter. The note asks for "trains that run on time, don't break down, meet connections, aren't overcrowded and are air conditioned." The group eagerly awaits Christmas Day!

The retention of through services to destinations such as Manchester remains a primary campaign aim for FLAG, and when discrepancies appeared on booking websites and in printed timetables suggesting that certain services had been curtailed, the group naturally raised the alarm. FLAG also used their local knowledge to correct information about Sunday bus services, which they'd seen in a draft of one of Northern's Train Times leaflets – they pointed out that, owing to County Council budget cuts, the bus services in question no longer ran!

30 years after FLAG started campaigning for a passenger information system on their line, and 22 years after donating £200 to BR Regional Railways for a tannoy system, full-colour information screens are at last being fitted to Furness Line stations: "...it's good to know our £200 (plus interest) has finally paid dividends!"

School artwork at Cark station won first prize in the community art category at the Community Rail awards in October - one of the art panels was sponsored by FLAG. New station adoption groups have been set up at Silverdale and Kents Bank, and the Tidy Town group at Dalton received a Britain-in-Bloom award for its station floral displays. The station building at Kents Bank boasts an art gallery, and a welcome addition to the station is an attractively-styled wooden waiting shelter on the up platform.

Carnforth station has a special exhibition running until 31 Dec, celebrating the 70th anniversary of the filming of "Brief Encounter". FLAG's secretary provided many of the photographs for the "then and now" feature.

Harrogate Line Supporters' Group – *franchise awards represent very good news for Harrogate*

Commenting on the Government's announcement about awarding the Northern franchise to Arriva Rail North and the TransPennine Express franchise to First TransPennine Express, HLSG says: "This is very good news for Harrogate businesses and residents." The group notes that the following improvements are part of the new Northern and TransPennine Express franchise agreements:

- 1) On the Leeds to York via Harrogate service, there will be 4 trains/hr each way between Leeds, Horsforth and Harrogate from 7am to 7pm on weekdays, and the evening service will also be enhanced. Also an additional late-evening service from Leeds to Knaresborough will be extended to York.
- 2) On Sundays, extra trains will be provided including: 2 trains/hr between Leeds and Harrogate and between Leeds and Knaresborough (up from 1) and some extra trains between Leeds and York.

HLSG spent a lot of time lobbying for such improvements and meeting each of the Franchise Bidders, so is generally pleased with the outcome. The group is in direct contact with the Arriva bid team and will be asking them for more detailed time scales for these improvements.

Support the Oldham-Rochdale-Manchester Line (STORM) – *Rochdale omitted from franchise plans*

After it was announced that the new Northern Franchise will go to Arriva, STORM's Chairman issued the following statement: "The details of the new franchise are a disappointment to STORM and its members. In the great detail of service improvements across the Northern Rail area there is only one mention of stations local to Rochdale, namely that Moston will get its 2 trains/hr service back.

"There are to be through trains from Bradford to Chester, Liverpool, Manchester Airport and Southport but the document lists the 'key stations' to be served by these trains as Halifax, Hebden Bridge and Todmorden! These trains are obviously coming via Rochdale but no mention of calls at Rochdale, Littleborough or Mills Hill. Is it the intention for them to run through nonstop?

“The apparent lack of knowledge of civil servants and officers based in Leeds as to the actual requirements of the Rochdale area, especially Littleborough and Mills Hill, does not bode well. Transport for Greater Manchester needs to take steps to make sure that West Yorkshire doesn't get all the improvements at the expense of Greater Manchester stations.”

One member of STORM lamented: “I still remember Arriva's last go with ‘Northern Spirit’ and they are not happy memories.”

Elsewhere, we read that Santa was on board a special train from Littleborough Station giving out presents and mince pies on Sunday 6 December. Littleborough Public Brass Band and carol singers from Littleborough Churches Together provided seasonal music. The train called at Smithy Bridge and Rochdale, where more families got on board to join in the festive fun, on its way to Manchester. The event was organised by Friends of Littleborough Station, STORM and Northern Rail.

Friends of the Barton Line – *New Clee users get improved service*

There's excellent news for Barton Line users in the Winter timetable for the line – all bar one of the trains can now call at New Clee station by request. However cancellations on the line are an almost daily occurrence, the main cause being a shortage of drivers (probably due to the ASLEF union's withdrawal from a Rest Day Working agreement with TransPennine).

FoBL's secretary, Anthony Berridge, had been approached by the manager of a local timber company which was having difficulty recruiting appropriate staff – the manager thought that the paucity of the train service to New Holland was a contributing factor. Anthony encouraged him to write to his MP making the case for an hourly frequency, and to express his concerns to Northern Rail.

Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association – *revenue growth justifies further service improvements*

MCRUA's winter newsletter begins by congratulating Arriva on winning the Northern franchise. The group is looking forward to discussing the detail of the coming improvements to services along the Mid Cheshire Line by Dec 2017, including the doubling of Sunday services to hourly and the new hourly semi-fast services from Greenbank to Manchester Piccadilly.

MCRUA reports that passenger figures continue to grow quite spectacularly (despite train performance remaining mediocre) and that revenue protection has improved. The combined effect is that revenue growth on the line has exceeded the train operator's expectations: “...all this helps to justify the business case for further service improvements”.

The installation of a Customer Information System along the line is welcomed, but MCRUA points out a number of shortcomings with the screens and speakers, saying that they were not consulted about their locations or about how the information would be presented.

MCRUA takes issue with the instruction in Northern's timetable leaflets which reads “If you board at a station where ticket buying facilities are not available, it is your responsibility to seek out the conductor”. The group understands that neither the National Rail Conditions of Carriage nor the Railway Byelaws place a requirement on passengers to seek out the conductor, and they cite a multitude of situations in which this would be unreasonable or impracticable (eg parent with child). They will be pressing the new franchisee to provide ticket-buying opportunities on every platform.

Although things have improved a little at the new £19m Altricham Interchange, MCRUA thinks the project suffers from having fragmented management across the organisations involved; they suggest that Transport for Greater Manchester should be in overall control, especially as TfGM has ambitions to run all stations in the city region.

All thirteen of MCRUA's Music Trains (sponsored by Northern) ran successfully in 2015 and were well-attended. The group is already planning the 2016 season, with more trains than ever.

Shrewsbury-Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Ass'n – *enhanced service the result of people power!*

The Chairman's Message at the start of SARPA's autumn newsletter celebrates the enhanced service on the Cambrian that began in May 2015. He tells us this would not have happened without a multitude of people all working hard to persuade government that it would be worthwhile.

SARPA's roving reporter (Secretary, Albert Hall) was out and about during September, talking to passengers about the additional trains, and some of their comments are reproduced in the group's newsletter. Some were now able to use the train to get to work or college, some were just enjoying a day out, and a group of men were off to the races in Chester thanks to better connections at Shrewsbury. A reliable source suggests the passenger growth has been around 20%.

Ceredigion County Council has secured funding from the Welsh Government to conduct a feasibility study into reopening the station at Bow Road, a project that's long been on SARPA's list of aspirations. Despite now being the busiest intermediate station on the line, Welshpool station still has the poorest facilities according to SARPA - they want to see more priority given to improving the station in view of its impressive growth.

It's reported that the car park at Caersws is now full nearly every day since the introduction of the enhanced service on the line. We also read that ospreys nesting within 55 metres of the line at Dovey Junction have created quite a stir over the summer months.

In this issue of SARPA's newsletter, The Brigadier senses that the Government is walking away from the conventional railway now they have some shiny new toys to play with in the form of High Speed 2 & 3 ... and £billions for their old chums in road lobby from the now ring-fenced vehicle excise duty. He thinks they're losing sight of the basic need for the existing rail network and for it to be upgraded to catch up with decades of underinvestment.

Traws Link Cymru – *"things are moving fast"*

A member of trawslinkcymru.org.uk, the campaigning group for the reopening of the Aberystwyth-Carmarthen Line (and Afon Wen-Bangor) writes to say that things are moving fast, and the group is now awaiting the results of the scoping report, a precursor to a full feasibility study. They've collected over 11000 signatures on their petition and have cross-party support from Welsh Assembly Members and MPs, and both county councils: Carmarthen and Ceredigion.

– from a post on paulsalveson.org

Trawslink Campaigners are conducting an aerial survey of the Aberystwyth to Carmarthen route and aim to produce a video that shows how little of the route has actually been developed on. Apparently Cardiff-based Welsh Government officials have suggested that large parts of the route are developed on, though Trawslink says it's less than 3%. *– from SARPA's newsletter*

Cotswold Line Promotion Group – *interim timetable while there are uncertainties over electrification*

The CLPG is pleased to see improvements to the train service from London in the afternoons being introduced in the December timetable change. However, they've pointed out that the pattern of services from Worcester in the afternoon is unbalanced and they've put forward ideas to resolve this and other anomalies. The Chairman says the group's proposals for interim timetable improvements are all the more important due to uncertainties over the electrification programme.

Improvements to stations were discussed at a recent meeting with senior managers from Great Western Railway. The CLPG says that continuous growth in line usage is putting significant strains on car parking, ticket offices and even access roads at some stations. The group has also been in touch with London Midland about similar problems on the Hereford/Worcester – Birmingham route.

The CLPG's President, Lord Faulkner of Worcester reports that, from his meetings at ministerial level, there's a lot going on to develop the case for further redoubling on the Cotswold Line with a view to perhaps running two trains an hour in the not-too-distant future. GWR's managing director, Mark Hopwood, has called for a manifesto for the line, setting out priorities for future development. The CLPG's Chairman highlighted the need to explore all possible sources of funding, and cited the example of a housing developer at Long Marsden pledging £17m towards the cost of reopening the link between Stratford-u-Avon and the Cotswold Line at Honeybourne. He also said that infrastructure constraints at Worcester were leading to problems with capacity and reliability.

Worcester Parkway station, planned for opening in 2017, continues to provoke controversy, not the least because of its high cost (£17.5m and rising). With its large car park, it's bound to abstract passengers from neighbouring stations. It has the potential to offer better connections, but only if fast trains stop there (adding to journey times).

The CLPG's annual charter train ran to Tenby on a super sunny September day with 420 passengers on board and was a great success, yielding over £3000 for group funds. Suggestions are invited for next year's destination.

A volunteer gardener at Hanborough wanted to replace the life-expired planters at the station, so asked the CLPG to help with costs. In the meantime a local timber company agreed to supply three planters free of charge in return for fixing advertising plaques on them (the line manager was happy with this arrangement, and a photo shows one of them planted up for the summer).

Commenting on the rebranding exercise conducted by First, the CLPG's former chairman, Derek Potter, comments wryly that adoption of the "Great Western Railway" name should be dependent upon reopening Swindon works and putting the rails seven feet apart where God always intended them to be!

Nuneaton, Bedworth and Hinckley Rail User Group – *lack of progress down to poor leadership*

NB&HRUG has been continually frustrated over the last 6 months by the poor leadership on the Nuneaton to Coventry rail upgrade (NUCKLE) project. Coventry City Council and Warwickshire County Council have failed to get the two new stations at Arena Park and Bermuda Park opened, despite both stations being ready for months. No confirmed opening date is known for either station - it appears that bureaucratic problems such as lack of compliance to planning permission has prevented them opening. There is also an ongoing debacle over trains not being able to stop for events at the Ricoh Arena due to lack of rolling stock, despite NUCKLE phase 1 being 10 years in the making. Not surprisingly, phase 2, which includes a new bay platform at Coventry station, seems to be ever further in the distance.

The group is pleased to hear that London Midland are adding two more evening services from London to the Trent Valley as a result of their direct award until 2017, which will also include free wifi. They've heard rumours that Virgin may be adding off-peak stops at stations in the Trent Valley from May 2016, but they remain sceptical. However, they're hopeful that Alliance Rail will get firm rights to operate services into Euston from 2017, which will include off-peak stops at Nuneaton.

The group comments: "Suddenly everyone is seeing the potential in the Trent Valley after a huge increase in usage over the last decade. More services are urgently needed to cope with demand from all the stations along the Trent Valley."

➤ *Full details about the Direct Award of a franchise extension to London Midland are given [here](#).*

East Norfolk Transport Users' Association – failures highlight need for spare rolling stock

ENTUA reports that, for a four day period from 20 Nov, all train services were suspended between Great Yarmouth and Norwich due to damage to diesel unit wheelsets as a result of poor rail conditions. At least two trains per day were arriving back daily with wheel damage, meaning they had to be sent to Ilford for repair. Abellio did try to hire in replacement rolling stock but other train operators were suffering similar problems, so they did not succeed.

The shortage caused much inconvenience to passengers and that's why, in their franchise submission to the Dept. for Transport, ENTUA stressed the need for spare rolling stock to be available to operators for such events as this. Local M.P. Brandon Lewis was quick to criticise Abellio, however ENTUA thinks the reason this event occurred is the lack of sustained investment in rail over the past by all Governments.

With the start of the new rail franchise now less than a year away, ENTUA was invited to attend a meeting with representatives of one of the bidders, National Express (NX). The first matter that ENTUA raised was the need for a complete upgrade of Great Yarmouth station. The second point concerned the fact that all trains from Great Yarmouth terminated at Norwich – they argued that it would be beneficial to rail users if some went on to Cambridge or Stansted Airport. The occasional return journey to London Liverpool Street would also help, though the group appreciated this was unlikely. The lack of a year-round bus service from the centre of town to the rail station was also raised - the representatives from NX said that, should they be awarded the new franchise, they would look to try to get this established by talking to local operators.

ENTUA were unable to find a mutually convenient time for a meeting with another of the bidders, First Group, so resorted to a lengthy telephone conversation. Similar topics were covered, but in addition there was a discussion about the possibility of offering reduced fares in the off peak or during Winter months. The First Group representative seemed surprised when informed that passengers were denied basic facilities at Great Yarmouth station after around 17:00 and even earlier on Sundays.

Both companies told ENTUA that the discussions had been most helpful and enlightening, and the group was praised for the amount of detail in their franchise submission.

Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton Rail User Group – catalyst for bringing the various parties together

A representative from Network Rail was due to attend the group's meeting on 2 Dec to answer questions about Foxton Level Crossing, by which time the new gates at the crossing should have been completed.

Meanwhile, a new housing development at Shepreth brought concerns that small children using the play area could easily wander via a small coppice towards the railway line, which is protected only by a post-and-wire fence. The coppice is owned by the County Council, but they thought the problem was Network Rail's responsibility. MS&FRUG intervened and now say that at least the two sides are talking to each other.

Bedford Commuters' Association – new timetable has plus and minus points

In their December newsletter, the BCA presents both the "positives" and "negatives" of the extensive timetable changes on Govia Thameslink Railway from Dec 2015. The big plus point should be improved reliability, but this comes at the expense of a reduction in service frequency on certain routes. The winter period historically results in a drop-off in performance, but the BCA is hopeful this will be offset by both a more-achievable timetable and measures to address the driver shortage (although the newsletter editor warns it could be 10 months before there are "plenty of drivers").

When the BCA (and neighbouring group APTU) had the opportunity to discuss performance and incident recovery with Thameslink management, they stressed the need to (i) recover the service as soon as possible (ii) consistently communicate the latest up-to-date travel information and (iii) refrain from making late changes to train stopping patterns.

The new depot at Three Bridges was formally opened in October. The BCA's Chairman attended on behalf of the Association and had the opportunity to inspect one of the new Class 700 units. He reports that the units are impressive and seem to be very solidly built. On a separate occasion, the Chairman went along on a Stakeholder Group tour of Three Bridges depot which included a short ride on one of the new trains. The group then moved on to the nearby Regional Operating Centre to see how trains are managed around the network.

The BCA is continuing its efforts to obtain improved compensation arrangements - one that recognises many small delays, which are not covered by DelayRepay. Working through the Thameslink Stakeholder Reference Group, the BCA claims to have the attention of the Dept. for Transport and is presenting options to DfT Ministers for their consideration.

The BCA notes that Virgin Trains have announced automatic refunds in some circumstances, but says the operator does need to know exactly when you travelled which would be difficult for those travelling on a paper ticket: "This highlights why Smartcards such as GTR's *The Key* are important to better compensation arrangements."

Hitchin Rail Users' Group – *having a say on station improvements*

A few months ago, HRUG responded to a Hertfordshire County Council consultation paper on improving the access to Hitchin station. The group observed that the station has almost 3m passengers annually, and that two previous layouts of the station forecourt had failed to tackle the basic issues. They described when congestion is at its worst, and how the movements of pedestrians, cyclists and motor traffic interact.

In particular, it was essential to preserve an adequate turning circle, both for service buses and rail replacement vehicles. The group also invited HCC to address wider issues such as parking regulations in neighbouring streets, and the need for an alternative access route for pedestrians. An additional car park could be created nearby to cater for future passenger growth.

At the November meeting of Railfuture Herts and Beds in St Albans, the HRUG Secretary, David Howlett, had a useful discussion with Larry Heyman of Govia Thameslink Railway, the TOC that operates Hitchin station. David subsequently sent Larry a marked-up map showing possible sites for additional parking around the station.

Chesham & District Transport Users' Group – *new timetable leaflets hard to get*

CDTUG report that, on the first day of the new Metropolitan line timetable (25th Sep), Chalfont & Latimer station had no timetables on display and a staff member only appeared when the train came, being otherwise invisible. However, they do welcome the fact that the new timetable provides considerably improved connections between Chiltern and Met line services.

CDTUG also report that Aldgate trains have been leaving early and then waiting at Baker Street for a right-time departure. The committee has asked members to let them know when this occurs.

The group remains hopeful that a new footbridge will be installed at Amersham to provide step-free access to all platforms. Transport for London's estimated cost is an eye-watering £10.5m, and CDTUG wonders what would be included for this price. They're confident that costs can be significantly reduced and will be working with a local disabled group to obtain independent verification.

Barking-Gospel Oak Rail User Group – at last: handrails and hanging straps for standees

BGORUG first approached the train operator about removing 12 seats and fitting extra handrails to allow more passengers to stand in comfort back in 2013. Earlier this year, Transport for London (TfL) finally agreed to fit extra handrails and hanging straps to the eight 2-car diesel trains and this work has now been completed. The group's Secretary, Glenn Wallis, commented "At long last, 5 years after they were delivered, these trains now actually look like inner suburban trains, instead of cross-country ones, which is what they were designed to be. However, passengers will have to continue struggling to board these packed trains for at least another 18 months and quite possibly much longer before 4-car electric trains take over."

Since the pedestrian link between Walthamstow Central and Walthamstow Queen's Road stations opened just over a year ago, BGORUG has been amazed by both the numbers of people making use of the link and the growing numbers using Walthamstow Queen's Road station. They had campaigned for the link since 1990 and so it was named after its chief protagonist, group member Ray Dudley, who sadly did not live long enough to see it open.

Last April, BGORUG asked TfL to add strap-lines to the Walthamstow Queen's Road nameplate roundels encouraging rail users to "alight here for Walthamstow Town Centre". The group is very pleased to see the strap-lines appear last month - it is hoped that they will encourage those who have never alighted at the station before to do so and explore the High Street.

An evening peak-hour train has been retimed as from the timetable change on 13 Dec. BGORUG questions the reason for this, since it now means that people arriving off the train from Clapham Junction have an impossibly tight connection at Gospel Oak.

TransWilts Community Rail Partnership – handing out timetables and counting heads

Over the weekend of 12/13 Dec, TransWilts CRP supporters rode the trains between Swindon and Westbury via Melksham giving out new timetables and conducting passenger counts. We're told that Santa was on the train too on Sunday, handing out presents. Finally, on Monday 14 Dec, the Partnership celebrated the completion of the first two years of the improved service on the line.

Tonbridge Line Commuters – taking up the cudgels on behalf of commuters

Although there has been some disruption as a result of the revised timetable brought in during the London Bridge works, the TLC's committee consider the service provided has in general run smoothly. However, they're dissatisfied with the Underground ticket options offered. Also they've taken up the cudgels on behalf of Hildenborough commuters, managing to get an extra stop on the morning service to Cannon Street.

South Eastern Trains' new managing Director recently invited local commuters to travel with him and point out the problems they faced - a representative from TLC took up the offer and passed him the Committee's 'Issues Log' of outstanding local problems. These included signage at Paddock Wood, queuing at Tonbridge, the siting of automatic ticket machines, and non-functioning toilets on trains. Other concerns raised by members at the group's AGM include the use of the alarm buttons in lifts, a misleading platform indication notice at Paddock Wood, and the siting of the ticket machine at Hildenborough.

A wider issue concerning ticket machines is the way they unfairly offer fares to London via "any permitted route" which includes premium rates on high speed trains. To avoid this, you have to select a somewhat obscure option "Not Valid on HS1". The group has proposed a solution less likely to catch out the unwary, and has enlisted the help of Anthony Smith, Chief Executive of Transport Focus, in their campaign.

TLC has discovered that most train operators use a notional figure of 520 journeys/year when calculating season ticket refunds under their Delay Repay schemes, but South Eastern use a figure of 546 journeys/year. The group thinks this is unfair because it is highly unlikely that anyone would make that many journeys (it would involve travelling every weekday including bank holidays and Christmas Day). They've written to their local MP about the matter and received an assurance from Transport Minister, Claire Perry, that her officials are looking into it. The group is unhappy about this vague commitment, so is continuing to press for action.

A perk for members of TLC, introduced some years ago, has been free travel insurance. However, TLC's committee has reluctantly agreed to abandon insurance cover as it had become uneconomic to finance.

East Hampshire Community Rail Partnership – Christmas photo competition

The Partnership has just announced a photo competition with the theme "Seen something on your rail journey that sums up Christmas in the East Hampshire area of the South Downs National Park?" Supporters are invited to submit festive rail pics for a chance to win two standard adult return tickets anywhere on the South West Trains network. The last date for entries is Wed 23 Dec 2015. The rules can be found [here](#).

The Partnership is looking into the possibility of taking out a lease on the old parcels office at Petersfield Station on a peppercorn rent. They want to use it for meetings and suggest it could also be used as an information centre for the railway or as a base for "Welcome to Petersfield" ambassadors. Supporters are invited to suggest other community uses for the room.

West Sussex Rail Users' Association – guest speaker challenged about train service

At the group's AGM in November, the guest speaker from Southern gave details of the extensive off-peak timetable changes from December. He also spoke about the new stock on order for Gatwick Express being delivered in 2016 and the build-up of the new Siemens-built Class 700 stock for Thameslink. Members challenged him about current performance, on-train announcements and uncomfortable 2+3 seating in some trains. On the last mentioned, the speaker confirmed that all new stock on order would be 2+2 seating.

Although the December timetable changes should improve reliability, there's disappointment that it brings no improvement to the "dismal Sunday service" in West Sussex. The group's autumn newsletter summarises all the changes and gives a run-down of the services in the area over Christmas and the New Year.

Friends of the Lymington-Brockenhurst Line – developing a multi-media line guide

FoLBL are working closely with New Forest National Park Authority and South West Trains on an exciting new project to enhance the visitors' experience whilst travelling on the line, with a range of information including local history, wildlife and memories. They will also be highlighting a number of walking routes visitors may like to explore. The aim is to produce an informative leaflet with a map included, together with online information and possibly some downloadable audio content.

Mike Wescombe, Transport Officer for the national park, is looking for local people with tales to tell capturing the current and historical aspects of the area. He says the timescale for the project is tight (it has to be completed by March) so an early response would be welcome. You can contact Mike on mike.wescombe@newforestnpa.gov.uk

...news from Railfuture follows...

RAILFUTURE ONLINE SHOPPING

Several new titles have been added to the list of books on offer at Railfuture's online shop, which you can access via this link: <http://www.railfuture.org.uk/shop/>. There are some good bargains to be had with discounts ranging from £1 to £8. Go online now and treat yourself to some interesting reading!

RAILFUTURE YORKSHIRE BRANCH

In the Branch newsletter *Yorkshire Rail Campaigner* we read that Woodlesford Train Users (nr Leeds) are fed up with being offered "jam tomorrow" and are starting a petition calling for a better service. Meanwhile the Friends of Askern Station (nr Doncaster) are campaigning to get their station re-opened - the line is currently used mainly for freight. Both groups are on Facebook if you want to find out more.

In September, members of Railfuture Yorkshire and representatives from Selby & District Rail Users Group visited the Potter Logistics Distribution Centre in Barlby. The party was fascinated with the operation and witnessed the departure of the freight rail service to Felixstowe. They were delighted to learn that the Potter Group recognise the many advantages of rail freight services and are keen to develop their business.

The next Yorkshire Branch event is the Open Meeting and AGM from 13:00 on Sat 23 Jan 2016 at the Cedar Court Hotel, Park Parade, Harrogate HG1 5AH. The Guest Speakers are to be Andrew Jones MP for Harrogate and David Horne Managing Director of Virgin East Coast. A buffet lunch is available from 12:00 (pre-booking essential). Details from Chair, Nina Smith (nhrawsons@googlemail.com).

RAILFUTURE WESSEX BRANCH

The Branch will be coordinating Railfuture's response to the South West franchise consultations, so if you have any pressing points which you would like to see included, please email the Branch Secretary via wessex@railfuture.org.uk as soon as possible. The due date for submission of comments to the Dept. for Transport is 9 Feb 2016.

Meanwhile, the Branch has been supporting an initiative to form a rail user group for the Salisbury-Exeter line. The first newsletter from the fledgling SERUG group can be read via the Wessex Branch pages on Railfuture's website [here](#).

➤ Wessex Branch AGM will be on 12 Mar 2016 in Winchester.

RAILFUTURE EAST ANGLIA BRANCH

East Anglia Branch reports an unprecedented and catastrophic service failure this Autumn on several routes, with at times nearly half the diesel trains based at Norwich out of action, mostly due to wheel damage. The Branch is asking why this terrible situation has been allowed to develop, and has written to Abellio asking questions about its strategy for dealing with rolling stock shortages.

Stop press (16 Dec): Abellio and Network Rail have commissioned rail resilience expert John Curley to write a report about what caused the problem and how this could be prevented in future.

Another cause for concern is the "pausing" of Network Rail's project to double-track Soham to Ely, and East Anglia Branch (together with Railfuture's national Infrastructure Group) has written to the NR Chairman about the delay, stressing the national significance of the Felixstowe to Nuneaton freight route.

➤ East Anglia Branch AGM will be on 27 Feb 2016 in Bury St Edmunds from 14:00.

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

PASSENGER JOURNEYS and STATION USAGE – *annual reports from the ORR*

Passenger Journeys New statistics just published by the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) show that the total number of rail passenger journeys between July and September 2015 (Q2 2015-16) reached 414 million, a 1.4% increase on last year.

ORR's 'Passenger Rail Usage Statistics' show the number of journeys made on the network, the distance travelled and revenue generated – providing an indication of the levels of demand for rail travel in Great Britain. For the first time, this data includes trends of passenger journeys and distance travelled for each train operator.

The data for July-September 2015 shows that there were:

- 290.2 million passenger journeys for franchised London and South East operators, a 2.1% increase (6.1 million) in the number of journeys compared to the same period last year.
- 34 million passenger journeys in the long distance franchised sector, a 1.2% rise (0.4 million) from last year.
- 89.2 million passenger journeys in the regional franchised sector, a 0.8% decrease (0.7 million) from last year.
- 0.62 million passenger journeys in the non-franchised sector, a 15.0% jump (0.1 million) from last year

You can read the full report and access the statistics [here](#).

Station Usage The latest estimates of station usage data just published by the ORR reveal that London stations continued to be the most heavily used stations in Britain last year. London Waterloo remains the most used station in Britain clocking over 99 million passenger entries and exits last year – an increase of 0.7m (or 1%) compared to 2013-14.

The report for estimates of station usage across Britain for the period April 2014 – March 2015 also shows that:

- The total number of entries and exits at stations across Britain in 2014-15 increased by over 119m – a 4.5% rise compared to the year before.
- There has only been one change to the list of top 10 stations most used stations this year, Stratford Station entered the list with over 30million passenger entries and exits – a 17.4% jump compared to 2013-14.
- Nine of the top 10 stations were located in London. Birmingham New Street was the only station in the top 10 located outside London.

You can view the full dataset and accompanying report [here](#).

PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS TRAIN SERVICES: 2015

Another annual report just published looks at experiences of, and attitudes towards, rail travel in Great Britain using questions asked on the Office for Statistics *Opinions and Lifestyle* survey in February 2015. Read the details [here](#).

FIRE SALE OF NETWORK RAIL ASSETS – *we need to be watchful!*

Network Rail is to sell off assets to help meet a shortfall in funding for the Control Period 5 investment programme. This includes £1.8bn from selling non-core assets - which could include retail units in managed stations, spare capacity on the telecoms network and non-core rail assets such as depots.

– Transport Briefing

EUROPEAN PASSENGERS' FEDERATION

Railfuture is a founding member of the EPF. Railfuture's representative, Trevor Garrod, sent us this report about the Federation's recent activities...

1. EPF has responded to a European Commission consultation on ticketing and information systems and is in the process of responding to one on maritime passengers' rights. A key point for the latter is that we have a level playing field.
2. EPF has written to all MEPs concerning the 4th Railway Package, which they are now considering. We have urged them to press for strong independent regulation and the involvement of users' representatives in determining and evaluating contracts in order to ensure open and transparent competition in the interests of passengers.
3. We have been working with the Community of European Railways on a response to the security issues which started with the incident on a Thalys train in August. All the time we have stressed the need for a proportionate response.
4. We worked with the Union Internationale des Transports Publics on a statement in response to the Juncker Plan. We stressed the case for more investment in public transport.
5. During the autumn we have been preparing for a new study on conventional international trains, i.e. to fill the gap between high-speed and regional trains. The Railfuture Eurostar survey indicated that 25% of our members want to transfer to such a service after arriving at Paris, Lille or Brussels - and it is not always easy.
6. We have also done the preparation work for a study on good and bad practice in international ticketing, and this will be in our Work Programme for 2016.
7. We have started work on a bid for project funding from the *Europe for Citizens* Programme.
8. I have provided information on facilities for the disabled in our country, at the request of a Czech MEP; and been in discussion with the assistant of a British MEP concerning the EU's Sustainable Urban Transport policy.
9. We have started revision of our 2013 paper on "The Final Mile."
- 10 During the autumn we took part in a meeting of the Customer Liaison Group of the Community of European Railways and provided speakers at a number of conferences, including in Geneva and Bucharest.

➤ For further information, log on to www.epf.eu

FRANCHISE ANNOUNCEMENT IS “GOOD NEWS FOR RAIL PASSENGERS IN THE NORTH WEST”

TravelWatch NorthWest, the independent Community Interest Company representing users of all forms of public transport in NW England, issued a press release to welcome the Government announcement about the new franchises for Northern and TransPennine from April 2016.

“We look forward to working closely with the new operators – Arriva who will run the Northern franchise and First (the current operator) TransPennine. The unpopular Pacer trains will go and the North is promised new trains, services and more capacity to cope with increasing numbers of passengers, alleviating the overcrowding now regularly seen.

“This is very good news and TWNW will be proactive in ensuring that the promises are fulfilled. It is especially pleasing that the number of new trains for Northern will be more than double the minimum required in the Government’s invitation to tender.

“Increased number of services on many lines is good news especially in Cumbria where new high-quality ‘Northern Connect’ services, meaning new or refurbished trains on longer-distance services, will run. It is disappointing though that it appears the Settle-Carlisle line will not benefit from this brand.”

- TWNW news release

- The Government announcement about the new **Northern** and **TransPennine Express** franchises is [here](#).
- The **Northern transport strategy: autumn report** is an update on the work that Transport for the North and the Dept for Transport are doing to develop the northern transport strategy. Read it [here](#).

INTERCITY WEST COAST 'OVERVIEW AND VISION DOCUMENT'

This 60-page document has been produced to:

- provide an overview of the current ICWC franchise to potential operators.
- communicate Rail Executive's vision, to inform potential operators interested in delivering that vision.
- facilitate engagement with potential operators so that Rail Executive can develop a robust and attractive proposition that delivers passenger and stakeholder interests on this route.

More [here](#).

- Dept for Transport announcement

MIDLAND METRO SERVICE EXTENDED TO BULL STREET

Part of the Midland Metro extension to Birmingham city centre opened on Sunday 6 December. Trams are now running to Bull Street which will temporarily act as the interchange with train and bus services at Snow Hill railway station.

Prior to the extension trams terminated within Snow Hill railway station and a new high level Snow Hill stop, next to the station, is expected to open in the New Year when the rest of the £128m tram line extension is completed. New stops at Corporation Street and Birmingham New Street/Grand Central will also open in the New Year. – *Transport Briefing*

NORTHERN LINE EXTENSION WORKS BEGIN

Mayor of London Boris Johnson has signalled the start of major works that will see the excavation of 600,000 tonnes of earth from beneath south London for the construction of the Northern line extension. On 23 Nov, Johnson helped start up a specially-designed 300 metre long conveyor belt that will shift tunnel and station site material to the banks of the River Thames as part of the project to extend the Northern line from Kennington to Battersea via Nine Elms.

Two new 3.2km tunnels will be constructed and two new stations built: one at the heart of the Battersea Power Station redevelopment and another at Nine Elms to the east, serving new developments such as the US Embassy and the redevelopment of New Covent Garden Market.

The full cost of the Northern line extension is expected to be up to £1bn, which is being funded by the private sector through a package agreed between Battersea Power Station, Wandsworth Council, Lambeth Council, the Mayor of London and central government. Once the extension opens, London Underground is planning to increase train frequencies on the Northern line to at least 30 trains per hour in each direction with the introduction of new trains. The extension will cut journey times to the West End and the City to just under 15 minutes. – *Transport Briefing*

- Transport for London has confirmed that construction of the Croyley Rail Link will begin in 2016.

2017 OPENING PLANNED FOR MAGHULL NORTH STATION

Merseytravel has begun a public consultation on plans for a new railway station at Maghull North. The new station would be located off School Lane in Maghull on the Ormskirk branch of the Merseyrail network Northern Line. With significant housing development planned for Maghull as part of the Sefton Local Plan, a new station would take pressure off the existing Maghull station and help meet the anticipated increase in demand from the new housing.

Proposals for the station include six carriage platform with shelters, a 200-space car park, step-free access to both platforms, a ticket office, secure cycle parking, passenger waiting facilities and toilet. Funding for the scheme is coming from a government contribution via the Local Growth Fund, Merseytravel and the Homes and Communities Agency, which is developing land on the east side of the railway.

The closing date for the consultation is 5 January 2016. Merseytravel says the aim is for work to start on site in January 2017 with the new station operational by December 2017. – *Transport Briefing*

EXTRA TRAINS BROUGHT IN DURING FORTH ROAD BRIDGE CLOSURE

Public transport campaigners are backing moves to keep extra trains and rolling stock in Scotland to help deal with the Forth Road Bridge closure, even after it is up and running again.

John McCormick, chairman of the Scottish Association for Public Transport said: "There is a quite a shortage of rolling stock in Scotland. When Abellio took over the franchise in April, there were some trains sent off down to one of the franchises in England and they have been short of rolling stock ever since then. So they are running with a very tight fleet at the moment. If they can get their hands on extra trains they should hang onto them. They should not just be held as a reserve in case there is any problem with the bridge; that would be waste. They should be used." – *Scottish Herald*

The Telegraph can disclose that ScotRail has been forced to bring in a [DB Schenker] diesel locomotive and six carriages from [Eastleigh depot] Hampshire to handle peak demand from commuters travelling between Edinburgh and Fife. – *Daily Telegraph*

LONDON'S FIRST COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP

South West Trains has just launched London's first ever Community Rail Partnership, in Hounslow. The train operator has joined forces with the London Borough of Hounslow to create a Community Rail Partnership that will build a bridge between the railway and local communities.

Plans are in place to introduce volunteer-led groups at each of the seven stations along the Hounslow Loop, between Hounslow and Barnes Bridge. They will be jointly funded by South West Trains and London Borough of Hounslow.

South West Trains supports four other CRPs in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. Investment in these groups increased over the summer to over £65,000 and 11 Station Adoption Groups have also received increased funding through various projects [*we're still waiting at Wool – Ed*].

To get things started, two planters have been placed at Hounslow station to help brighten up the station and encourage the involvement of local residents and community groups. Notice boards will also be placed at all seven the stations allowing communities to share information easily.

Community Rail Partnership Officer, Susan Rocke, who is local to the area said, "Our main aim as the Hounslow Community Rail partnership is to bring the railway and the community together. We hope to make each station a focus for the local community providing a central location and venue for activities and events. We would love to hear from local residents, commuters and community members who want to be a part of one of these groups and make a difference to their local station and in their local community." You can get in touch by email via: crphounslowline@gmail.com.

- SWT press release

NETWORK RAIL APPOINTS FIRMS FOR PHASE 2 OF THE EAST-WEST RAIL LINK

A rail link connecting Aylesbury and Winslow with Milton Keynes has moved a step closer to reality after Network Rail appointed three firms which will deliver the next phase of the £270m East-West Rail scheme.

An alliance of four equal parts between Network Rail, Atkins, Laing O'Rourke and VolkerRail will build East-West Rail Phase 2 (EWR2) linking Oxford, Milton Keynes and Bedford, and Milton Keynes with London Marylebone via Aylesbury and a new station at Winslow. The news comes after Network Rail confirmed it will build the East-West rail link as 'soon as possible', calming fears that the project would face massive delays. It is included in the organisation's 2015-2019 work programme.

The alliance is currently working on the outline design and construction programme for the scheme. Once this initial segment of work is complete, the EWR2 alliance will consult with the Department for Transport to agree a final design, construction timetable and costs. It aims to submit an application for a Transport & Works Act order in autumn 2016.

Once complete, this work would enable the following train journeys:

- Oxford – Milton Keynes (calling at Oxford Parkway, Bicester, Winslow and Bletchley)
- Oxford – Bedford (calls: Oxford P'way, Bicester, Winslow, Bletchley, Woburn Sands & Ridgmont)
- Milton Keynes – Aylesbury – London Marylebone (calling at Bletchley, Winslow, Princes Risborough & High Wycombe)
- Increased capacity for freight services.

-from the Bucks Herald spotted by Andy Long

NATIONAL RAIL PASSENGER OPERATORS' MAP

The 33rd edition of Barry Doe's rail franchise map has just been produced. This shows Virgin Trains East Coast extending to Sunderland and SWT running via Castle Cary and Westbury, with the Yeovil Junction to Pen Mill chord seeing scheduled services for the first time in half-a-century.

Copies may be downloaded from the 'Rail Operators in the British Isles' section of Barry's website www.barrydoe.co.uk, where links to this and previous editions appear.

NEWS FROM THE ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIPS

ACoRP tell us the Community Rail Café chat room continues to thrive. They're about to make some changes to it including tagging of comments, one effect of which will make it easier to index and therefore search.

With the end of the Citizens' Rail project, ACoRP will be taking on responsibility for the Café early in 2016. You can access the Café and join up via the link on the Home page of ACoRP's new-look website <http://acorp.uk.com/>.

ANOTHER PIECE IN THE "PROJECT WAREHAM" JIGSAW

The Swiss contractor, Schweize, has now completed installation of Norden Gates level-crossing on the Swanage Railway. In a brief ceremony, this important piece of infrastructure was handed over to Mark Woolley, the Swanage Railway Company director responsible for Project Wareham.

The funding for this crossing came from BP (now Perenco), operators of the Wytch Farm oilfield at the end of the road beyond Norden Gates. The crossing is another piece of the jigsaw which had to be completed before regular train services start next June between Wareham and Swanage.

-news item spotted by Martin Hill

GOLDEN AGE FOR VOLUNTEERS

“We are in a golden age for ‘baby boomer’ volunteers: that age group now entering retirement, often still physically healthy and looking for meaningful activity. This group can offer a wealth of working life experience and expertise.” - *Michael Willmot writing in “Train on Line”*

EVENTS – lots of dates for your new diary

Events lifted from newsletters and emails received in recent weeks are listed below.

Further events are shown in the [Events listing on Railfuture’s website](#)

Coloured blobs differentiate between types of events...

- National & regional rail events.
- Railfuture events (rail user group representatives are welcome to attend).
- Local Rail User Group events.

- 5 January 2016. Tuesday. Chesham & District Transport Users Group meet at **Chesham** Town Hall from 19:30. <http://www.cdtug.org/>
- 9 January 2016. Saturday. Shrewsbury-Aberystwyth Rail Passengers’ Assn meet at the Royal Oak, **Welshpool** from 11:30. sarpa@sarpa.info
- 11 January 2016. Monday. Bexhill Rail Action Group meet at Hastings Direct, **Collington**. 19.00-21.00. <http://www.bexhillrailaction.org.uk/>
- 13 January 2016. Wednesday. Harrow Public Transport Users Association rail meeting at Harrow Baptist Church Hall, College Road, **Harrow** from 14:00.
- 13 January 2016. Wednesday. Railfuture London and South East regional branch, Eastern division meeting, **Stratford**. 18.30. londonsoutheast@railfuture.org.uk
- 14 January 2016. Thursday. Railfuture London and South East regional branch, Sussex & Coastway division meeting. 18.00. londonsoutheast@railfuture.org.uk
- 20 January 2016. Wednesday. Friends of the Barton line meet at the No 1 Inn, **Cleethorpes** from 19:00. enquiries@bartonrail.org.uk
- 23 January 2016. Saturday. Railfuture Yorkshire Branch joint meeting (with Harrogate Line Supporters) at the Cedar Court Hotel, **Harrogate** from 13:00. Guest speaker: Transport Minister and local MP, Andrew Jones. Booking essential. nina.smith@railfuture.org.uk
- 6 February 2016. Saturday. Railfuture North West branch AGM. Blackpool. northwest@railfuture.org.uk
- 8 February 2016. Monday. Bexhill Rail Action Group meet at Hastings Direct, **Collington**. 19.00-21.00. <http://www.bexhillrailaction.org.uk/>
- 11 February 2016. Thursday. NorthWest TravelWatch Conference in the Offices of Transport for Greater **Manchester**. Details: admin@travelwatch-northwest.org.uk
- 11 February 2016. Thursday. Railfuture London and South East regional branch, Sussex & Coastway division meeting. 18.00. londonsoutheast@railfuture.org.uk
- 13 February 2016. Saturday. Shrewsbury-Aberystwyth Rail Passengers’ Assn meet at the Cambrian Hotel, **Aberystwyth** from 11:45. sarpa@sarpa.info
- 15 February 2016. Monday. Friends of the Lymington-Brockenhurst Line hold their AGM from 19:30 at the Community Centre, Cannon Street, **Lymington**. The AGM will be followed by two films on Swiss railways. <http://www.lymington-brockenhurstcrp.co.uk/friends.asp>
- 16 February 2016. Tuesday. Chesham & District Transport Users Group meet at **Chesham** Town Hall from 19:30. <http://www.cdtug.org/>
- 20 February 2016. Saturday. London and South East regional branch, Kent division meeting. 18.00. londonsoutheast@railfuture.org.uk
- 27 February 2016. Saturday. East Anglia Branch AGM at the Friends Meeting House in **Bury St Edmunds** from 14:00. eastanglia@railfuture.org.uk

- 1 March 2016. Tuesday. Shrewsbury-Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Assn meet at the Unicorn, **Caersws** from 18:30. sarpa@sarpa.info
- 9 March 2016. Wednesday. Railfuture London and South East regional branch, Eastern division meeting, **Stratford**. 18.30. londonsoutheast@railfuture.org.uk
- 12 March 2016. Saturday. Wessex Branch AGM in **Winchester**. wessex@railfuture.org.uk
- 14/15 March 2016. DfT Designated Line Seminar in **Norwich**. Details tba www.acorp.uk.com/events.html
- 16 March 2016. Wednesday. Friends of the Barton line meet at the Sloop, **Barton-u-Humber** from 18:00 (mtg starts 20:00). enquiries@bartonrail.org.uk
- 19 March 2016. Saturday. Lincolnshire branch AGM, at **Saxilby** Methodist Church. lincolnshire@railfuture.org.uk
- 5 April 2016. Tuesday. Chesham & District Transport Users Group meet at **Chesham** Town Hall from 19:30. <http://www.cdtug.org/>
- 16 April 2016. Saturday. AGM of the Friends of the Settle-Carlisle Line in the Hallmark Hotel, **Carlisle** at 11:15 for 11:45 start. Guest speakers in the afternoon from Northern Rail and the Campaign for Borders Rail. <http://www.foscl.org.uk/>
- 17 May 2016. Tuesday. Chesham & District Transport Users Group meet at **Chesham** Town Hall from 19:30. <http://www.cdtug.org/>
- 18 May 2016. Wednesday. Friends of the Barton line meet at the No 1 Inn, **Cleethorpes** from 19:00. enquiries@bartonrail.org.uk
- 21 May 2016. Saturday. Railfuture AGM at **Milton Keynes** from 10:00 for 10:45. Guest speaker to talk about East West Rail. <http://www.railfuture.org.uk/conferences/>
- 18 June 2016. Saturday. Railfuture Reopenings Conference at the Scottish Mining Museum, **Newtongrange** from 10:00 for 10:45. <http://www.railfuture.org.uk/conferences/>
- 21 June 2016. Tuesday. Chesham & District Transport Users Group meet at **Chesham** Town Hall from 19:30. <http://www.cdtug.org/>
- 20 July 2016. Wednesday. Friends of the Barton line AGM at the Sloop, **Barton-u-Humber** from 18:00 (mtg starts 20:00). enquiries@bartonrail.org.uk
- 9 August 2016. Tuesday. Chesham & District Transport Users Group meet at **Chesham** Town Hall from 19:30. <http://www.cdtug.org/>
- 20 September 2016. Tuesday. Chesham & District Transport Users Group meet at **Chesham** Town Hall from 19:30. <http://www.cdtug.org/>
- 21 September 2016. Wednesday. Friends of the Barton line meet at the No 1 Inn, **Cleethorpes** from 19:00. enquiries@bartonrail.org.uk
- 25 October 2016. Tuesday. Chesham & District Transport Users Group meet at **Chesham** Town Hall from 19:30. <http://www.cdtug.org/>
- 12 November 2016. Saturday. Railfuture Rail User Conference at the Quaker Meeting House, 40 Bull Street, **Birmingham** from 10:00 for 10:45. <http://www.railfuture.org.uk/conferences/>
- 16 November 2016. Wednesday. Friends of the Barton line meet at the Sloop, **Barton-u-Humber** from 18:00 (mtg starts 20:00). enquiries@bartonrail.org.uk
- 13 December 2016. Tuesday. Chesham & District Transport Users Group meet at **Chesham** Town Hall from 19:30. <http://www.cdtug.org/>

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 for the very last time by...

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