



June 2022

Welcome to the Rail User Express

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This month RUX joins the rest of the nation in celebrating Her Majesty the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. 13 June also saw the 180th anniversary of the first Royal patronage of the railway in 1842, when Queen Victoria and Prince Albert travelled from Slough to Paddington. The 18 mile journey took just 25 minutes, and on the footplate was none other than Isambard Kingdom Brunel. Since then the Royal Train has been a staple and convenient means of travelling securely - and being the most environmentally friendly, it should remain so for many years to come.

Roger Smith

We continue with the usual roundup of news items from groups around Great Britain. Please keep your contributions coming: they are all gratefully received.

Friends of the Far North Line

It is really coming to something when the Director of Rail for Transport Scotland replies "I'm looking forward to finding out" when asked what effect the Williams-Shapps Review findings and the setting up of GBR will have in Scotland. At least as far as rail is concerned, the relationship between the UK and Scottish Governments could be described as dysfunctional.

In its submission to the Strategic Project Transport Review 2, FoFNL suggested a new station at Halkirk, with an island platform and a chord to the Thurso branch; extending the FNL to Scrabster to connect with ferries to Orkney; and a passing loop at Kinbrace able to accommodate the longest freight trains. It would also like the lines from Inverness to Perth and to Aberdeen doubled and electrified, and the direct Edinburgh – Perth line via Kinross reinstated.

On 28 April the Scottish Government Economy and Fair Work Committee published its [report](#) on Scotland's supply chain. It was good to see the following from consultants [Kerr Dunvegan](#) in Annex B: "The first priority for the Scottish supply chain is to accelerate the transfer of freight from road to rail. This will have short and long-term benefits"; it then lists these in detail.

During the current pay negotiations between newly nationalised ScotRail and the rail unions, many drivers have added to the pressure by withdrawing voluntary overtime and rest day working. ScotRail responded with a 30% cut in services, but over 50% on rural routes. Halving the FNL service from four trains a day to two has made it unusable for many passengers. At Wick for example, there is only 1 hr 3 mins between the arrival of the first train and departure of the last. Given that the

timetable had to be completely recast in great haste, FoFNL regards this level of cuts as unnecessary. They raised the matter with the Scottish Transport Secretary, but had not received a reply by 7 June.

Harrogate Line Supporters Group

Tony Baxter and Pete Myers of Northern Railway met Brian Dunsby and HLSG Chairman Andrew Whitworth in Harrogate to explain why the 0607 and 0633 trains to Leeds had to be cut from the May timetable, as well as a complete diagram of trains in the evening. The changes reflected the availability of train crew post COVID (especially for Driver Training), and were consulted at a high level with Rail North Partnership; however, there was no time to consult with stakeholders such as HLSG. Northern plans to reinstate these key services in December, but hopes to bring this forward to July, or possibly September once the holiday period has ended.

Northern Weekly Salvo – Paul Salveson

South East Lancashire CRP is sponsoring summer weekend bus services linking three major visitor attractions with the train: Horwich Parkway to Rivington (Sundays and bank holidays only), Walkden to RHS Bridgewater, and Wigan to Haigh Woodland Park. Funding has come from various sources: Northern, CrossCountry, Avanti West Coast, Transport for Greater Manchester, RHS and Wigan Council. The 'Rivington Rambler' will have a flat fare of just £1 and 50p for children, but free for some, as concessions will be valid. Cash revenue will be donated to Rivington Heritage Trust.

Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester Lines

Newton-le-Willows station is unrecognizable from the wayside station it used to be, with copious vehicular access and lifts to ground level, platform and footbridge. Is it intended as an interchange station between Holyhead/Chester on the one hand and Liverpool on the other to either Victoria or Piccadilly? Changing trains there avoids the awful Earlistown, still advised by National TT: apart from the long walk between the Chester and Liverpool lines, the footbridge over the former is one of the worst on the network.

Huddersfield Penistone Sheffield Rail Users Association

Transport for the North's Manchester Rail Blueprint links timetable changes with infrastructure upgrades around the city over the next 20 years, but will also affect services East of the Pennines.

Although their initial bid for £47m from the Government's Levelling Up fund failed, local MPs Mark Eastwood and Miriam Cates have pooled their £25m bid limit to make a second one, both to improve reliability and speed between Huddersfield and Penistone, and to allow for two trains per hour. Their bid is backed by Kirklees Council, Barnsley Council, both Sheffield City Region and West Yorkshire Combined Authorities, and by Colne Valley MP Jason McCartney, who also has his own bid for funding another project under the scheme. It was a surprise to many that, with its commitment to the north of England, the Government did not support the first bid.

Pete Myers, Stakeholder Manager at Northern, has confirmed to HPSRUA its desire to introduce three-car Class 150 trains on the Penistone line from December by splitting some two-car units. However, this is dependent on a trouble-free introduction of bi- and tri-mode Class 769 trains in the northwest, and on East Midlands Railway releasing more Class 158 trains.

Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association

The indicative version of the December 2022 timetable for the Mid Cheshire Line shows an hourly Monday to Saturday service as now. Times towards Manchester are largely unchanged, but those leaving Piccadilly are shown at 10 minutes past the hour, half an hour different from now. Most of the peak hour extra trains are reinstated, but not the morning one towards Chester. This will inconvenience some schoolchildren and commuters.

Also in the December 2022 timetable, Stockport will lose its through services to Salford Crescent, Bolton, Wigan, Southport, Preston and Blackpool. The existing Hazel Grove to Blackpool North service will start from Manchester Airport, making that half-hourly, while the Alderley Edge to Southport service will terminate at Piccadilly, with another from Oxford Road to Southport.

Friends of Reddish South & Denton Stations Campaign Group

Following a successful Restoring Your Railways bid, Transport for Greater Manchester is inviting Stockport and Tameside residents to complete surveys to inform the Strategic Outline Business Case for:

- a regular passenger rail service between Stockport and either Manchester Victoria or Stalybridge via Reddish South and Denton (<https://forms.office.com/r/xbMcJrACxD>)
- a new passenger rail service between Rose Hill (Marple) and Stockport (<https://forms.office.com/r/OigmmzynfV>).

Friends of the Barton Line

Barrow Haven station is currently closed to replace the single platform; the £1.3m project aims 'to make train travel more attractive'. EMR is investing a further £26,000 in a new shelter, cycle racks, signage and a solar-powered help point. During the closure, EMR is providing an on-demand taxi service to or from either New Holland or Barton stations. Barrow Haven is scheduled to reopen on 8 August.

East Suffolk Travel Association

On 25 April Trevor Garrod and Alan Williams represented ESTA at this year's Greater Anglia (GA) Rail Users' Forum. Passenger numbers on regional services were now above pre-pandemic levels, but not yet on commuter and business travel to London. Both ESTA and the East Norfolk Transport Users' Association complained about the lack of paper timetables; GA said that this was a "temporary" decision. Also its train planners were examining the feasibility of Lowestoft – London through trains, possibly some experimental weekend services.

At ESTA's AGM on 21 May, guest speaker Peter Aldous MP stressed the importance of decarbonisation in transport policy, and the need to invest in relieving pinch points, including Haughley Junction and Ely. And as the new trains introduced in 2019 were faster, GA needed to look at the implications of this for the timetable, commenting "We can do better than 95 minutes between Lowestoft and Ipswich."

ESTA has published five Discover leaflets, two brand new and three updated from earlier issues. Deben & Alde Valleys promotes the area between Woodbridge and Snape, while Lowestoft & Oulton Broad is ESTA's contribution to the 175th anniversary of the coming of the railway to Lowestoft from Reedham. The revised leaflets cover the Blyth Valley, Saxmundham to the Coast, and Bungay & the Waveney Valley.

The first scheduled freight train for many years left Lowestoft's newly relaid freight sidings on 9 March. More aggregate is destined for the Midlands, but there seems to be a temporary shortage of wagons.

Meldreth Shepreth and Foxton Rail User Group

Weekday train services are back to half-hourly all day, which is a hugely positive step forward. Performance data indicates that service reliability is steadily improving, as workforce builds back. To retain the service into the future, it is essential that ridership continues to grow, so anyone who has got out of the habit of using the train during the pandemic should try it out!

English Regional Transport Association

Although re-railing the original Great Central Main Line is no longer feasible, ERTA believes that the option of a new line along the corridor should be kept open. It would go from Claydon Junction (the East-West Rail link to Aylesbury) to parkway stations at Brackley, adjacent to the A43 and with bus links to Silverstone, and at Rugby Central by means of a link via Barby to the WCML/ Northampton Loop/DIRFT. On 7 July, ERTA has an online meeting to promote the idea. All tiers of governance, councils and agencies along with business and developers should invest in seeing what a new sustainable rail link could offer.

Torbay Rail Users Group

Roger Dixon takes issue with my suggestion that timetabling should be the preserve of the TOCs, albeit that DfT and NR must have the final say. He cites the inadequate services provided by CrossCountry, who no longer serve Newquay, the largest resort in Cornwall, nor Torbay, the largest overnight resort in the South West. While neither may justify a regular service, some direct services would support the Government's 'levelling up' agenda, as many seaside resorts are in deprived areas.

RAILFUTURE

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



Christian Wolmar will present the RUG Annual Awards at the Rf AGM near Bristol Parkway station on Saturday 16 July. Some of the winners will make a short presentation about the activities behind their Award.

NEWS

Giving evidence to the Public Accounts Committee, High Speed Rail DG Clive Maxwell claimed that building the station for HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail at Manchester Piccadilly underground would cost an extra £5 billion, and cause huge disruption to the city centre. But to reach a new surface station, HS2 would have to emerge from the ground in Ardwick before traversing a mile long viaduct up to 40ft in height. Then, to go on to Leeds, it would have to reverse and exit Manchester on yet more viaducts.

The underground station proposed by Weston Williamson + Partners is very similar to that for Old Oak Common, which has a construction budget of around £1 billion. High-speed trains from London would be able to continue straight through to Leeds, and it could handle twice as many trains as a turn-back station with the same number of platforms. A new surface station could occupy 125 acres of prime development land, and cost 14,000 new jobs plus another 2,600 around the construction site while work takes place. In Rf's view, Manchester should be at the heart of the rail network, not at the end of a branch line. The impact of a solution that limits future connectivity will be felt for a very long time.

Germany has introduced a new bargain ticket to entice people back onto its railways. For just 9 Euros you can buy a whole month's travel during June, July or August throughout the country on local regional trains, trams and buses. "We're laying down the challenge for Britain to do likewise," said Rf Director Ian Brown. "German Railways have dramatically set out to get passengers back onto public transport. If an equivalent ticket were available in this country, you could travel from Dover to Crewe for just £7.72."

NR employee Emily Pownall, who is completing a part-time Masters degree in Railway Studies, would like Rf members and contacts to complete a [survey](#) to inform her dissertation. She says: "I'm looking at women's perceptions of safety during train journeys, for both passengers and staff, with a particular focus on LBT Women's experiences. I'm hoping the analysis will provide insight into how we can make passengers feel safer whilst travelling via train. It will hopefully fill an important gap in the current available academic research." The survey is also open to men.

Rf LINCOLNSHIRE

One of the four options in a Government paper on [Strategic Alternatives to the HS2 Eastern Leg](#) was to extend it east of Nottingham parallel to the Lincoln line, cross the ECML north of Newark with junctions to the west and north, then follow it north, but by-passing Doncaster to the east. Rf Branch Chairman David Harby spoke to the [BBC](#) about how this option would affect Newark and Retford. He took care to say that every option would have its supporters, but although the one via Newark would do little for Sheffield, the Government might like it, as it was relatively cheap. And it would benefit Newark and Retford by freeing up space on the ECML for local interconnectivity, which is limited now and was non-existent in the draft ECML timetable from last year.

COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

During Community Rail Week from 23-29 May, over 80 events took place across the country, getting the word out about community rail and encouraging people to give the train a try. The week got off to a flying start: accompanied by Ade Ayoola, Community Rail Lead at the DfT, Jools Townsend, the CEO of CRN, and the East Meets West Women's Group. Rail Minister Wendy Morton MP took the train from Bradford Forster Square to Bingley, where she met Action Stations Group volunteers and a team from the Bentham Line. The Minister was clearly impressed by the range of work carried out in community rail.

With funding from Waverley Borough Council, Surrey Hills to South Downs CRP has commissioned a [video](#) from Spontaneous Media to showcase the countryside and places to visit on the Guildford - Haslemere line. The password is Hills2Downs.

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

The GBR Transition Team has published its [report](#) on the 307 responses to its call for evidence to inform the development of a long-term strategy for rail (the Whole Industry Strategic Plan). Decarbonisation, accessibility, the need for a strong customer service ethos and financial sustainability, along with the importance of integrating with other transport, were the key areas of focus identified. GBRTT will continue to engage with a wide range of stakeholders; the first version the WISP will be ready towards the end of the year.

[Analysis](#) by the Office of Rail and Road found that Britain ranks lowest for 'whole society' safety, which combines the number of fatalities and serious injuries across five risk categories: passenger, employee, level crossing user, trespasser, and other. For passenger safety, Britain ranks eighth lowest overall, but this compares favourably with other European countries with similarly large railway networks.

NR has [responded](#) to ORR's concern regarding the new ECML and WCML timetables. They represent a significant challenge, and a number of key issues remain to be resolved before the industry is satisfied that they can be successfully introduced. However, the April ECML Programme Board agreed to continue to plan for it to start in May 2023.

In the first phase of work to electrify the Fife Circle, NR will pile the foundations for masts to carry overhead wires between Haymarket and the Forth Bridge: 25 single track km will be electrified by December 2024. Subsequent phases of work will see the 'partial' electrification of lines in Fife, a further 79 STKs. A new fleet of Battery Electric Multiple Units (BEMUs) will then replace the life-expired DMUs.

Every weekend throughout July, Dore & Totley, Grindleford, Bamford and Hathersage stations will close as part of a £145m package of improvement on the Hope Valley line between Manchester and Sheffield. It includes a new passing loop between Bamford and Hathersage, and a new platform and footbridge with lifts at Dore & Totley station.

Here is the link to NR's [EWR Strategic Statement](#) that was omitted from the May issue. It is a comprehensive appraisal of how the EWR remit could be expanded to exploit its full potential.

In the early hours of 29 May, the first Northern City Line train ran between Finsbury Park and Moorgate using digital signalling. Safety and reliability checks will continue throughout 2022, with driver training and migration due to start early next year. The line should operate solely using digital signalling in 2024.

Unfortunately, the project to power electric trains from Selmeston solar farm at Berwick, Sussex, cannot proceed, as site-specific technical issues that emerged as the project progressed proved impossible to overcome. Even so, other projects will continue to prove the concept of solar energy powering trains, and its role in achieving the UK's Net Zero commitments.

The newly restored Dartmoor Line between Exeter and Okehampton saw over 50,000 journeys in its first 20 weeks, more than twice the number predicted, so services have doubled to hourly. Footfall at Crediton has also risen by 39% against pre-pandemic levels. Equally impressive was the Elizabeth line, with more than a million journeys made on the central section in its first five days. Investment on new and restored lines really does pay dividends!

At its Rail Innovation & Development Centre (RIDC), NR has trialled the first train retrofitted with onboard digital signalling. Alstom's ETCS system fitted to a Class 180 DMU owned by Angel Trains and operated by Grand Central is compliant with ETCS Baseline 3 Release 2 (required for roll out of the East Coast Digital Programme), and the first to support Packet 44, which enables operation with GB specifics such as mph.

,,,and finally

A Sunderland football fan travelled to Wembley for the play-off final via Menorca because it was cheaper than taking the train or bus! James Jelly paid £12.50 to fly out, £10.50 back to Stansted, and £28 for an overnight stay in a hostel, a total of £51. He added: "One lad I know paid £260 for a return to London on the train, and British Airways wanted £161.99 for a direct flight."

CONSULTATIONS

- Hampshire County Council: [Local Transport Plan 4](#). Closes 26 June.

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

EVENTS

Please keep your events coming, and update websites with any changes as soon as they are made. Stand-alone lists are helpful, as newsletters may be discarded. Also copy [Roger Blake](#), who maintains lists of [Events](#) and [Key Dates](#) on the Rf website.

Blob colour indicates the type of event:

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

June

- Friday 17. Friends of the Far North Line AGM, National Hotel, **Dingwall**, 1115.
- Tuesday 21. Chesham & District Transport User Group, Town Hall, **Chesham**, HP5 1EP, 1930 (Also 2 Aug, 20 Sep, 25 Oct, 6 Dec.)
- Tuesday 28. Levenmouth Rail Campaign, **Online**, 1830 (the last Tuesday of every month).

July

- Thursday 7. English Regional Transport Association, Re-rail Great Central Corridor, **Online**, 1300.
- Saturday 9. English Regional Transport Association, Rupert Brooke, 8-10 Castle Street, **Rugby**, Warks. CV21 2TP, 1500.
- Tuesday 12. STORM, Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, **Castleton**, OL11 2SP, 1400 (Also the second Tuesday of each month).
- Wednesday 13. Rf London & South East, Herts & Beds Division, **Online**, 1900.
- Thursday 14. Rf London & South East, Eastern Division, **Online**, 1930.
- Saturday 16. Rf AGM and RUG Awards, St Michael's Church Centre, The Green, Stoke Gifford, **Bristol**, BS34 8PD, 1100.
- Wednesday 20. Friends of the Barton Line AGM, White Swan **Barton**, 1800 (Also 15 Sep at No 1 Inn, Cleethorpes, and 16 Nov.)

Further Ahead

- 13 August. English Regional Transport Association, Barrel Vault, Unit 23, St Pancras Station, **London**, 1500.
- 16 August. Rf East Midlands, Victoria Hotel, 85 Dovecote Lane, **Beeston**, NG9 1JG. 1200.
- 20 August. Rf London South East, Kent Division, 1400.
- 10 September. English Regional Transport Association, The Swan Pub, 1 Dunstable Road, **Flitwick**, Bedfordshire, MK45 1HP, 1400.
- 15 September. Rf Annual Conference, St Georges Centre, 60 Great George Street, **Leeds**, LS1 3DL.
- 15 September. Meldreth Shepreth and Foxton Rail User Group, venue TBN, 1930.
- 5 October. Community Rail Awards, **Manchester** Central Convention Centre.
- 15 October. East Suffolk Transport Association, Market Hall, High Street, **Saxmundham**, 1400.
- 15 October. English Regional Transport Association AGM, St Peters Court House, Church Lane, **Berkhamsted**, Hertfordshire, HP4 2AX, 1400.
- 21 October. Avocet Line Rail Users Group AGM, Manor Hotel, **Exmouth**, 1900.

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

Contact the editor by e-mail: ruglink@railfuture.org.uk, or phone: 01462 815992.

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Registered Office: Edinburgh House, 1-5 Bellevue Road, Clevedon, North Somerset, BS21 7N - **for legal correspondence.**
All other correspondence to: 14 Ghent Field Circle, Thurston, Suffolk IP31 3UP*