



September 2023

Welcome to the Rail User Express

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With new stations opening in Reading, Bristol and Thanet and more to come, the Leven branch next year, and no shortage of ideas for the future (Rf East Anglia), the rail network continues to develop – except in East Lancashire it seems. So we need to keep up the pressure!

Roger Smith

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

Levenmouth Rail Campaign

The tracks are laid, and signalling and other equipment is being installed, but the stations are yet to come. Both will be unmanned, although a train crew depot sized for 24 including 10 drivers and 10 conductors will occupy two-thirds of the Leven station building, as three trains will be stabled there overnight. Up to 400 crew will be trained in batches from January onwards. Class 158 and 170 DMUs (2-3 carriages) will be used initially. However, a shortage of rolling stock may limit the service to just one train/hour rather than the two that were promised, at least to start with. A timetabling consultation across Fife is planned.

Skipton-East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership

Nothing in Transport for the North's (TfN) latest strategy would improve the dire transport links from East Lancashire communities with the worst economic and social deprivation in England to the powerhouse cities of Leeds and Bradford. SELRAP Chair Peter Bryson says: "TfN plans to spend £29 billion on rail improvements in the North over the next 25 years, but not a penny is coming to East Lancashire. Thus TfN has simply ignored the pledges made by Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Chancellor Jeremy Hunt when, earlier this year in Accrington, they re-launched the Conservative's manifesto commitments to Level-Up the UK."

Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester lines

STORM supports plans for the new station at Slattocks that TfGM proposed in 2021 in tranche 1 of its [Five Year Transport Delivery Plan](#). It would serve nearby Stanycliffe, as well as Hopwood Hall College, Stake Hill Industrial Estate and a planned housing estate next to the A627(M) slip road. And NR has submitted plans for next year to demolish and rebuild the bridge south of Castleton that carries the Manchester - Rochdale line over the M62.

Northern has [tendered](#) for up to 450 new train sets that could be decarbonised by conversion into either electric or battery-electric multiple units, plus servicing and parts, and a simulator for driver training. Tenders close on 25 September and the outcome will be announced on 26 October.

Northern Weekly Salvo – Paul Salvesson

The announcement in early July that hundreds of station booking offices were to close (mostly in England) was greeted with a storm of opposition. The (extended) deadline for comments on this ill-thought proposal was 1 September, and an amazing 680,000 submissions have been made - Paul suspects that most will be against. The [Petition to Parliament](#) against the plans is still open.

Friends of the Barton Line

On 26 June, the Rail Operations Group trialled an LNER Azuma train without passengers from Doncaster – Cleethorpes – Lincoln – Cleethorpes - Doncaster with a view to starting a regular passenger service between Cleethorpes and London Kings Cross from May 2024.

FBL's Archive List now comprises ten pages of text and is available upon request to the Archivist. Its quest for a permanent display facility is focused on Baysgarth House Museum in Barton. Liz Bennet has been making overtures to North Lincolnshire Council to have this fine building adapted and made available for the town's various voluntary groups.

English Regional Transport Association

A Northampton - Market Harborough rail link would cut Northampton - Leicester timings from 100mins to about 35mins each way, and relieve the A508 and M1. With Oxford - Milton Keynes - Northampton also relieving the A421 and A43, the social, economic and environmental benefits are not wild dreams but hard facts and opportunities that demand a more supportive response.

The need for endless consultant-led rail studies presents lay people with a huge funding barrier – only to discover, if they cross that hurdle, that there is then no money to see their project through. Yet road schemes are evaluated by publicly paid professionals, a gross inequality in their favour despite a climate emergency. A common sense approach is needed for the public and tiers of governance to achieve greater levelling up, and get spades in the ground whilst Rome burns.

Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group

During the evening peak, you can use the Elizabeth Line with an off-peak ticket from Paddington to Reading and then any train, including those bound for the West Country, on to Newbury, Kintbury, Hungerford and Bedwyn.

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](#).

NEWS

The rise in regulated train fares in England next March will again be below the rate of inflation. Rf was pleased that this year's increase was only 5.9%, but even that was rearranging the deckchairs on the Titanic. The passenger service currently on offer simply isn't value for money, with too many cancellations even when there's no industrial action. Focusing on cost rather than the bottom line, ignores the fact that passengers generate most of the railways' revenue, so for this to grow the service offered must meet their needs.

RAILFUTURE EAST ANGLIA

NR has issued Strategic Advice on how the capacity released by opening HS2 to Birmingham and Crewe could unlock passenger and freight services on the West Coast Main Line South. Integrated with East West Rail (EWR), it could have half-hourly services from Oxford – Northampton, and from Cambridge - Birmingham via a new east to north curve at Bletchley (p206).

As well as its thoughts on ticket office closures, station staffing and making TVMs fit for purpose, [Rail East 199](#) has a wealth of ideas for lines in its area including EWR; Cambridge station redevelopment, and the multitude of connections from Cambridge South; the potential for a Norwich Metro, and remodelling Stansted Airport, with a through north-south route and a new line from Colchester via Braintree to relieve the A120.

The new footbridge at Royston station will open soon, so both the temporary steps that allow people to cross platforms via the roadway above, and the old footbridge that was declared unsafe in 2020 and has been closed ever since will be removed.

RAILFUTURE DEVON AND CORNWALL

Correction: Exeter's new station at Marsh Barton did not open in May as reported last month but on 4 July.

COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

When the DfT asked train operators in England to find savings, CRN told the National Community Rail Steering Group that core funding was critical to maintaining CRP staffing; essential reductions should come only from biddable funding pots. Almost every train operator found ways to protect it entirely for 2023-24 (only LNER looks set to make a small reduction). CRN and the Steering Group then agreed to work collectively to support community rail through what will continue to be a challenging period, including helping CRPs and station groups generate and protect funding from wider sources by evidencing its impact and value.

Rail Minister Huw Merriman MP's Summer Rail Tour took in several CRN members, including the Settle-Carlisle Railway Development Company, the Bentham Line, Penistone Line Partnership, Conwy Valley & North West Wales Coast CRP, Hampshire CRP and Purbeck CRP. The Minister heard first-hand how community rail projects deliver greater value from rail, promote sustainable mobility, and bring people together.

Leeds-Morecambe CRP Chairman Gerald Townson presented the Minister with a copy of the 'Bentham Line Development Strategy to 2042'. It covers a 'greener' approach to the Line, as well as the Eden Project Morecambe that opens in 2026 and the associated infrastructure between there and Lancaster, the Line's 175th anniversary in June 2025, and Bradford being named the 'City of Culture' for that year.

With DfT support, CRN's 'Integrated sustainable transport in community rail' fund is now open to member CRPs and station groups. Applications will be considered until 30 November or until all funds have been allocated.

TRANSPORT FOCUS

A TF report details the impact on passengers of engineering work at the new Old Oak Common station on the GWR main Line/HS2 route, and on the Midland Main Line. Passengers want better and earlier information to make an informed decision about their journey. Some passengers thought that for longer works a full week's closure may be better than traditional weekend work, reflecting the change in the post-pandemic use of the railway, with an increase in leisure travel, and flexible working patterns with more home working on traditional commuting days.

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

Between 1 January and 31 July, Huddersfield saw 13% of its scheduled trains cancelled. Manchester Victoria had a rate of 10%, with Oxford Road, York and Newcastle at 9%. Stations in Wales had a cancellation rate at 7%, while the North East was the highest region in England at 6%.

In the four weeks to 19 August the Elizabeth line had the most cancellations, when a total of 9.1% of services on did not run. CrossCountry was the next highest at 7.5%. Overall, cancellations rose to 3.9% from 3.3% in the previous four weeks. ORR has challenged the rail industry to improve its focus on passengers, and provide more reliable information. It has reduced the notice period for those who need to book assistance before they travel from 24 hours to just two.

NR is not awarding bonuses to the 20,000 RMT union members who took industrial action in its dispute over pay, jobs and working conditions. NR said that it had been "crystal clear" with trade unions and employees that strike action would affect its performance-related bonus scheme.

England's Economic Heartland's Early Careers Network will offer professionals working in the transport sector in the Oxford – Cambridge arc a forum for shared learning and development. It will be formally launched at a reception after EEH's conference in Cambridge on 1 November.

Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire District Councils have agreed the design of the £200m Cambridge South Station on the Biomedical Campus, with parking for 500 bicycles on each side. NR said that approval was "integral to the ambitious planning and construction programme".

NR and Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) ran six trains in half an hour between Finsbury Park and Moorgate under the European Train Control System to confirm that digital signalling could support the high-frequency metro service - a significant milestone in the East Coast Digital Programme.

New signalling between Balham and Platforms 9-19 at London Victoria has reduced delays to Southern and Gatwick Express trains heading into London via Clapham Junction by 55%. Ongoing upgrades in the Crystal Place, Tulse Hill and Peckham area are set to finish next February, whilst those between Nunhead, Battersea and Herne Hill will complete in 2025. A major programme of work to install a modern signalling system throughout Cornwall has also started.

A fare dodger who repeatedly gave the name of an old school friend when caught travelling without a ticket, racking up over £7,000 in fines, was jailed for 10 months and ordered to pay a £149 victim surcharge for committing acts with intent to pervert the course of justice.

...and finally

Peter Feeney spotted a Specsavers advert on a Greater Anglia train doing over 75mph and about to reach its destination on time: "Is your career crawling along as slowly as this bus?"

A passenger on a Southern service from Southampton to London Victoria was allegedly threatened with being reported to police due to his smelly feet. He told the conductor that they were blistered, and removing his shoe helped to ease the pain, but his explanation fell on deaf ears.

Leven based Fife Heritage Railway will preserve a retired Class 313 test train that NR used on projects such as European Train Control System. The Rail Heritage Designation Advisory Board has awarded the train 'heritage status', as its original seating is still intact and of historical interest.

CONSULTATIONS

- Kent CC: [Emerging Local Transport Plan 5](#), closes 18 September
- Southern Railway: [West Coastway Proposals](#), closes 27 September
- DfT: [The Interaction between Freight and Logistics and the Planning System in England](#), closes 6 October.
- West Oxfordshire DC: [Local Plan 2041](#) - ideas and objectives, closes 25 October.

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

EVENTS

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

Blob colour indicates the type of event:

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

September

- Tuesday 19. Chesham & District Transport Users' Group: Town Hall, Parsonage Lane, **Chesham**, Bucks, HP5 1EP, 1930 (Also 24 October).
- Thursday 21. Rail Action Group East of Scotland AGM, Village Hall, **East Linton**, 1900.
- Thursday 21. Friends of the Barton Line No 1 Inn, **Cleethorpes** station, 1900 (Also 15 November at the White Swan, Barton).
- Saturday 23. Rf East Anglia, Friends' Meeting House, 5 Upper Goat Lane, **Norwich**, NR2 1EW, 1400 (Also 2 December in Cambridge).
- Saturday 30. English Regional Transport Association, Quaker House, Wellington Street, **Northampton**, NN1 3AS, 1400.
- Saturday 30. Rf East Midlands, First Class Lounge, East Midlands Parkway station, 1430.

October

- Thursday 5. Rf London & South East, Sussex & Coastway division, **Online**, 1800. (And on the first Thursday of every month).
- Tuesday 10. STORM Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, **Castleton**, OL11 2SP, 1400. (Also the second Tuesday of every month).
- Saturday 14. Rf London & South East, Herts & Beds division, venue tbc – Bricket Wood station?
- Saturday 14. East Suffolk Travel Association, Fromus Centre, Street Farm Road, **Saxmundham**, 1400.
- Saturday 21. Mid Anglia Rail Passengers Association AGM, Friends Meeting House, St John's Street, **Bury St Edmunds**, Suffolk, IP33 1SJ, 1400.
- Thursday 26. South East Northumberland Rail User Group, Town Hall, Market Place, **Morpeth**, Northumberland, NE61 1LZ, 1930.
- Tuesday 31. Levenmouth Rail Campaign, Fife Renewables Innovation Centre, Ajax Way, **Methil**, Leven, KY8 3RS and **Online**, 1830 (Also the last Tuesday of every other month).

Further Ahead

- 1 November. England's Economic Heartland, Guildhall, **Cambridge**.
- 8 November. Rf London & South East, Eastern division, **Online**, 1900.
- 13 November. Ribble Valley Rail, The New Inn, Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, 1900 (And on the second Monday of alternate months).
- 18 November. Rf London & South East, Kent division.

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

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