



March 2024

Welcome to the Rail User Express

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While rail fares continue to rise inexorably, the “temporary” 5p/litre cut in road fuel duty remains, although the price of petrol has come back down from its peak of £1.91/litre in June 2022. Analysis by [Carbon Brief](#) suggests that cuts and freezes to fuel duty since 2010 have raised road traffic CO₂ emissions by 24%, leading to a 7% growth in the UK’s overall CO₂ output – and modal shift in the wrong direction!

Roger Smith

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

South East Northumberland Rail User Group

At a SENRUG hustings in Morpeth Town Hall on 11 April, five of the six candidates for the position of North East Mayor will set out their public transport policies, and sum up after a Q&A session. Unfortunately, the Labour candidate is unable to attend or to find a representative.

Ribble Valley Rail

Northern Trains [Yorkshire Dales Explorer](#) will replace DalesRail. From 8 June, two Saturday services will run each way all year round between Rochdale and Ribbleshead via Manchester Victoria, Salford, Bolton, Blackburn and Clitheroe. The Lancashire Rail Ramblers will organise guided walks.

Community Rail Lancashire and local councils have commissioned and funded a Northern Trains report “[Lancashire Service Uplifts](#)”. One of its proposals is for a half-hourly Ribble Valley service by extending the Rochdale – Blackburn service to Clitheroe, or possibly Hellifield, with a demand forecast of up to 133,000 passengers/year and revenue uplift of £0.7m/year. So it’s over to the Government and DfT to find the additional cost (*or Lancashire – see rest of the news – Ed*).

The Ribble Valley trains are approaching 50 years old. Northern is replacing its 367-strong fleet with multi-modal trains (electric/battery and bio/clean diesel), although the first of these is not due to enter service until 2028-9.

Skipton East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership

The Prime Minister and his Chancellor chose Accrington, in the heart of East Lancashire, to relaunch the Conservative Party's election manifesto commitment to Levelling Up. Yet, over a year after those promises were made, and in the budget, not a penny for new transport projects has been delivered anywhere in the region, though SELRAP's Skipton to Colne rail project runs through key "Red Wall" constituencies.

Northern Weekly Salvo – Paul Salvesson

The Government's decision to scrap the northern leg of HS2 with no sensible alternative has resulted in a half-built scheme costing billions that will contribute little to solving our transport problems, and could actually make them worse. Even more ludicrous, on conventional track the HS2 trains will be slower than the Pendolinos, which can tilt to take curves faster, whereas the "high-speed" trains can't tilt because it was assumed that most of their route would be largely straight. Can anything be rescued from the mess? The West Coast Main Line desperately needs more capacity, especially north of Rugby. Unless the entire route is four-tracked with speeds of at least 140 mph, there is a real risk that freight trains will have fewer paths than now.

Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group

RUX congratulates BTPG on the 300th edition of its newsletter.

The short-notice replacement of IETs with Turbos is preferable to cancellations. GWR has more IETs out of action than normal due to damage (eg from flooding or hitting things on the line). Hitachi has a dedicated team to get them back in service as soon as possible, but at any one time there are also three sets out for repairs to cracks, as well as those on routine maintenance.

Tarka Rail Association

A new Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance aims to reconnect Bideford and Barnstaple, and upgrade the Tarka Line through to Exeter. At its launch on 1 March, thirty representatives from 13 stakeholder organisations agreed to develop a case to put to Government, building on local council resolutions already passed and funding already committed.

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](#).



RUG Awards 2024 - call for nominations expires Easter Saturday, 30 March (NB the earlier date!)

The 2024 RUG Awards and Commendations (also open to local campaigns, station adopters and rail partnerships etc) will be presented at the Rf national AGM in Edinburgh on 13 July. This is the **last call** for nominations; details of how to enter are on [Rf's website](#).

Four of the six awards have been named to honour past members and their dedication to the cause of rail development:

- The Adrian Shooter award for best website
- The Clara Zilahi award for best campaigner
- The Oliver Lovell award for best new group
- The Paul Abell award for best newsletter

Nominations are also invited for best social media and best campaign, so get your entries in.

NEWS

There's been much food for thought on the future of the rail industry, but very little on short-term improvement. The rail operators and their suppliers have both issued reports: a '[Rail Manifesto](#)' by Rail Partners, and '[Research on Long-Term Passenger Growth](#)' by the RIA; both the Minister of State for Rail and his Shadow Minister spoke at the [George Bradshaw Address](#), while the DfT has published the draft [Rail Reform Bil](#) together with [explanatory notes](#).

Rf Chair Chris Page, [commented](#): "Until the Government of the day, together with the train operators, decide that their core goal is to run the train service without cancellations and industrial action being the norm, the railway won't be able to play its proper place in the UK's transport services. [They] need to...get the product right in a changed, far more flexible, world."

RAILFUTURE EAST ANGLIA

Greater Anglia should work towards a half-hourly service on all of its lines to coastal towns, though not necessarily from every station. The infrastructure may not allow this immediately, but RfEA notes how GWR overcame similar problems along both sides of the Exe estuary in Devon to serve settlements of a similar size. RfEA would also like to see:

- The Norwich - Stansted Airport service extended to Great Yarmouth, with weekday timings on Sunday to even out the Ely – Cambridge service, which is currently bunched around the hour mark
- A half-hourly Bishop's Stortford - Cambridge North local service, ideally by extending six of the 2tph Stratford - Bishop's Stortford services
- The Cambridge North to London Liverpool Street off-peak service diverted via Stratford to facilitate access to the Westfield Centre and the new concert hall and museums
- More Ipswich - Newmarket - Cambridge peak services, and on Friday and Saturday the last Ipswich - Bury St Edmunds train extended to Cambridge, returning at 2347. The 2244 from King's Cross would connect to give Newmarket and Bury a later London departure.

COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

CRN discussed opportunities for community rail with West Yorkshire Mayor Tracy Brabin. Quarterly meetings will keep the Mayor and her team updated on such insights, a model CRN would like to see replicated elsewhere.

The first in a series of CRN policy position statements, on [sustainable transport and travel](#), draws on community rail experiences, insights and wider evidence. Members can use the material to highlight the strategic role community rail can play at a local level. The next statement, on accessibility and inclusion, will be published next month.

TRANSPORT FOCUS

TF's latest [Rail User Survey](#) from 24 March 2023 to 4 February 2024 found that rail passenger satisfaction fell for every measure, from 88% to 81% overall, and to 74% both for train cleanliness (down from 81%), and for information provided during the journey (down from 82%). The railway as a whole needs to deliver higher standards and more consistently.

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

Between FY25/26 until FY31/32, local transport authorities (LTAs) in the North and the Midlands will receive £2.5bn and £2.2bn respectively from a Local Transport Fund (LTF) in addition to their annual Integrated Transport Block (ITB) allocation. A DfT [table](#) shows the current ITB allocation for each LTA, and its LTF grant.

In November, ORR began to investigate train performance in NR's Wales and Western region. Further cross-industry collaboration could make for improvement. ORR has asked NR and other key bodies for over 150 pieces of evidence. It expects to publish interim findings by late Spring.

A joint campaign by the Samaritans, NR, British Transport Police and the wider rail industry, '[Small Talk Saves Lives](#)', seeks to empower the public to start a conversation if their instinct tells them that someone needs help. Don't worry about saying the wrong thing; 'Do you know where I can get a cuppa?' can be all it takes to interrupt any suicidal thoughts.

The English Regional Transport Association (ERTA) is in the process of rebranding as the British Regional Transport Association (BRTA).

The West Highland Line service between Oban and Glasgow has been dubbed the "Polar Express" amid complaints of plunging temperatures. The Class 156 coaches are warmed by excess heat from the engine, but in particularly cold spells this can take forever.

Rail services between Workington and Carlisle are disrupted for at least six weeks because of the need for emergency work on the viaduct over the River Derwent. Fast flowing water resulting from an unusually wet February has eroded two of the supporting pillars.

NR has submitted a [planning application](#) to build a new, two-platform station at Haxby on the York - Scarborough line, funded by the DfT and City of York Council. Subject to planning consent, final designs will be completed this year, with construction expected to start in spring 2025.

New [Class 730 electric trains](#) now serve the Wolverhampton – Birmingham – Walsall route, with the Cross City Line between Lichfield and Redditch/Bromsgrove set to follow soon.

West Midlands Rail Executive (WMRE) is developing proposals for three new stations. North of Wolverhampton on the Shrewsbury line, a station between Pendeford and Claregate would also serve Tettenhall. Castle Bromwich between Birmingham and the East Midlands would restore the station that closed in 1968, while Coventry East would be a brand new one in the Binley/Willenhall area on the line to Rugby.

NR, Transport for West Midlands and WMRE are working on a £30m single platform station at Aldridge on the Sutton Park Line, with a half-hourly Walsall service from 2027. Longer-term plans could see the line electrified, with direct services to Birmingham and beyond. The new Wrexham, Shropshire and Midlands Railway Company plans to run to London Euston via the Sutton Park Line, and is exploring opportunities for this service to call at Aldridge.

Since 2021, NR has laid 41 miles of new track between Bicester and Bletchley as part of East West Rail (EWR). On 7 March at Steeple Claydon, Rail Minister Huw Merriman clipped the final section. In the Budget, Chancellor Jeremy Hunt said work on the Bletchley to Bedford section would be accelerated, supported by £240m from existing budgets. An Oxford - Milton Keynes service is expected to start next year, and to Bedford by 2030.

On 6 March, England's Economic Heartland MD Naomi Green [told the Transport Committee](#) that EWR was vital to realising economic potential: "Jobs created in our region are not competing with Birmingham, or Yorkshire and the Humber, but with places like Shenzhen, Toronto and Singapore. The challenge was that transport appraisal techniques [may] not fully reflect the range of wider transformational benefits a scheme such as EWR will bring to towns and cities in the region".

The session also heard from Bedford Mayor Tom Wootton: “While EWR is a great idea, his authority had significant concerns over the chosen route, and the quality of engagement his residents had received.” However, the statutory consultation starting in June will focus on the preferred route announced last May.

London Northwestern Railway has resumed a full Monday - Saturday service on the Bletchley – Bedford line, with fares reduced to £1 for three months. The service was suspended in 2022 when Vivarail went into administration, although a peak service resumed last November.

Moves are afoot to expand the capacity of [London St Pancras International](#), and to redevelop [Waterloo station](#) and the area around it. In the short term, reopening Ebbsfleet and Ashford to international passengers would relieve the pressure on St Pancras.

Transport for London (TfL) is to give each of its six Overground lines [its own identity](#), and mark it with parallel lines coloured as follows:

- The Lioness line: Euston – Wembley Central - Watford Junction in yellow
- The Mildmay line: Stratford - Highbury & Islington - Richmond/Clapham Junction in blue
- The Suffragette line: Gospel Oak to Barking Riverside in green
- The Windrush line: Highbury & Islington to Clapham Junction/New Cross/Crystal Palace/West Croydon in red
- The Weaver line: Liverpool Street to Cheshunt/Enfield Town/Chingford in maroon
- The Liberty line: Romford to Upminster in grey.

Following a public consultation, a new GTR Monday – Saturday [West Coastway](#) service pattern from 3 June has half-hourly Southampton - Brighton, and London - Gatwick - Portsmouth Harbour services, but no longer a direct Southampton - Gatwick service.

...and finally

Transport services in Germany faced severe disruption when a two-day strike by Lufthansa ground staff coincided with a 35-hour strike by train drivers – so the UK is not alone!

CONSULTATIONS

- TfL: [Extending the Docklands Light Railway to Beckton Riverside and Thamesmead](#), Closes 18 March.
- Transport Committee: [Rail Reform Bill, Call for Evidence](#). Closes 27 March.
- Wealden District Council: [Draft Local Plan and Sustainability Appraisal](#). Closes 10 May.

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

EVENTS

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

Blob colour indicates the type of event:

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

March

■ Saturday 16. British Regional Transport Association, Methodist Church, Northampton Road, **Market Harborough**, LE16 9HE, 1400.

■ Monday 18. Community Rail Awards 2024, **Swansea** Arena, 1700.

■ Wednesday 20. Friends of the Barton Line, White Swan at **Barton** interchange, 1800 (Also 16 May at the No.1 inn, Cleethorpes station. 1900).

- Thursday 21. Rf London & South East regional branch, London Metro division, Ian Baxter Gallery, 75 Cowcross Street, Farringdon, **London**, EC1M 6EL., 1900.
- Saturday 23. Ribble Valley Rail, Trinity Hub, Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, 1400 .
- Tuesday 26. Levenmouth Rail Campaign, Fife Renewables Innovation Centre, Ajax Way, **Methil**, Leven, KY8 3RS and **Online**, 1830.
- Wednesday 27. British Regional Transport Association, Costa Coffee, Silver Street, **Bedford** MK40 1SU, 1400.

April

- Tuesday 2. Chesham & District Transport Users' Group, Town Hall, **Chesham**, 1930.
- Thursday 11. South East Northumberland Rail User Group, Town Hall, **Morpeth**, 1930.
- Thursday 11. Rf London & South East, Sussex & Coastway division, Methodist church hall, Perrymount Road, **Haywards Heath**, West Sussex, RH16 3DN.
- Friday 12. Friends of **Littleborough** Stations Volunteer Day.
- Saturday 20. Rf London & South East regional branch AGM, Wesley's Chapel, 49 City Road, **London**, EC1Y 1AU, 1100.
- Saturday 27. Rf London & South East, Herts & Beds division, St Paul's Church, Hatfield Road, **St Albans**, AL1 4JP, 1100 (Also 29 May Online).
- Saturday 27. Rf Yorkshire AGM, Priestly Hall, Mill Lane Chapel, City Square, **Leeds** LS1 5E, 1300.
- Saturday 27. Rf Wales AGM, **Shrewsbury** station, 1400.
- Saturday 27. British Regional Transport Association, Unitarian Church, Worthing Road, **Horsham** RH12 1SL, 1400.

Further Ahead

- 8 May. Rf London & South East, Eastern division. **Online**, 1900 (Also the second Wednesday of alternate months).
- 10 May. Friends of the West Highland Lines AGM, Commodore Inn, 112-117 West Clyde Street, **Helensburgh**, G84 8ES.
- 11 May. Ontrack - Tendring Transport Users AGM, Gospel Chapel, 62 Old Road, **Frinton-on-Sea**, Essex, CO13 9BY, 1030.
- 13 May. Friends of Littleborough Stations, History Centre, **Littleborough**, 1900.
- 13 May. Ribble Valley Rail, The New Inn, Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, 1900 (Also the second Monday of alternate months).
- 21-22 June. European Passengers' Federation, Ibis Hotel, **Warsaw**.

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

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