

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.

Please include railfuture.org.uk in your list of useful contacts on your website and in newsletters!

Please support Britain's number one advocate for the railways and rail users!

For details about group affiliation to Railfuture, please contact the [Membership Secretary](#)

GUEST RAIL USER GROUP OF THE MONTH**Tyne & Wear Public Transport Users' Group**[website](#)

The Tyne & Wear Public Transport Users' Group was formed in 2010 with the aim of "improving the quality, quantity and availability of Public Transport services for the general public in the North East". TWPTUG is supported by Co-op Group's Community Fund Grant. One of the group's campaigns in 2012 called for a "Bikes on Metro" trial. Although Tyne & Wear Metro bosses initially said "no", at least it kick-started a stakeholders' group examining the long-standing question of whether bicycles can be carried on the Metro trains. The campaign prompted Metro's operator, NEXUS, to survey its passengers (on-train) and a wider population (off train) in order to capture the views of bike users and non-bike users. Results of the survey are expected in the next few weeks.

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

St Andrews Rail Link campaign (StARLink)[website](#)

A "concept study" into the case for reopening the line to St Andrews has been produced for StARLink by Tata Steel, and the authors presented their findings at a meeting of the Scottish branch of the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport in November. The study shows that special factors such as tourism and the world-class golf course enhance the passenger numbers expected to use a reintroduced rail service by some 25%, and the authors conclude that the scheme warrants further appraisal by the Scottish Government.

The December issue of the *Scots Magazine*, arguably the world's oldest magazine, carries an article about the StARLink campaign which includes an interview with the campaign's convenor, Jane Ann Liston, under the title "One Track Mind". The magazine enjoys an international readership, and the StARLink committee hope it will bring their campaign to the attention of many more people.

Pens, key-rings and fridge magnets are sold in aid of campaign funds, and these can be ordered via the "Shop" page of the StARLink website.

Furness Line Action Group[contact](#)

It's a year since FLAG and the Lakes Line Rail User Group alerted local MPs of the threat to the Manchester through services to/from Barrow and Windermere from 2014. This resulted in a campaign called Cumbria Better Connected, and the immediate outcome is the welcome news that First TransPennine Express has devised an improved draft timetable which retains most of the through services. FLAG says that the refranchising of Northern/TPE network will provide another opportunity to campaign on this issue.

FLAG has been working with Northern to improve connections at Carnforth for Leeds, and to have lower fares "via Clapham" which recognize the much shorter route – the group is able to claim success on both fronts. FLAG is also grateful to Northern for a number of service and capacity improvements on their line from the Dec 2012 timetable change. And after a 25-year campaign,

there's progress on the problem of the low platform at Dalton: a short hump has been installed so that those alighting from the centre doors of the train have a manageable step.

Earlier in the year, FLAG took their information stand to both the rail event at Millom Station and the Furness Model Railway Exhibition, and gained several new members as a result. The group has also raised its profile by becoming a major sponsor of the Carnforth Station Heritage Centre ... oh, and by taking out group affiliation to Railfuture. Thanks for that!

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

When contractors moved in at Smithy Bridge station to clear away the old waiting shelters, STORM feared that any replacements would be to an altogether inadequate design, and they tried in vain to get specifications from Transport for Greater Manchester; there was a sigh of relief all round when high-quality replacement shelters were installed. It's hoped that Littleborough will get similar shelters in the course of time.

Upset by the cost of season tickets from Rochdale to Manchester, STORM's chairman wrote to the local paper quoting comparative costs for other similar-length routes into the city in order to show that Rochdale passengers were getting a very raw deal. Another cause for concern is the quality of road replacement services during engineering works especially on Sundays, and STORM hopes to meet with TfGM and Northern to discuss the issue.

The Mince Pie Special train on 10 Dec organised by Friends of Littleborough Stations and STORM in conjunction with Northern Rail was a great success, with the Littleborough Public Brass Band playing Christmas carols. Next year STORM would like to run a Mince Pie Special on the tram from Rochdale to Manchester via Oldham, but there's a problem: eating food on the tram is forbidden!

North Cheshire Rail Users' Group [website](#)

In her chairman's report, Janet Briggs says that 2012 has been a vintage year for NCRUG, with restoration work completed at Frodsham station and restorations well underway at Helsby, plus a new customer information system (albeit with some imperfections) – so much has happened that the group's publicity leaflet and powerpoint presentation need updating. The final job at Frodsham was restoration of the platform railings, and NCRUG members helped prepare the site by cutting back vegetation. Now the job is finished, members have been able to restock the flower beds with plants supplied by the local council.

Looking forward to 2013, discussions are in hand with various bodies to explore options for marking the 150th anniversary of the railway between Hooton and Helsby – a special train has been suggested. Meanwhile, NCRUG is hopeful that the first service to Chester on Sundays will actually *be* a train – for some time now, Arriva Trains Wales has been running it as a bus service!

NCRUG received an invitation from Chester Debating Society to put the case for the HS2 high speed rail link. The ensuing discussions ranged over the whole structure of the railways in Britain, and NCRUG's representative was able to dispel some myths. Those that spoke in favour of HS2 were defeated at the final vote, but at least they felt they had "cut their teeth" and would achieve a better outcome in the event of a follow-up debate.

Mid Cheshire Rail Users' Association [website](#)

MCRUA has been carrying out Passenger Counts during the autumn months and the figures are showing that loadings are well up on 3 years ago on the section of the line between Altrincham and Chester, although they're somewhat down for journeys through to Manchester due to a less-convenient timetable than in 2008. The group reports that train performance is slipping, partly due to the increased numbers boarding and alighting.

Following news of the franchising fiasco, MCRUA notes that the current Northern franchise may well continue beyond its end date of April 2014 ... "so we will have to wait even longer for the vital investment in new trains and passenger information systems at stations. There is even talk of

modifying the Class 142 Pacers so that they comply with disability discrimination legislation and can therefore be used beyond 2020.”

MCRUA is helping Northern Rail with a novel project: to recruit “station support” volunteers for unstaffed stations, whose job it will be to receive news of any disruption to services and to relay details to passengers. There’s a possibility that the volunteers will receive a free travel pass for use on Northern trains.

MCRUA’s newsletter reports that members of the Middlewich Rail Link Campaign had secured around 2,000 signatures on a petition calling for reinstatement of passenger services between Sandbach and Northwich. Congleton MP Fiona Bruce will present the petition to Parliament.

Shrewsbury-Aberystwyth Rail Passengers’ Association [website](#)

In his “Chairman’s Message”, SARPA’s new Chairman, Angus Eickhoff, draws parallels between the franchising fiasco with its huge cost to the taxpayer and the trial of the hugely-expensive ERTMS signalling system on the Cambrian line. It would be so costly to fit further trains with the necessary ERTMS equipment for use on the line that it is difficult to see how any additional sets can ever be contemplated, let alone replacement units when the current ones are life-expired.

Angus also reports that a conference he had attended on Integrated Public Transport in Wales was somewhat hijacked by representatives from disabled groups pushing their own agenda. He was left wondering what the perception of the officers running the event would be – there’s a danger they would regard public transport as a provision for the disadvantaged rather than as a cornerstone of the economy. Another member of SARPA attended a meeting of the Wales Public Transport Users’ Committee and commented that, although the members of the committee were quite knowledgeable and well-intentioned, they seemed hamstrung by their own protocols which prevented them from answering questions or entering into discussions with invited guests, some of whom were representatives of the main UK transport campaign groups.

Elsewhere we read that SARPA considers that progress towards achieving an hourly service on the Cambrian line is turning into a pantomime, with politicians blowing hot and cold, and blaming Network Rail for the delay – although SARPA’s own enquiries suggest that there are no insurmountable technical issues.

In his regular column, the Brigadier tells us that he met up with an old chum, US Colonel “Chuck” Snitzelburger, at his club in London at a time when the big-screen TV there carried news of the West Coast franchising collapse. After being asked “what kind of cockamamie system are you using to run your railroad, can’t Maggie sort it out?” the Brigadier felt obliged to explain rail privatisation and its ramifications. “Gee someone needs shooting!” was Chuck’s initial response, followed later by the observation: “So franchising is a legal contract for being crap at your job and uninventive? Hell boy I’d sue!” The Brigadier popped out to the toilet for a moment and came back to find his friend watching an interview with Bob Crow of the RMT union; Chuck remarked: “...now this guy’s talking sense, who is he?” *[Good heavens, my spell-checker accepts “cockamamie”! – Ed]*

Stourbridge Line User Group [website](#)

London Midland’s decision to reduce staffing at many of its stations has angered Stourbridge Line users. SLUG’s chairman Rob Hebron said “We presented a strong case for maintaining staffing but the Department for Transport has ignored the passengers’ organisations. We expected a compromise not a rubber stamp.”

Worst affected of Stourbridge Line stations is Lye which will become no more than an unmanned halt. SLUG is in discussion with LM and it is hoped that some of the cuts can be averted. “Feedback from other rail user groups leads us to believe that we must make our case based on security and safety issues, not on revenue protection or customer convenience factors” says Rob, adding: “perhaps minimum staffing standards will have to be built into conditions for the next franchise holder.”

And on top of all this comes news of train cancellations on London Midland due to driver shortages. SLUG says that the word “frustration” doesn’t really cover the emotions of train passengers whose livelihoods and daily routine are being disrupted. “The double whammy of inhospitable, unstaffed stations and unreliable services will drive down passenger demand for rail travel ... the investment in new trains will have been to no avail.”

SLUG’s autumn newsletter includes the usual “supplement” which covers items of railway interest in greater depth. A 2-page article in this issue describes a typical day’s work for the operator of the unique railcar service on the Stourbridge Branch Line, from the early-morning safety checks to changing the LPG gas tanks at the end of service. The vehicle makes over 200 individual journeys along the ¾ mile branch during the course of the 18-hour day, with a reliability figure of over 99%.

Cotswold Line Promotion Group

[website](#)

The Winter edition of the Cotswold & Malvern Line News (price £1, free to members) carries an “award winning” banner on the front cover as a result of being judged “top mag” in Railfuture’s Rail User Group awards. Inside, we read that the group’s charter train was a great success, with a full-complement of 430 passengers enjoying a trip to York and Scarborough on an HST provided by First Great Western. The operating surplus and raffle netted around £1200, which will go towards next year’s flower displays along the line.

Earlier in the summer, there had been a special event to mark the return of Class 180 Adelante units on the Cotswold line – FGW’s Managing Director made a speech in which he praised the work of the CLPG saying that, without them, the enhanced service, featuring refurbished trains and redoubled stretches of track, would probably not have taken place.

Included with the magazine is a tear-out form for subscription renewals which members are encouraged to photocopy should they wish to recruit a friend – and if they tick a box to say they originally paid for the magazine, they get £1 off the cost of membership.

Bedford Commuters’ Association

[website](#)

After many years of lobbying by the BCA, an Arrivals screen has been installed at Bedford Station, located to the left of the Departure screens. Also after years of complaining about Flitwick Station footbridge, which is so dilapidated that one end has to be supported with scaffolding, the group is pleased that the bridge is about to be refurbished.

At the November AGM of the BCA, speakers from First Capital Connect, East Midland Trains and Network Rail provided updates on current service performance, and the improvements planned for the coming months and in the longer term. An article in the group’s December newsletter looks ahead to Phase 2 of the Thameslink project which has just been launched; but with yet another delay in the signing of the contract for the new trains, the BCA thinks there’s a risk that infrastructure works will be completed before the full complement of new trains is in service.

Chesham & District Transport Users’ Group

London Underground managers had assured rail users that units with reduced seating destined for the Circle line would not be used for Chesham and Amersham services, but Chesham TUG members have noticed these units straying north, and have sent in reports accordingly. The issue of early/late departures have been raised with LU management, who then undertook to remind drivers of the importance of adhering to the timetable. And users continue to be annoyed by constant announcements of a “good service” on the line when it’s often anything but!

LU trains from Chesham currently stop at all stations and take around an hour to get into London – the group is consequently pressing for faster services, and is thinking of setting up an e-petition on the issue. Meanwhile, one of their members is looking into the feasibility and cost of setting up a website for the group.

Barking-Gospel Oak Line User Group

[website](#)

The news that four stations in their area are set to benefit from additional waiting shelters has been greeted warmly by BGOLUG. The group had been campaigning for more covered waiting areas since Transport for London took over responsibility for the line five years ago and passenger numbers began to snowball. BGOLUG will continue to press for such improvements at all of the line's twelve stations and especially at its busiest intermediate station, Blackhorse Road.

BGOLUG representatives attended the 5th birthday celebrations of operating company LOROL at Haggerston Station on 12 Nov, and enjoyed getting their teeth into the Class 172-themed birthday cake.

Cambridge Heath & London Fields User Group

[website](#)

The number of passengers using London Fields station hit a new high in December, but at neighbouring Cambridge Heath the figure dropped a little. The reason is simple, argues CHLFUG: at London Fields, the service has been improved but at Cambridge Heath there have been cuts. The group hopes that managers at Greater Anglia and the Dept. for Transport take due note, although the lack of reliable passenger figures for London stations from the Office of Rail Regulation doesn't help. The ORR claims that only 200,000 people use Cambridge Heath station annually, but based on their own counts, CHLFUG believe the real figure for Cambridge Heath is 600,000. "How can the ORR get it so wrong?" The group is convinced that a better service on Sundays would help passenger numbers grow in a big way. They consider that a half-hourly service is not acceptable.

Southwark Rail Users' Group

[website](#)

In advance of the 9 Dec timetable change, SRUG reminded its members that there would be big changes to local rail services with "London Overground" (Clapham Junction to Surrey Quays) replacing the "South London Line" (London Bridge to Victoria via Peckham Rye) – a service that dates back to 1867. On Sat 8 Dec, members and friends crowded onto a morning train waving "farewell" placards, then retired to a pub at Denmark Hill to drown their sorrows.

While applauding the new journey opportunities to east and west London via Overground, the group laments the loss of the direct connections to central London. Arguing that the new Tube map shows their stations as somewhat cut off from central London, SRUG has now produced their own colour map which helps to publicise rail connections into the centre – anyone can download it from the SRUG website.

"Many users, organisations and representatives fought a long and hard campaign to save the South London Line," says SRUG, "but it was not successful. Maybe there can be a campaign to bring it back in 2018 after London Bridge station is rebuilt. In the meantime, the campaign continues to get the gaps filled in services to Victoria that the loss of the South London Line creates in the evenings and at weekends and to restore the service to 4 train/hour."

LATE NEWS: Local MP Simon Hughes and London Assembly members came along to the "farewell" event on Sat 8th to hear concerns about the loss of direct trains to central London. Then on Mon 10th, Mayor Boris Johnson travelled on the new Overground service accompanied by local radio presenters, and SRUG members were on hand to put their side of the story.

[You can watch a short promotional video for the new Overground service [here](#) – Ed]

Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group

[website](#)

After getting their local MP involved in the issue of direct trains to London after electrification to Newbury, the BTPG has some good news to report. Three of the MPs representing towns with stations west of Newbury met with the Minister for Rail, Simon Burns, and put the case for retaining the current level of through services – the result was a promise from the Minister to instruct the Dept. of Transport to formally investigate the option of extending rail electrification from Newbury to Westbury.

West Sussex Rail Users' Association

[website](#)

WSRUA's priorities for the new Thameslink, Southern & Gt Northern franchise are set out on the "Campaigns" page of their website. The list was drawn up after the committee surveyed its members over the summer months. They had also met 3 of the 5 bidders up to the point when the whole franchising process was thrown into confusion.

The committee has attended meetings with the local council in Horsham aimed at addressing disruption to rail services in bad weather. They've also been keeping a close eye on the redevelopment work at Horsham Station (just completed) and the resignalling scheme for the Arun Valley Line which is due to start shortly. Meanwhile, the group is helping the Arun Valley Community Rail partnership with such things as floral displays and community artwork.

After the withdrawal of refreshment trolleys from Southern's trains, WSRUA has been pressing for their re-introduction and has suggested some options which they hope the company is exploring: "There is a franchise commitment for the provision of refreshments and we have reminded Southern of this."

South Hampshire Rail Users Group

[website](#)

In the previous edition of RUEx, I had reported that SHRUG were upset by the introduction a charge of 20p for the use of the toilets at Southampton Central. SHRUG's organiser, Denis Fryer, replied to say that charges for the toilets had not, after all, been introduced, even though the turnstile boxes are in place, adding: "The downside Gents is of good quality, though much smaller than the one it replaced, but the upside facility remains squalid." *See page 8 for more news of SWT loos!!*

Friends of Crewkerne Station

[website](#)

The Friends have just held their second Open Day at the station and over £200 was raised for group funds; to top it all, a special train headed by the steam loco "Tangmere" whistled through. On 20 Dec, members are meeting Network Rail's Mike Franklin at the station to receive a safety briefing in advance of beginning work on the redundant down platform.

Torbay Line Rail Users' Group

Roger Dixon of TLRUG was sufficiently annoyed by a news item broadcast by the local BBC TV station that he wrote a letter of complaint. The "Spotlight" programme on 29 Nov included an item on the reliability of the main railway line out of Devon and Cornwall following a landslip at Teignmouth. A Transport Professor at Plymouth University, when interviewed, dismissed any suggestion of building an alternative inland route using one of two possible former railway alignments as far too expensive. Viewers were left with the impression that this was the final word on the subject.

Roger argues that the likely cost of such a scheme – around £200m – should be weighed against the cost to the local economy when the main line is closed (the local Business Council estimates £100m per week). He points out that the 4-mile South Devon Link Road is to cost £125m, and the billions to be spent on HS2 will have no benefit whatsoever to the taxpayers of the South West.

Roger concludes: "I believe that these facts suggest that there is a viable case for an alternative rail route to the South West. The BBC's charter requires the corporation to present a balanced view on issues such as this. It has clearly failed to do so in this case."

Avocet Line Rail Users Group

[website](#)

ALRUG are masters of the art of sending out press releases to the local media. In October, they issued a press release to welcome the awarding of Community Rail status to the Exeter-Exmouth Line. Not long after, another press release from the group gave more good news: that for a 6-week trial period, the service frequency on Sundays would be doubled to half-hourly. The story continued with a quote from Chairman Tony Day: "over the past three years we have done a lot of work on this, including many Sunday passenger counts with the help of the Devon & Cornwall Rail

Partnership. We have demonstrated clearly that Sunday trains are as busy – or busier – than those in the week, apart from the rush hour.”

After the first Sunday of the new timetable, a further press release was issued under the heading “Good start for extra trains” - the essential message was that overall passenger numbers were well up on the previous week. The story was accompanied by a photograph showing a train leaving Exmouth, being flagged away by a local councillor. An upbeat quotation from the councillor appears towards the end of the press release.

...lastly, a trip across the Irish Sea to hear from...

Rail Users Ireland

[website](#)

Rail Users Ireland welcomed the Irish government’s decision to extend the Dublin Area Rapid Transit (DART) system but remain concerned about two issues: (i) the DART will only go as far as Hazelhatch and Balbriggan, not Drogheda and Kildare as originally promised, and (ii) the interconnector tunnel (necessary for the DART extension) is only due for completion in 2015, which they point out is “now delayed till 2018 in no small part due to government indecision.”

In November, the group reported that rail commuters in Dublin face increases of up to 14% on what are already high fares for a service which continues to be cut back. They give comparisons with fares for other European cities to show that commuters in Dublin are “being ripped off”. Mark Gleeson, spokesperson for the group, said "Public transport is funded to provide a public service to support the economy of the country. Lack of access to affordable and reliable public transport is a recognized barrier to taking up employment."

...news from Railfuture follows...

RAIL SUBSIDY OVERSTATED

Railfuture researchers led by Norman Bradbury have been examining the figures behind the Government’s claim that the railways receive vast amounts of public subsidy. Although the precise figures are difficult to get hold of, Norman and his team have shown that the amounts paid back to the Exchequer in the form of business rates, corporation tax, income tax and the like are quite substantial. Over the year 2010-2011, for example, these taxation streams effectively reduce the net subsidy paid to the railway from £3960m to more like £1557m.

Of course, Railfuture believes rail’s contribution to the real economy is even greater when non-user benefits (urban regeneration, access to employment, lower pollution, fewer lorries, etc.) are taken into account.

“Railfuture has done a great job in starting the ball rolling,” comments Railfuture’s President, Christian Wolmar, “but these figures need filling out and, crucially, should be used widely in order to boost the industry’s case for investment.” – *from an article in RailWatch (a longer version of the article appeared in Rail magazine, issue 710).*

DYNAMIC GROUPS TO REPLACE COMMITTEES

From January, Railfuture’s existing committee structure will be replaced with new, more dynamic groups. This is more than just a name change, as groups will be required to adopt new ways of working that are more responsive to the needs of the society and its members, and to demonstrate value for money. Areas covered by the new groups are, briefly: Research, Special Projects, Policy, Media, Communications, Finance, Passenger, Freight, International and Networks.

There are opportunities for RUG supporters who are also Railfuture members to serve on these groups, contributing to the formation of national policy and entering into discussions with key decision-makers in Government and the rail industry. If you would like to participate, please reply to ruglink@railfuture.org.uk and I will put you in touch with the appropriate person.

RAILFUTURE KICK-STARTS UCKFIELD STUDY

Railfuture has placed an advert in Modern Railways magazine inviting expressions of interest from railway consultancies in preparing a business case for extending the Uckfield branch line to Lewes. Bridging the gap will provide an additional rail route between the Sussex Coast and London, opening new journey possibilities and aiding the regeneration of places like Newhaven.

On 10 Dec, Railfuture members canvassed morning commuters at Uckfield station and received over 60 responses overwhelmingly in favour of developing a new station car park and transferring the former station site to Network Rail, thereby permitting the reopening the line to Lewes. A special section of the Railfuture website [here](#) allows you to stay up to date with the campaign.

EAST ANGLIA SURVEYS

Railfuture East Anglia members regularly count footfall at stations all over the region to compare with various 'official' sources of data. At the same time, observations are made on the amenities offered: condition of stations, signage at the station, car parking facilities and the like. During a recent visit to Halesworth, the surveyors also looked at train/bus interchange, cycle storage, plus signage to and from the centre of town. They found that there is a good interchange for passengers wishing to transfer between train and bus, and the provision for cycle storage is adequate - although given the size of Halesworth, they were surprised to see only a solitary bicycle.

RAILFUTURE REPORT-A-LOO

Railfuture's Wessex Branch committee found it necessary to complain to South West Trains about the state of toilets on its Class 444 and 450 units – sometimes locked out of use and often “stinking to high heaven”. They've been assured by SWT that the Siemens maintenance depot at Northam is on top of the problem. Staff are systematically removing a particular type of WC that's proving troublesome and fitting a more reliable unit. The remaining toilets in the “Desiro” fleet are getting a complete overhaul - figures show that they're about 25% through the works programme.

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

WEST COAST MAIN LINE: FINAL REPORT OF THE LAIDLAW INQUIRY

The independent Laidlaw Inquiry into the cancelled West Coast Main Line franchise competition has concluded that the project failed because of an accumulation of significant errors related to inadequate planning and preparation, complex organisational structure, and a weak governance framework. Further details [here](#).

The Dept. for Transport has published its formal response to the report which commits the department to implementing swiftly a series of actions that will enable it to resume the franchising programme, with the confidence of the rail industry, as soon as possible.

The Laidlaw inquiry's final report is only part of the work the DfT is doing to review its rail franchising policy. It will also take into account the forthcoming National Audit Office report into the lessons from the cancellation of the InterCity West Coast franchise and the conclusions of Richard Brown's review of the future of the rail franchising programme, due to be submitted to the Secretary of State by the end of December. – www.gov.uk

THE TRUE MEASURE OF HOW MUCH WE NEED HS2

“The number of passengers using the West Coast Main Line has continued to rise steadily, with Virgin Trains alone carrying some 30 million passengers last year. If HS2 existed today virtually all of those passengers would transfer to the new route, which would make it – already – busier than any other existing High Speed Rail route in the world. The busiest at present is Beijing to Tianjin, in China, a mere 117km (73 miles) carrying 25 million passengers in 2010.

“That is the true measure of how much we need HS2 – and how sad it is that we are likely to have to wait another 15 years to see it brought to fruition.” – from Alan Marshall’s column “The Long View” in *Railnews*

STRATEGIC BUSINESS PLAN OUT SOON – a consultation will follow

Mon 7 Jan sees the publication of Network Rail’s Strategic Business Plan for Control period 5, 2014-2019. The next day, a consultation on the Plan will be launched by the Office of Rail Regulation, with a closing date of 19 Feb.

ALTERNATIVES TO FRANCHISING

Some members of the Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways have been enthused by a report called [Rebuilding Rail](#), published earlier this year by the *Transport for Quality of Life* consultancy with funding from the rail trade unions. The FoSBR folk wondered why I hadn’t mentioned it in Rail User Express – so now I have! The authors of the report propose a unified structure similar to Deutsche Bahn, which would allow private companies to compete with a public sector “GB Rail” and operate some of the train services.

More recently, a new report entitled [Rail Cymru](#) was introduced to Assembly Members in a debate in the Welsh Assembly, and has gained the support of key figures in the Labour and Co-operative Movements. This report was written by rail expert Paul Salveson and sets out a vision for a railway in Wales that is owned by and for the people of Wales, bringing together communities, employees and passengers. The paper was commissioned by The Co-operative Party with support from SERA, ASLEF and others. It advocates the Assembly Government holding on to the Wales and Borders franchise in 2018, and putting in place a ‘not for dividend’ model which would see profit invested directly back in to the service itself rather than leaving Wales.

COMPENSATION TO TRAIN OPERATORS FOR DELAYS - consultation

The Office of Rail Regulation is seeking views on a range of detailed issues relating to Schedules 4 and 8 – the compensation train operators receive for the financial impact of planned and unplanned rail service disruption attributable to Network Rail or other train operators. Schedule 4 compensates train operators for the impact of planned service disruption, and Schedule 8 compensates train operators for the impact of unplanned service disruption. Compensation is intended to cover fare revenue losses or costs, such as those associated with running replacement buses. It is important that Network Rail and train operators are incentivised to work in the best interests of passengers and customers by avoiding disruption. The closing date for comments is 28 Jan 2013. – ORR website
See: <http://www.rail-reg.gov.uk/pr13/consultations/possessions-and-performance-regimes.php>

ACTION PLANS BUILDS ON OLYMPIC EXPERIENCE

The Department for Transport has published two action plans which set out priorities, as well as highlighting areas where action is in the pipeline or already underway.

The [Accessibility Action Plan](#) builds on the transport successes of the Olympic and Paralympic Games and aims to create a long lasting legacy of improved access and information. One of the aims will be to build on the Games Spectator Journey Planner. Another is deciding where £100 million of extra funding might be best spent in the long term to improve accessibility of railway stations

The [Equality Action Plan](#) looks at how we can encourage a more inclusive transport network, ensuring that policy makers are alive to the particular needs and concerns of different groups in society. These include affordability issues for young people and pensioners and the ability for all people to travel in safety and free from harassment. – from DfT press release

I've scanned through both documents, looking for instances where rail users might be involved in the implementation of these plans...

- Firstly, the Government wants to involve community groups in formulating transport policy and the programme of service delivery. We should take them up on this!
- The safety and security of vulnerable travellers is seen as a high priority. Well, we're already doing our bit here by providing a friendly presence at stations, dealing with litter, reporting graffiti and safety hazards etc. We're also campaigning vigorously to retain station staff!
- The Accessibility Action Plan recognises that disabled people can benefit from travel training and the chance to try public transport, and so we could get involved in the delivery of local projects of this nature. In the North West, the pilot "Community Ambassador" scheme has successfully worked with people from ethnic minorities to introduce them to the rail network – another area where we could give support and advice.

The two Action Plan documents also give useful statistics such as the number of vehicles in the rail fleet that are now compliant with accessibility requirements (the target date for all vehicles is Jan 2020), and number of stations that have benefitted from the Access for All programme. It's useful to compare the Government's aspirations with your own local stations and trains so that you can speak with authority on what still needs to be done.

PASSENGERS TO BENEFIT FROM OLYMPIC BOOST TO SERVICES

Music lovers and sports fans travelling to gigs and games will benefit from more convenient train services under plans to make it easier for operators to offer more flexible timetables, Transport Minister Norman Baker announced in November.

The changes, which are being introduced after a successful trial during the London 2012 Games, will mean that on special occasions train operators will be able to adjust a small portion of the timetable to better serve passengers without seeking permission from the government. Operators will be allowed to adjust up to 30% of their timetabled services for special occasions. – *DfT press release*

DFT MOVES TO GOV.UK WEBSITE

In November, the Department for Transport (DfT) and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) became the first central government organisations to move onto the new **GOV.UK** website - the new single home for all government services and information. All web addresses have been redirected, so you don't need to update your bookmarks, but you might want to make a note of the new address for the Dept for Transport: www.gov.uk/dft

ACoRP TAKES ON WATER

The Association of Community Rail Partnerships has moved. Their new office address is:

The Old Water Tower, Huddersfield Railway Station, St George's Square, Huddersfield HD1 1JF.

NATIONAL RAIL PASSENGER OPERATORS' MAP - 24th edition

The 2013 edition of Barry Doe's franchise map has just been produced. Anyone may download copies for private or commercial use, including printing at any size, from the 'Rail Operators in the British Isles' section of Barry's [website](#).

LIFE ON THE LINE

An exciting educational project called "Life on the Line" is currently underway in the southern counties of England aimed at encouraging schoolchildren to discover their local rail heritage – details [here](#). David Brace, a committee member of Railfuture Wessex Branch, has been busy researching material about the railways of Hampshire for use in classroom presentations. David is also giving a talk to his local museum group next year on "The coming of the railway to Basingstoke".

ABERYSTWYTH - CARMARTHEN LINE RE-OPENING CAMPAIGN

Cardiff University tutor Mark Worrall has recently launched a petition to the Welsh Government to reopen the Aberystwyth to Carmarthen line. Signed by over 600 people, he had hoped that 1,000 signatures would have been added to it, which would have forced a debate on the subject. However, the WG won't even run a feasibility study before 2015. The government spokesman said: "As the reopening of a railway line between Aberystwyth and Carmarthen was not included in the original National Transport Plan, it was therefore not prioritised for delivery in the period to 2015, and we therefore have no plans to consider a feasibility study as suggested." – *from an article in the Cambrian News, reproduced in SARPA's December newsletter*

STATION ADOPTION SPREADS ACROSS THE SOUTH

We were a bit slow off the mark getting stations adopted along the SW main line between Southampton & Weymouth, but volunteers are making up for lost time. Station adoption groups at New Milton, Christchurch, Wool (hooray!) and Upwey have been going for a few years, and there's a "Friends" group looking after stations on the Brockenhurst-Lymington branch. A station adoption group for Sway was formed last year by retired railway manager Alan Cracknell, and on 8th Dec a new "Friends of Wareham Railway Station" group was launched by local councillor Beryl Ezzard.

Beryl is a member of the Purbeck Community Rail Partnership which is working with the Swanage Railway to bring back a regular passenger service between Swanage and Wareham. It's hoped that a diesel shuttle will start running in 2014 ... a good reason for getting Wareham Station looking smart!

THE £126m ROAD SCHEME

Andy Long of the Bedford Commuters Assn. tells us that a new road scheme was approved as part of the Chancellor's "Autumn Statement" earlier this month. The Government will spend £126.6 million on a two-lane road between the A5 and M1 north of Dunstable and Houghton Regis. At a cost of £126.6 million for 2.6 miles of new road, this equates to **£48.7 million PER MILE** (although the bulk of the cost of this road is no doubt the new grade-separated junction 11A with the M1 motorway).

Andy wonders if an equivalent McNulty-style "Value for Money" exercise should examine the cost-benefit of such an expensive road scheme, adding: "How much of East-West Rail Link east of Bedford could have been delivered for the £126.6 million? However, the scheme could "unlock" the potential of the proposed inter-modal rail freight interchange at Sundon, which is immediately to the east of the proposed Junction 11A on the M1 motorway."

EXPERIMENTAL RAILCARD DISAPPEARS

A useful railcard has been discontinued. It was called "Two Together" and was withdrawn very quietly at the end of May. The card was on trial for a year in the West Midland postal code areas (with a view to going nationwide) but the period of trial has not been extended. The decision was not to continue with it, possibly because of its complexity: the morning time restriction, the need for both holders to travel together, the computer systems requirements to issue tickets, and seat reservations for two people when almost everything else is set up for one. – *from the Stourbridge Line User Group's Newsletter*

TRAVELWATCH NORTHWESTSURVEYS NORTHERN RAIL SERVICES

On 14 Dec, TWNW launched a report analysing 100 journeys made on Northern Rail's services over the previous few months. The report shows that passengers are largely content with their travel experience on Northern trains, but it is of concern that, in 25% of the journeys surveyed, the conductor was not seen at all and tickets not checked. The watchdog recognises that NR has to run its services with a fleet of some of the oldest and timeworn trains running on Britain's railway network and it has had to deal with an unpredicted growth of 40% in passenger numbers. Contact [TWNW admin](#) if you like to receive the report electronically. – *TWNW press release*

PUBLIC LIABILITY INSURANCE

Richard Holland, Chairman & Treasurer of Felixstowe Travel Watch, writes in response to the item about insurance on page 10 of Rail User Express dated 12 Nov:

“As a retired insurance person, I would be shocked if any user group did not have Public Liability insurance. Ours is arranged with Aon Charity Assured Insurance (Insurance House, 125/129 Vaughan Way, Leicester LE1 4SB tel 0845 740 2003) and costs £215 to give £5m Public Liability plus Personal Accident insurance and more, based on 30 active committee/helpers.”

MEMBERSHIP DATABASE SOFTWARE – suggestions please

The Membership Secretary of the Cotswold Line Promotion Group, who is incidentally celebrating 31 years in the post, wants to transfer the CLPG database of just under 2000 members to a new system. The original programme was written in the early 1990s using Microsoft QuickBasic. It's clearly time for a change, so can anyone out in RUGland recommend suitable software? Please respond to ruglink@railfuture.org.uk and I will pass on your suggestions.

And finally ... IT'S THE GREAT RUG-LINK CHRISTMAS QUIZ!

Below is a list of 15 railway stations followed by the names of 15 RUGs that regularly submit items for Rail User Express. If you've been paying attention over recent months, you should have no difficulty in linking the name of each station to the RUG that looks after it. Good luck!

List of Stations:

Derker; Drem; Finstock; Flitwick; Helmsdale; Honley; Maybole; Newtown; Plumley;
Polsloe Bridge; Roose; Rufford; Sunnymeads; Thornton Abbey; Whalley.

List of RUGs:

- 1 Avocet Line Rail Users' Group
- 2 Bedford Commuters' Association
- 3 Cotswold Line Promotion Group
- 4 Friends of the Barton Line
- 5 Friends of the Far North Line
- 6 Furness Line Action Group
- 7 Huddersfield, Penistone and Sheffield Rail Users' Association
- 8 Mid Cheshire Rail Users' Association
- 9 STORM
- 10 Ormskirk, Preston and Southport Travellers' Association
- 11 Rail Action Group East of Scotland
- 12 Ribble Valley Rail
- 13 Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association
- 14 Stranraer to Ayr Line Support Association
- 15 Windsor Lines Passengers' Association

No prizes – the correct answers will be revealed in the next RUGEx.

EVENTS

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

Sun 16 Dec [Penistone Line Partnership](#) Santa Special from Barnsley to Manchester.

Tue 8 Jan Chesham Transport User's Group meet at Chesham Town Hall from 19:30.

Wed 9 Jan Railfuture London & SE ([Eastern Division](#)) meet in Stratford from 18:30.

Sat 12 Jan [SARPA](#) meet at the Royal Oak, Welshpool from 11:30.

Mon 14 Jan [SELRAP](#) open meeting, Herriots Hotel, Skipton from 19:00.

Mon 14 Jan [Bexhill Rail Action Gp](#) meet at Sackville Hotel, Bexhill from 19:00.

Thu 17 Jan Railfuture London & SE ([Sx & Coastway Division](#)) meet in Edenbridge from 18:00.

Sat 2 Feb Railfuture [North West Branch](#) AGM, Savoy Hotel, Blackpool from 11:00; lunch at 13:00.

Sat 2 Feb Railfuture London & SE members' meeting at Friends Meeting Ho, Chelmsford from 10:30.

Tue 5 Feb [SARPA](#) meet at the The Sportsman, Newtown from 18:30.

Mon 11 Feb [Bexhill Rail Action Gp](#) meet at Sackville Hotel, Bexhill from 19:00.

Sat 16 Feb Railfuture London & SE ([Kent Division](#)) meet at The Elephant, Faversham from 14:00.

Tue 19 Feb Chesham Transport User's Group meet at Chesham Town Hall from 19:30.

Sat 23 Feb [Railfuture East Anglia](#) AGM at Friends Meeting Ho, Bury St Edmunds.

Sat 23 Feb [ESTA](#) spring meeting at Saxmundham.

Thu 7 Mar London & SE ([Sx & Coastway Division](#)) meet at The Station, Uckfield from 18:00.

Sat 9 Mar [SARPA](#) meet at the White Lion, Machynlleth from 11:00.

Wed 13 Mar [Meldreth, Shepreth & Foxtton RUG](#) AGM at Meldreth Manor School from 19:30.

Mar 14-15 [ACoRP](#) Seminar about Designated Community Rail Lines. Details to be announced.

Sat 16 Mar Railfuture Lincolnshire AGM at Cleethorpes Town Hall.

Wed 27 Mar 50th Anniversary of the publication of the Beeching Report. Mark the event with your own "reshaping" report!

Sat 13 Apr [SARPA](#) meet at The Cambria, Aberystwyth from 11:00.

Sat 20 Apr Railfuture [North West Branch](#) meet at the Golden Pheasant, Plumley from 13:00.

Sat 27 Apr [Bus Users UK](#) AGM in Oxford

Sat 4 May [ESTA](#) AGM. Venue to be decided.

Tue 7 May [SARPA](#) meet at Railway Station, Shrewsbury from 17:45.

Sat 11 May [Railfuture](#) AGM at the Town Hall, Durham

Sun 19 May National rail timetable change

Sat 18 May [Cotswold Line Promotion Group](#) AGM at the WI Hall, Moreton-in-Marsh from 10:30.

Sat 22 Jun [Railfuture](#) summer conference at the Albemarle Centre, Taunton

Fri 27 Sep [ACoRP](#) Community Rail Awards 2012, Llandudno

Tue 1 Oct Railway Development Society (aka Railfuture) 35th anniversary.

Sat 2 Nov [Railfuture](#) conference, Oxford.

Sun 8 Dec National rail timetable change

More events on the Railfuture and ACoRP websites.

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

This bulletin has been sent by

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