

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.

For details about group affiliation to Railfuture, see website [here](#) (from the "Membership Type" menu, select "RUG").

Guest Organisation of the Month – Witney Oxford Transport Group

This organisation was founded in 2013 with the help of Railfuture to promote track-based alternatives to costly proposals for widening the congested A40 trunk road to the west of Oxford. The three solutions the group has suggested are (i) a metro-style commuter train service between Oxford and Witney, using the Cotswold Line to Yarnton and then a reinstated Witney branch line, (ii) a new concrete road exclusively used by buses and (iii) a revolutionary "tram-train" service, operating partly on the railway and partly on new tracks laid alongside roads.

The group wants a new study to be made into the cause of the problems and possible solutions, which would cost an estimated £10,000 to £20,000. The County Council commissioned a study in 2001 which examined the guided bus and rail reopening options; there have been more housing and workplace developments since then, and hence more traffic, but still no action to relieve congestion. - Read more about the group on their website at <http://witneyoxfordtransport.wordpress.com/> -

A list of Rail Reopening Campaign groups around the UK can be seen [here](#)

We continue with the usual roundup of news items from rail user groups around the UK (some we haven't heard from for some time). As always, I'm grateful to RUGs that send me their magazines and bulletins.

Friends of the West Highland Lines – change of venue for AGM

Due to a canal festival at Banavie on 17th May, the Friends have had to change the location of their AGM to the Alexandra Hotel, Fort William. The speakers at the AGM will be the Rt. Hon Charles Kennedy, M.P. (the group's Hon. President Elect) and James Wilkin, ACoRP Development Officer, Scotland North.

Rail Action Group East of Scotland – next ScotRail operator could help fund new stations

RAGES has met with all five bidders for the next ScotRail franchise and put forward their aims. They asked the bidders to consider contributing to the funding of new stations as the Government's Station Investment Fund would not cover the whole cost. The Scottish Minister for Transport has assured campaigners that the rail study which identified stations for reopening would be shared with the franchise bidders and, after the successful bidder has been announced, RAGES' rail development ideas would be given due consideration.

RAGES now has to engage with the three shortlisted bidders for the East Coast franchise. Meanwhile, local groups are considering whether to put in a bid for a Community Rail Partnership for the North Berwick line, with possibly a similar bid for Dunbar at a later date.

[All the above points were gleaned from RAGES' electronic news bulletin No. 400 – which indicates how often they keep in touch with their membership! - Ed]

Ribble Valley Rail – experimental Sunday service needs our support

There's mixed news from the Ribble Valley. Train performance has improved in the first few weeks of the year, but patronage of the [Ribble Valley Rambler](#) Sunday service has been disappointing: "It's sad that for years we've been campaigning for a service north of Clitheroe and yet when one is provided the passenger numbers are not good." RVR's chairman urges us all to support this service, which runs until 11 May when the DalesRail season begins. The scenery is magnificent and the ornate station canopy at Hellifield has just been restored.

Members were able to air some of their grievances during a questions-and-answers session with Northern Rail in February. The number-one concern appeared to be revenue protection and difficulties in obtaining tickets. Another problem is finding the guard on a crowded train in order to alight at Entwistle, a "request stop" station – why is this not a scheduled stop in peak hours? Northern Rail promises more detailed and accurate information for passengers when a new real-time data system, being trialled on the Harrogate line, is rolled out across the network.

A member who commutes between Clitheroe and Manchester shares his experiences, saying that, when it works, it's an amazing service and Northern Rail staff are both helpful and friendly. However, there are a number of issues that drive him to distraction. The main grumbles are: unreliable and cramped rolling stock (standing room only in the peaks) and regular late running (often the return train terminates short at Blackburn leading to a very late homecoming). He's invited NR's director to come along and experience the daily commute - but alas no response so far.

Campaign for Better Transport : West Yorkshire Group – an invitation to their meetings

Ray Wilkes wrote to say that Railfuture members are welcome at meetings of the CBT's [West Yorkshire Group](#), which covers both rail and bus issues. At their AGM on 15 April, the group hopes to confirm their status as covering North Yorks as well as West Yorks; the AGM will be held in the Methodist Mission, Oxford Place, Leeds (next to the Town Hall). A separate Rail Group meets in the Grove pub on the following Mondays in 2014: 31 Mar, 2 Jun, 28 Jul, 29 Sep, 24 Nov.

Don Valley Railway – three options for a passenger service now on the table

The group's January AGM was an opportunity to review progress to date and agree a campaign strategy for the coming year. The petition for reinstatement of a passenger service attracted over 2500 signatures and was presented to both Stocksbridge Town Council and Sheffield City Council. Work continues on the business plan, and in December, Parry People Movers stepped in with their own designs for an ultra light rapid transit scheme (a third option for consideration).

To progress the first option for a conventional rail passenger service, the DVR plans to lobby for inclusion of their scheme in the franchising process for the new Northern Rail franchise. Secondly, there is the option of extending the Sheffield Supertram to Stocksbridge, which depends on a successful outcome of the Sheffield-Rotherham tram train experiment. However, the PPM intervention remains of interest because it promises to be commercially viable by reducing costs to below revenue.

The DVR will continue to campaign, and to build and demonstrate local support; where gaps exist in the development process, the group is prepared to intervene. The cost of developing a business plan is put at £50k, so the coming year is likely to be a year of fundraising. Among the suggestions are: a virtual charity shop on eBay, a U-Tube video for the project and a cab-ride video (*if you can offer advice on any of these, please reply to ruglink@railfuture.org.uk and I will put you in touch with the DVR - Ed*)

Lichfield Rail Promotion Group – local authorities blinkered by the Stop HS2 campaign!

The LRPG continues to press for the reintroduction regular passenger services between Lichfield and Derby, but find it's difficult to raise any enthusiasm among the local authorities who seem more focussed on trying to stop HS2! Diverted passenger services do run over the line from time to time, showing how beneficial a regular service would be.

Passenger numbers on Trent Valley services between London and the North West continue to grow, as does overcrowding, and the group has persuaded Virgin Trains to look at extra weekend calls for Lichfield. Meanwhile, London Midland is planning timetable adjustments on their Birmingham Cross-City services to improve Trent Valley connections; however, the LRPG is concerned at the number of trains terminating short of Lichfield Trent Valley and has suggested measures which might alleviate the problem during times of disruption.

The group meets from 20:00 on the second Monday of each month in the George IV pub in Bore Street, Lichfield – we're told that numbers attending have grown leading to better discussions. Members recently enjoyed a round trip by train: out to Birmingham and home via Nottingham, where a tram ride and depot visit were promised.

Shrewsbury-Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association – another step towards an hourly service

The Shrewsbury-Aberystwyth Line Liaison Committee has just published the results of a survey (with over 6000 respondents) about projected enhancements on the Cambrian Main Line and has found an overwhelming need for more trains. SARPA is truly impressed, but points out that an hourly service has been talked about since 1997 and was actually written in to the current franchise agreement from 2003 (Welsh Government policy is that it might be included in the new franchise beginning 2018!). There have been many excuses why the hourly service has not happened, and SARPA has long argued that incremental service enhancements are a more practical way forwards. SARPA welcomes the creation of a Cambrian Rail Implementation Group which will look at the costs and feasibility of the SALLC recommendations.

A consultation on the future of the Wales & Borders Rail Franchise gave SARPA the opportunity to air its views. Their wide-ranging comments include:

- rail user organisations like SARPA should have greater input - we have a track record of being proved right!
- a vertically integrated railway which is free from Civil Service and Political interference is required with investment plans that have been drawn up with local communities, passengers and local government.
- a mechanism must be available to allow for changed circumstances and flexibility as opposed to 15 years of stagnation.
- rolling stock should be purchased directly and owned, which is cheaper than leasing.
- the following stations on the Cambrian mainline should be reopened: Bow St, Carno, Abermule and Hanwood.

SARPA notes that "in the to-be-expected fashion" there is no sign of the station refurbishment at Shrewsbury going ahead. They also note that the Welsh Government has announced again the station refurbishment at Aberystwyth: "maybe if they keep announcing it people will believe it's happened!"

Stourbridge Line Users' Group – recent campaign was anything but sluggish!

The beginning of March saw the introduction of a new timetable on the Stourbridge Town branch line – it was revised by London Midland at the request of SLUG: "this achievement must go on record as being the quickest turnaround of any SLUG campaign."

Chiltern Railway offers an excellent choice of trains from Kidderminster to London on Mon-Sat, but bizarrely there's no return service on Saturday evening. SLUG has discovered the stock returns empty to a nearby depot and so the group is petitioning Chiltern for at least one through train from London on Saturday evenings. This is just one of the aspirations included in the group's "New Year

Campaign Agenda” which received widespread coverage in local newspapers. Other items on their agenda include: a new station for Kidderminster, a makeover for Worcester Foregate Street, track modernisation to reduce single line working and junction conflicts, and better value-for-money for passengers.

SLUG’s successful campaign for an improved service for Hartlebury station is now showing benefits as the passenger numbers build up, but there have been some unexpected consequences prompting a Hagley resident to slate SLUG in the local press. The group’s chairman replied defending the group’s reputation and denying bias, pointing out that SLUG were not consulted by London Midland on the details of the timetable prior to its publication. He adds that the problem for Hagley rail users could be ironed out, but it does show that it’s difficult to please everyone.

Bedford to Bletchley Rail Users’ Association – East West Rail Link gets under way

Although it will cause some short-term inconvenience, the BBRUA is pleased that work has started on re-connecting the Marston Vale line with the former Bletchley to Oxford route. The work of the group is not over yet as they see a need to influence the proposed service pattern for the East-West Rail Link and the connecting services to Milton Keynes. The group’s AGM at Bow Brickhill on 2 April will be attended by speakers from the community rail partnership, the EWRL consortium and London Midland, so there will be a chance to catch up on the latest developments.

There’s one piece of good news to report: London Midland will be installing a new information screen on platform 1A at Bedford Midland, something for which the group had been campaigning.

The small heritage centre and shop at Ridgmont station is due to re-open in April, and the BBRUA has agreed to take over responsibility for the provision of volunteers for the project –anyone willing to help out is asked to get in touch.

Bedford Commuters’ Association – living with the Thameslink upgrade

The BCA recognises that the basic principle of diverting services away from London Bridge during the blockade for rebuilding works starting in December is a ‘done deal’ and something they simply have to live with; once details of alternative routes are available, the BCA will be lobbying for any reasonable additions.

Coinciding with the launch of the new Siemens Class 700 units for Thameslink, the BCA and the neighbouring group APTU issued a joint press release which they copied to MPs. The core message was to seek retention of 4 trains per hour from Bedford, Luton and St Albans to East Croydon and Gatwick Airport during the London Bridge station rebuild, and members are asked to continue campaigning on this issue.

Representatives of rail users, including the BCA, had visited the Siemens factory in Germany in the first half of 2013 to view a mock-up of the new trains. It had been apparent that the interior layout was a compromise between high-capacity seating for “metro” services and the comfort one might expect for long-distance journeys. Comments were collated and there was considerable agreement between the representatives; there was much to praise, but also some concerns. Six months later and much to their disappointment it seems that very few of the comments had been taken on board. Yes, some minor points such as coat hooks in toilets, had been addressed, but overall there remains the impression that comfort has been sacrificed to achieve high passenger density. It’s recognised that some issues are a lost cause, but others are worth pursuing, as they could be implemented at a later date by the new franchise operator.

Plans for a much-needed toilet and waiting shelter for Flitwick have been unveiled, and the BCA will be making sure the building lives up to expectations.

Oxon & Bucks Rail Action Committee – “pie-in-the-sky” will soon be tracks on the ground

OBRAC’s newsletter gives a resumé of progress on the EWRL project over the past year. In November 2013, representatives of OBRAC had been delighted to attend an East West Rail Consortium celebration, in London, of the finalisation of the contributions from the many local councils to the project. The event included presentations from the various industry partners involved in the project as well as from politicians. The Chair of the Joint Delivery Board commented that the £500m scheme had originally been dismissed as “pie in the sky”!

Members of the group can keep up to date with the latest construction news by signing up for OBRAC’s regular email bulletins. The challenge for the future is to ensure that the route east of Bedford is settled and the funding is secured.

Meldreth, Shepreth & Foxton Rail Users’ Group – station gardeners being kept busy

March 15th is poppy planting day at Shepreth station. The new-season’s planting is currently being planned for Meldreth station, and the station gardeners have to bear in mind the challenges of keeping the garden watered without a hosepipe.

At their March meeting, members of the group will be updated on Network Rail’s feasibility study for the closure of Foxton level crossing. A “project board” has been set up involving councillors, the rail user group and other interested parties to ensure that all local concerns are taken on board.

Walton on the Naze, Frinton on sea, Kirby Cross and Thorpe le Soken Rail Users’ Association

...otherwise known as “Ontrack Rail Users’ Association”

On 29 Nov 2013, the Association (assisted by local councillors and others) carried out a headcount of passengers boarding and alighting from all trains at Frinton-on-Sea station. On that day, it was found that 345 passengers boarded and 355 alighted from 9 trains, a total footfall of 700 passengers. Subsequent analysis suggests that this could give an annual footfall of around 200,000 to 220,000 for the station, some 15% to 25% higher than the official figure from the Office of Rail Regulation.

Extrapolating results is difficult for Frinton as, besides the usual variation over the week, there is much seasonal travel, including school trips in term time and exchange students from the continent in May/June and September. Furthermore, Frinton and Walton-on-the Naze receive a significant number of summer visitors. Last summer, the Association carried out a survey of the most popular services bringing day trippers to the coast which suggests that over July and August they contributed around 17,000 to the footfall at Frinton station (with a slightly higher number for Walton). Charter trains have also run to Frinton in recent summers, bringing large groups for a day out by the sea.

The Association is very grateful to all those who assisted in this headcount which lasted from 05.30 until midnight in order to include the first and last trains of the day. Further work is necessary to improve the accuracy of these observations and also to extend the work to other stations on the Sunshine Coast Line. – *from a report in Railfuture’s Rail East publication*

Pembrokeshire Rail Travellers’ Association – improved reliability...but oh, those wretched Pacers!

We haven’t heard from the PRTA for some time – they’ve just sent me their two most recent newsletters so we can catch up with happenings in South West Wales. We’re told that the Milford Haven Rail Passengers’ group is no longer a separate entity and is now part of the PRTA.

In the spring of 2013, the PRTA was looking forward to the completion of line redoubling between Llanelli and Swansea, and was hoping that it would mean faster schedules, fewer delays and better connections with Paddington trains at Swansea, and perhaps even an extra train or two. The group was able to give credit to Arriva Trains Wales for improving the reliability of their trains compared with 2012.

Members were able to join in celebrations on Sept 7th for the 150th anniversary of the opening of the line to Milford Haven. A group of actors arrived by train in period costumes to be greeted by the town band and various dignitaries. There were displays and exhibitions around the town for people to enjoy: “we all look forward to the 200th anniversary!”

Class 143 Pacer units are increasingly being used on local services in Pembrokeshire, and a PRTA member was moved to write a letter of complaint to ATW after being jolted around on one of these “cattle trucks”. Having travelled by train in nearly every western European country over a period of thirty years, the writer concludes that these are the worst trains he’s ever experienced anywhere!

The newsletter editor highly recommends the Traveline website for journey planning: “it continues to improve and it throws up all sorts of options you might not have considered.”

An important function the PRTA is able to perform in the community is to compile and circulate up-to-date information about local rail services and fares. Their *Rail Fares* guide runs to four pages and begins with the warning that the situation is very complex even after some simplification. There’s a lot of advice on bargain fares - the £5 Pembrokeshire Railcard, available to residents, is especially recommended: “two day trips to Carmarthen and you’ll save the cost of the card!”

Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways – much talk and many promises, but nothing to show

This is another group we haven’t heard from for some time - Chairman Bernard Lane has just written to us with a few points:

“There isn’t a lot of progress to date, but at least the Bristol Metro concept is still being talked about! The main area of debate is the reluctance of Bristol City Council to open two stations on Filton Bank when it is quadrupled - they keep quoting the problem of stopping trains on a slope saying freight trains would stall etc. which is nonsense. It is all to do with NR not wanting stations too close at Horfield and Ashley Down.

“Another subject of debate is the Henbury loop which is again being hampered by lack of will power on the political side locally, although Charlotte Leslie MP is campaigning vigorously on this. It appears that the excuses range from lack of signals, track and the heavy freight the Port will be sending up the line. There is talk of reconnecting the old ICI site when it is developed as a rubbish burning power station, but the sidings are being removed at the moment. The reinstatement of passenger services on the Portishead line is being promised for 2019 ... although at times we wonder if it will ever happen!

“We await news on the electrification details - it appears the wires will only go as far as Bath Road bridge and the new platforms in the historic Wyatt trainshed are still not secure. However there are some imaginative plans for Temple Meads station and the former Diesel yard; a new entrance on the north side of the trainshed could become the main entrance to the station.”

Chesham & District Transport Users’ Group – suffering cancellations and silly announcements

The group is concerned that trains continue to be cancelled at short notice and without explanation. Experience suggests that, when services are disrupted, Chesham trains are being cut in favour of Amersham services, despite assurances from staff at the Baker Street Control Centre that everything possible was done to ensure Chesham services ran reliably.

Commuters continue to be infuriated by announcements of a “Good Service” when there was clearly disruption, and by announcements that “Frequent Services Operate from This Station” when, at best, trains are every 30 mins.

The contract to modernise signalling on London Underground including the Metropolitan Line by 2018 has run into trouble, and so there’s a worry that the re-tendering process will have an adverse effect on the timescale.

Windsor Lines Passengers' Association – two decades to replace a footbridge

The WLPA's newsletter begins with the strange tale of how work on replacing a footbridge at North Sheen has only just been completed ... 20 years after it began! Construction was suspended at the time of rail privatisation. The new bridge might still be in a half-finished state had it not been for the WLPA raising the matter at every opportunity.

After suffering a weekend of bus substitution between Hounslow and Egham, the group suggests that a reduction in fare would have been appropriate: "indeed, surely any bus substitution should trigger a fare reduction." Another disappointment is the roll-out of information screens that show how many minutes to the next train instead of the usual expected time and actual time. It's felt that this is a ploy to hide late running, and is rather insulting as it implies people cannot work out the difference between actual and expected time.

There has understandably been considerable disruption to services of late due to fallen trees and flooding, but the information screens have not always been helpful – the WLPA's view is that the system should be switched off rather than display inaccurate information.

Finally, we're told that the pressure for a half hourly service on the Hounslow loop is building with many groups and local authorities in support.

[To answer a question posed in the WLPA's newsletter, does anyone know whether lifts can remain active when a station is unstaffed? – please reply to ruglink@railfuture.org.uk]

Friends of the Lymington to Brockenhurst Line – possibility of steam train visiting the branch

At the group's AGM in February, members heard of possible plans for a steam train tour from their line to destinations yet to be decided, but Bristol, Oxford and Worcester were among the suggestions. Before that happens, the group will be enjoying a trip to the Milestones heritage museum in Basingstoke on 26th April, and hearing a talk on 7th April entitled "the Inside Story of the Venice Simplon Orient Express" from a rail expert who was involved in reviving the historic train.

Torbay Line Rail Users' Group – line via Okehampton would leave Torbay out on a limb

After I circulated some information about the future of rail services west of Exeter following the devastation at Dawlish, Roger Dixon replied with a viewpoint from Torbay:

"The idea of reopening Exeter - Plymouth north of Dartmoor is a good idea. It should carry sufficient local traffic from Tavistock, Okehampton, Crediton to make it financially viable. It will also provide a diversionary route for the main line for a day or two.

"However this line DOES NOT provide a substitute for the main line. In particular it does not serve Torbay. Torbay, with a population of 135000, is the second largest conurbation west of Bristol. Its economy depends heavily on tourism. It has over 4 million visitors a year - one and a quarter million of these are overnight visitors, the largest of any resort in the country.

"The only viable option for an alternative main line west of Exeter is an inland link between Exeter and Newton Abbot thus serving Torbay and Plymouth. The existing coastal line should be maintained as a secondary route. Network Rail have stated that they are only considering the north of Dartmoor route as an alternative main line - there is a strong suspicion that this is just political posturing. An idea that severs Torbay from the national rail network is not a credible option."

...news from Railfuture follows...

RAILFUTURE ARGUES FOR FARE INCREASES TO BE LINKED TO CPI – from a recent press release

January's inflation figures have highlighted the unfairness of recent rail fare rises. The figure for CPI is just 1.9%, whereas the figure for RPI, which is used to set rail fares, is 2.8%. "So in the real world, prices are going up by just 1.9%, and, if they're lucky, people will be getting wage or pension increases based on that figure" said Bruce Williamson from Railfuture "Compare that to the recent rail fare rises of 3.1%. That is a massive difference, and the government cannot justify continuing to set rail fares on the higher RPI figure. The government routinely claims that CPI is its preferred measure of inflation, so why won't it use CPI for rail fare increases?"

"What's more, these differences get compounded year-on-year, meaning that in real terms rail fares are much more expensive than they were ten years ago, making a much less affordable for ordinary people. This is why Railfuture will continue to call for fares to be based on CPI. Having the most expensive rail fares in Europe is not something to be proud of"

RAILFUTURE PIONEERS SECURE ONLINE VOTING – system is being offered to rail user groups

A system has been put in place that enables members to vote online in order to elect representatives to the Board of Railfuture – this is in addition to the traditional methods of voting by post or in person at the Society's AGM. You can see what the voting page looks like by clicking on [this link](#). It's hoped that the online option will encourage many more people to become involved in the election process.

Once the system has been thoroughly assessed as part of the April 2014 election process, the facility will be offered to Railfuture's affiliated rail user groups so that they can take advantage of secure voting technology for their own ballots. Anyone who might be interested in this offer is asked to contact Railfuture Director, Jerry Alderson, via jerry.alderson@railfuture.org.uk.

RAILFUTURE EAST ANGLIA

The year 2013/14 has been a busy one for the Branch. Members had delivered leaflets to households and collected signatures for a petition in connection with the campaign to re-open the line to Wisbech. A 10-page briefing paper about route options on the East-West Rail Link towards Cambridge was published and distributed to local politicians and the media. Also, there were a number of developments in the area necessitating comment and Branch support including the new, regular train service for Manea, the development of a new station at Cambridge Science Park, the remodelling of Peterborough station and a new bus link for Saffron Walden ("a good start – but much work remains to truly tempt those currently going by car to Audley End station").

The Branch had sent a list of aspirations in response to the consultation on Network Rail's programme for Control Period 5 (2014-19). Their wish-list includes: Ely North junction, third track in the Chelmsford area, four-tracking between Huntingdon and Peterborough, and continued investment in railfreight. The Branch is looking forward to hosting Railfuture's summer conference, which will be held in Cambridge on Sat 21 June.

RAILFUTURE WALES

For some time now a group of people in the Lampeter area and wider afield have been campaigning for the re-opening of the line between Carmarthen and Aberystwyth, and have asked the Cambrian Lines Branch of Railfuture for support. We're told that the group, calling itself [Traws Link Cymru](#), is very well organised and has engendered a great deal of support; it's understood they will also be campaigning for the reinstatement of the Afonwen-Caernarfon-Bangor line as part of a bigger strategic framework.

Representatives of Railfuture Wales attended the launch of a document entitled "The Future of the Wales and Borders Franchise" published by the Welsh Assembly's Business & Enterprise Committee, and, on the whole, they were impressed with its content. A "not-for-dividend" business model

receives much attention in the report; the Railfuture Wales representatives say that, if such a company is to bid for the franchise, the Assembly needs to get its skates on and set it up right away. In any case, the Assembly has yet to obtain the powers to manage the franchising process.

Commenting on the unusual winter weather, the Branch thinks that the disruption caused will at least serve to highlight the value of the railways to the public.

RAILFUTURE SEVERNSIDE

On 13th of Feb, John Hassall and Nigel Bray of Railfuture met Transport Minister Baroness Kramer to present their proposal for an integrated transport authority for Somerset. "Many cities in this country have much better public transport than rural counties such as Somerset" said John. "This is because their transport is integrated, with things such as joint ticketing and coordinated timetabling. An ITA would allow us to do this, and hopefully attract more funding too, meaning that transport users in Somerset will get a much better deal" "Somerset County Council seems content to just let public transport try to run itself. This "hands off" attitude is not good enough; it can't deliver the decent public transport that we need, which is why we are pushing for an ITA"

Nigel Bray added: "There's a real lack of information and co-ordination between different modes of transport. If Central Government thinks that the County Council doesn't have any ideas about how to promote and develop rail, there's a real danger that train services in Somerset will suffer."

– from a Railfuture press release

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

ORGANISATIONAL REVIEW OF DEPARTMENT FOR TRANSPORT RAIL FUNCTIONS

The Government has just released a document with the above title, originally published in Dec 2013. It contains recommendations for government rail functions including structures, governance, pay and rewards following an organisational review. You can read the document [here](#).

RAIL REGULATOR LAUNCHES TICKETING MARKET REVIEW

The Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) has launched a review of the rail ticketing market to understand whether arrangements for selling rail tickets are encouraging innovation and competition to the benefit of passengers. The review will focus particularly on the industry arrangements and practices with respect to the range and type of ticket products that train companies sell, the sales channels and the third party market for ticket selling. The ORR welcome stakeholders' feedback, and the deadline for comment is 21 Mar 2014. There's an opportunity to attend a workshop in London on 8th May. Details [here](#).

The ORR's Station Usage data for 2012-2013 (detailing the total numbers of people entering, exiting and changing at each station in Great Britain) has just been published and is available here .

PASSENGER AWARENESS OF COMPENSATION AND REFUND RIGHTS

The Office of Rail Regulation has just published a [study](#) into how well passengers are aware of their rights to compensation when trains are delayed and cancelled. Their study shows that:

- over 75% of rail passengers 'do not know very much' or 'nothing at all' about their rights to a refund or compensation when trains are delayed or cancelled; and
- passengers believe that train operators could do more to promote compensation rights awareness - 74% of the study participants said that train companies do 'not very much' or 'nothing at all' to proactively provide information about compensation when there are delays.

The study also sets out passengers' suggestions for more effective ways of raising awareness, such as prominently displayed compensation information on websites; posters at stations; information on the back on tickets; automated claims processes; and compensation in cash or vouchers that can be used online.

This year ORR will work with industry to develop a code of practice for train companies, setting out what ticketing information should be provided to customers to help them make informed choices. The Code will provide clarity on what information passengers can expect from their train companies, including information on the different types of fares, any restrictions that apply, and key terms and conditions, such as compensation and refund rights.

The Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC) has developed a 'toolkit' for operators setting out a range of measures they could adopt to make passengers more aware of their compensation and refund rights.

– from ORR press release

[Many rail user groups, particularly those representing commuters, are very good at telling their members about the compensation they are entitled to in the event of disruption – some even distribute claim forms and negotiate the level of refund for season ticket holders. - Ed]

PASSENGERS BEING TREATED UNFAIRLY

Passenger Focus is concerned about the unfair treatment meted out by train companies on passengers who have made an innocent mistake when travelling, and they've taken up the issue with the transport minister.

Each year PF handles thousands of appeals by passengers who are unhappy with the way their train company has handled their complaint. They've found that passengers using the rail network face very inconsistent treatment when travelling without a 'valid' ticket. Passengers who get it wrong can find themselves facing a hefty bill, or in some of the worst cases, criminal prosecution.

In their letter to the transport minister they've included a number of examples of poor behaviour by train companies, who seem to have far more autonomy and legal power than most other commercial industries. This includes threatening passengers with prosecution for errors such as forgetting their railcard, losing one of their tickets but having other proof of purchase, or being unable to pick up booked tickets. Sometimes the threat of criminal prosecution seems to be used as a form of debt collection by train companies.

PF has argued that this approach to justice must be administered according to clear guidelines, be accountable, give passengers a fair hearing and not assume everyone is guilty.

– item in PF's Passenger Voice newsletter

CHECK HISTORIC TRAIN PERFORMANCE IN DETAIL

A website has recently been launched that allows users to check the historic performance of their trains. This was created using Network Rail open data feeds under licence. It allows people to check performance of their trains down to individual services over a specified time period. It may help you avoid services that are often delayed. It will certainly assist rail user groups when confronting train operators over poor performance! The tool can be found at <http://recenttraintimes.co.uk/>

COMMUNITY RAIL TEAM AXED

Rail user groups will be disappointed with Network Rail's decision to axe its 2-person Community Rail team as part of a reported 15% reduction in staff prior to the start of Control Period 5.

The decision has led to widespread criticism and concern across the community rail movement, and provoked the Association of Community Rail Partnerships to protest to NR's Chief Executive and to the Office of Rail Regulation and Dept. for Transport. Transport Minister Baroness Kramer has expressed her concern that the move might jeopardise delivery of the DfT's Community Rail Strategy. Already, CRPs report that they have been told that NR's attendance at meetings can no longer be guaranteed.

Network Rail spokesman, Kevin Groves, told Modern Railways (according to their article) that although the unit is being disbanded, "our community rail endeavours continue". Strategic issues will apparently be the responsibility of Jo Kaye and her team, while regional activity will be devolved to the ten routes. *– report from Andy Long based on an article in Modern Railways*

TWO TOGETHER RAILCARD

The new Two Together railcard was launched on 3rd March. With the railcard, two named people over 16 will be able to travel together and receive a discount of one-third off all fares, at all times except between 0430 and 0930 on Monday - Friday. You don't have to be related! The card will cost £30, but a discount of £3 can be obtained online at <http://twotogether-railcard.co.uk/leaflet> by entering the code LEAFLET3. The card will also be available from station ticket offices. Each person must provide a passport photograph. The card can only be used when the two named people travel together so does not replace any existing railcards.

The Two Together railcard was trialled for a period of time last year in the West Midlands, and was obviously successful. Railfuture welcomes its introduction nationally - it fills the gap between Young Persons, Senior and Family railcards, is one step towards a National Rail Card and will make the cost of rail travel more competitive with the cost of two people travelling together by car.

CAMPAIGN LAUNCH CALLS FOR SCOTTISH 'RAIL REVOLUTION'

On 3rd March, Transform Scotland launched a new campaign to build support for a 'rail revolution' in Scotland stating that Scotland's rail network urgently requires investment and upgrading to provide travellers with a safe, civilised and sustainable mode of transport, to support the Scottish economy and to help Scotland protect its environment and meet its legally-binding climate change targets.

The 'Inter-City Express' campaign aims to transform rail travel in Scotland over the next fifteen years, bringing all seven of Scotland's cities closer together with a 'safe, civilised and sustainable mode of transport that is fit for the 21st Century'. The key features of the campaign are to:

- Extend planned rail electrification from Perth to Dunblane, in conjunction with doubling and electrifying the Inverness to Perth line, transforming its capacity and capability for both passenger and freight traffic
- Reduce journey times from Inverness, Aberdeen and Dundee to the Central Belt through electrification and extensive doubling of the relevant rail lines
- Bring the long-neglected single track rail line from Aberdeen to Inverness into the 21st Century through a programme of upgrading and modernisation
- Build and electrify a new direct rail link from Perth to Edinburgh, cutting up to 35 minutes off journey times from Inverness and Perth to Edinburgh
- Create a new Inter-City rail hub at Perth station as a catalyst for transport connectivity, urban regeneration and economic recovery

The campaign will be seeking support from across the whole of the country, from Scottish businesses and business groups, such as Chambers of Commerce, Local Authorities and Regional Transport Partnerships, politicians, media outlets, campaign and community groups and other organisations and individuals in order to move forward its vision of a better transport future for Scotland.

It's claimed that the rail route from Perth to Edinburgh is currently not fit for purpose as an inter-city route. The ambition should be for a dualled and electrified Highland Main Line as only this level of investment will allow the sustainable, passenger and freight options to compete with the road alternative.

– from a Transform Scotland press release

- **Transform Scotland** is a national sustainable transport alliance, bringing together rail, bus and shipping operators, local authorities, national environment and conservation groups, businesses and local transport groups.
- **Inter-City Express** is a joint campaign set up by Transform Scotland, Rail Freight Group, Capital Rail Action Group, the Friends of the Far North Line and the Scottish Association for Public Transport. Details at www.transformscotland.org.uk/intercityexpress.

SERVICE DETAILS FOR THE BORDERS RAILWAY

Transport Scotland has unveiled the times and prices of services on the Borders to Edinburgh railway which is due to reopen in 2015. It said the plans, subject to sign-off from the industry, meant passengers should be able to travel "end-to-end" for less than £10. Transport Scotland said the average fare across the line between Edinburgh and Tweedbank would be just £3.50. There will be two trains per hour in each direction throughout peak times with an hourly service on Sundays. The earliest weekday train from the Borders leaves Tweedbank at 05:20, reaching Edinburgh at 06:15. The latest service from Waverley departs at 23:54.

Tom Curry, vice chairman for [Campaign for Borders Rail](#), said it was delighted with the pricing: "The fare structure coupled with the half-hourly timetable will make the railway competitive with bus and car and will no doubt encourage a great number of people to switch to using the train," he said. "The confirmation that the first service of the day from Tweedbank will make a connection with the 0625 Edinburgh to Kings Cross is a welcome bonus coming from the timetable consultation and will give Borders business folk a sustainable route to London. At the other end of the day, late night services will also help make passengers' days more flexible and will be particularly crucial when it comes to sporting events and the Edinburgh Festivals." – story on BBC Scotland spotted by Andy Macfarlane

RE-OPENING COLNE-SKIPTON RAILWAY LINE 'WOULD BE FINANCIALLY VIABLE'

Reopening the railway line between Colne and Skipton would be financially viable, according to a new report. Consultants ARUP were appointed to look at the social and economic case for reinstating the line by campaigners from SELRAP (Skipton-East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership), who are hoping to restore the line. The findings from the feasibility study will be revealed at the group's AGM on 10th March. The AGM will be held at St Bartholomew's Church, Albert Road, Colne, from 7pm - all are welcome to attend.

ARUP concludes that a station could be established at Earby, with Barnoldswick served by a new Parkway Station near Kelbrook. More than 430,000 people would be expected to use the new line annually and the benefits of the new route could be 6.5 times the total costs. Long distance, inter-regional services and freight could increase that figure still further.

– Lancashire Telegraph

CHECK YOUR AFFILIATIONS!

One of the rail user groups we hear from regularly was surprised to learn that they weren't affiliated to Railfuture. They assumed that they were, and nobody is quite sure whether they'd forgotten to join or whether their membership had lapsed.

I try to keep the [List of Rail User Groups](#) on Railfuture's website up-to-date, so if there isn't an "A" against the name of your group, you need to raise the issue of affiliating to Railfuture at your next committee meeting - thanks! As a reminder, the benefits of affiliation include:

- RailWatch magazine sent quarterly,
- Access to funding from Railfuture's Rail Defence Fund,
- A chance to enter the annual Rail User Group awards competition,
- Discounts at Railfuture conferences,
- The opportunity to serve on Railfuture's expert committees, and to meet with senior politicians and rail-industry managers.

TRANS PENNINE EXPRESS TRAIN FLEET CUT TO PROVIDE TRAINS FOR SOUTH

TravelWatch NorthWest issued a press release drawing attention to the news that the TransPennine Express fleet will be cut by 13% in 2015 when 9 out of its 70 train units will be moved to the South of England to run for Chiltern Rail.

Labelling the move as "crazy and scandalous", John Owen of TravelWatch North West said, "This is another example of a South East based government not caring a jot for train passengers in the North of England. Trans Pennine is already the most over-crowded train company in the UK and will now lose 13% of its train units. And the stupid part of it is that the decision appears to have been made by the Dept. for Transport in cahoots with the train leasing company. First Group - the TPE operator - doesn't seem to have had a say in the matter."

The trains being transferred are currently used mostly on the Manchester – Leeds - Hull routes and will not be replaced. Plans to strengthen train capacity on the Manchester - Leeds corridor look like they will have to be scrapped and timetable planners will have to go back to the drawing board. There would seem to be little scope to relieve the massive over-crowding being experienced on all TPE routes at all times of day.

"COMMONS JEERING OVER LOCOMOTIVES RELOCATION PLAN FROM NORTH TO SOUTH"

This incredibly silly headline is from the Bradford Telegraph and Argus. The story beneath the headline is about a question in the House of Commons from Jack Straw MP following the decision to re-allocate nine trains from the TransPennine Express franchise.

The story continues: "Most observers believed the laughter was because Mr Straw, the Blackburn MP, has a home in the Chilterns – to where the locomotives (*sic*) will be moved."

Rail users will be laughing (or maybe crying) for other reasons.

... the Events listing follows (lots to keep you busy!) ...

EVENTS

National & regional rail events are highlighted in **yellow**. Community & environmental events are in **purple**.
Railfuture events are in **green**, and rail user group representatives are welcome to attend!

- Mon 10 Mar** [BRAG](#) meet at Conquest House, Bexhill from 19:00.
- Mon 10 Mar** [Lichfield Rail Promotion Group](#) AGM at Lichfield Guildhall from 19:30. Guest speakers from London Midland.
- Mon 10 Mar** [Watford Rail Users' Group](#) Open Meeting at Watford Town Hall from 18:45.
- Mon 10 Mar** [SELRAP](#) AGM at St Bartholomew's Church, Colne, from 19:00 - all welcome to attend.
- Wed 12 Mar** [Railfuture London & SE](#) (Eastern division) meeting in Stratford from 18:30.
- Wed 12 Mar** [Meldreth, Shepreth & Foxton RUG](#) meet at Melbourn Village College from 19:30.
- 14/15 Mar** [European Passenger Federation](#) 2014 Conference at the Palazzo Lombardia, Milan.
- Sat 15 Mar** [Railfuture Lincs](#) AGM at Market Rasen.
- Sat 15 Mar** [Ribble Valley Rail](#) AGM at Trinity Church Hall, Clitheroe from 14:00. Spkr from Lancs CC.
- Tue 18 Mar** [Oxon & Bucks Rail Action Cttee](#) AGM at Network Rail HQ, Milton Keynes from 18:30.
- Wed 19 Mar** [FoBL](#) will be at the Sloop, Barton-on-Humber from 18:00 for 20:00 meeting start.
- Wed 19 Mar** [Marshlink Action Group](#) AGM at Rye Town Hall from 19:15.
- Thu 20 Mar** [Harrogate Line Users](#) meet representatives from one of bidders for East Coast franchise
- Thu 20 Mar** [Traws Link Cymru](#) meet at Victoria Hall, Lampeter from 19:30
- 19/20 Mar** [ACoRP](#) Designated Lines seminar, Blackpool
- Sat 22 Mar** "[TransWilts Link](#)" joint meeting of transport groups, The Laverton, Westbury from 10:00
- Wed 26 Mar** [ACoRP](#) Station Adoption seminar, Carrs Lane Church Centre, Birmingham
- Thu 27 Mar** [West Wilts Rail Users' Group](#) AGM at Bradford-on-Avon.
- Sat 29 Mar** [Railfuture E Mids](#) AGM at Loughborough.
- Mon 31 Mar** [E Sussex Rail Alliance](#)/SHRIMP Rail Summit in Hastings with Transport Minister & MP
- Tue 1 Apr** The start of Network Rail's Control Period 5 (2014-2019)
- Tue 1 Apr** [Chesham & District TUG](#) meets at Chesham Town Hall from 19:30.
- Tue 1 Apr** [Saltburn Line User Group](#) AGM at the Conservative Club, Saltburn from 19:15.
- Tue 1 Apr** [SARPA](#) meet at the White Lion, Caersws from 18:45.
- Wed 2 Apr** [BBRUA](#) AGM at the Pavilion, Bow Brickhill from 19:15 with guest speakers.
- Sat 5 Apr** [Railfuture Wessex Branch](#) AGM in Southampton.
- Mon 7 Apr** [Ribble Valley Rail](#) meet at the New Inn, Clitheroe from 19:30.
- Sat 12 Apr** [Railfuture North West](#) committee meeting at Littleborough Station from 13:00
- Sat 12 Apr** [Railfuture West Midlands](#) AGM at Carrs Lane Church Centre, Birmingham from 10:30
- Mon 14 Apr** [Avocet Line Users](#) meeting with guest speaker: ret'd rail manager Chris Green, 19:00.
- Mon 14 Apr** [BRAG](#) meet at Conquest House, Bexhill from 19:00.
- Tue 15 Apr** [CBT West Yorks](#) AGM at the Methodist Mission, Oxford Place, Leeds from 19:30.
- Mon 21 Apr** 25th anniversary of the saving of the Settle-Carlisle Line.
- Thu 24 Apr** Fourth Regional Seminar of [Active Travel](#), Manchester
- Sat 26 Apr** [Friends of the Settle-Carlisle](#) AGM at Hallmark Hotel, Carlisle from 11:45.
- Sat 26 Apr** [Railfuture London & SE](#) open meeting from 10:30 with AGM after lunch, Univ of London. Guest speakers: Chris Austin and representatives from the Spa Valley and Kent & E Sx Railways.
- Sat 26 Apr** [Railfuture Wales \(South\)](#) AGM at Quaker Meeting House, Charles St, Cardiff from 13:15

Tue 6 May [Saltburn Line User Group](#) meet at the Conservative Club, Saltburn from 19:15.

Tue 6 May [SARPA](#) meet at the Railway Station, Shrewsbury from 17:45.

Wed 7 May [BBRUA](#) Heritage Walk around historic Berkhamstead with pub lunch.

Thu 8 May [ORR](#) workshop on retail market for tickets in London from 09:30; registration necessary.

Sat 10 May [Railway Development Society \(Railfuture\) AGM](#) at the Quaker Meeting House, Sheffield from 11:00. Guest speaker: Shadow Transport Sec, Mary Creagh MP. Also speakers from RUGs.

Sat 10 May Provisional date for [PENRUG](#)'s AGM in Thetford.

Mon 12 May [Ribble Valley Rail](#) meet at the New Inn, Clitheroe from 19:30.

Tue 13 May [ACoRP](#) members' spring seminar for the North of England, held in York.

Tue 13 May [Chesham & District TUG](#) meets at Chesham Town Hall from 19:30.

Fri 16 May [Edenbridge & District Rail Travellers' Assn.](#) open AGM at the WI Hall, Edenbridge, 19:00.

Sat 17 May [ESTA](#) AGM at St Mary's Church Hall, Halesworth.

Sat 17 May [FoWHL](#) lunch and AGM at the Alexandra Hotel, Fort William from 12:30. Guest speakers: Charles Kennedy MP and a representative from ACoRP.

Sun 18 May National rail timetable change.

Sun 18 May [FoBL](#) "Start of Summer Service" lunch at the No 1 Inn, Cleethorpes from 12:00.

Tue 20 May [ACoRP](#) members' spring seminar for the South of England, held in London

Wed 21 May [ACoRP](#) conference "Community Rail in the City"

Wed 21 May [FoBL](#) will be at the No 1, Cleethorpes for 19:00 meeting start.

Thu 22 May UK Local and European Community elections

Tue 27 May [Felixstowe Travel Watch](#) AGM, Salvation Army, Cobbold Rd, Felixstowe from 19:30.

Fri 30 May 175th anniversary celebrations at Derby station

Sat 31 May [Friends of the Far North Line](#) AGM and conference at the Conon Bridge Hotel, 10 mins from Conon Bridge station, from 11:30.

1-7 Jun [Volunteers' Week](#) - an annual event which celebrates the fantastic contribution millions of volunteers make across the UK. At the very least, an excuse for a press release about your group!

Tue 3 Jun [Saltburn Line User Group](#) meet at the Conservative Club, Saltburn from 19:15.

Thu 5 Jun [World Environment Day](#) - a global day for environmental action and to encourage support for sustainable development.

Fri 6 Jun [Edenbridge & Dist. Rail Travellers' Assn](#) open AGM at the Eden Centre, Four Elms Rd Edenbridge from 19:00.

Mon 9 Jun [Ribble Valley Rail](#) meet at the New Inn, Clitheroe from 19:30.

Sat 14 Jun [SARPA](#) meet at the Railway Hotel, Borth from 11:45.

Sun 15 Jun [Avocet Line Users](#) outing to the Dartmoor Railway.

Sat 21 Jun [Railfuture summer conference](#) at the University Centre, Cambridge from 10:45. As always, an impressive line-up of speakers is promised.

Sat 21 Jun [Railfuture North West](#) committee meeting at the Station Hotel, Preston from 13:00

Sat 21 Jun (Belated) D-Day commemorations on the Lymington-Brockenhurst Line

Tue 24 Jun [Chesham & District TUG](#) meets at Chesham Town Hall from 19:30.

Tue 1 Jul [Saltburn Line User Group](#) meet at the Conservative Club, Saltburn from 19:15.

Sat 12 Jul [SARPA](#) meet at Tywyn Wharf, Talylyn Rlwy, from 11:45.

Wed 16 Jul FoBL AGM at the Sloop, Barton-on-Humber from 18:00 for 20:00 meeting start.

Tue 5 Aug [Chesham & District TUG](#) meets at Chesham Town Hall from 19:30.

Tue 5 Aug [SARPA](#) meet at The Sportsman, Newtown from 18:45.

Tue 16 Sep [Chesham & District TUG](#) meets at Chesham Town Hall from 19:30.

Mon 22 Sep [European Car-Free Day](#). A chance to promote the alternatives!

Thu 2 Oct [ACoRP](#) Community Rail Awards ceremony in Scarborough.

Sat 4 Oct [TravelWatch SouthWest](#) general meeting, College of Arts & Tech, Taunton from 10:30.

Tue 28 Oct [Chesham & District TUG](#) meets at Chesham Town Hall from 19:30.

Sat 1 Nov [Railfuture autumn conference](#) and RUG Awards, Univ of Westminster, London

Wed 5 Nov [ACoRP](#) Station Adoption seminar, ScotRail offices, Waterloo Street, Glasgow

Tue 11 Nov [ACoRP](#) members' autumn seminar for the North of England, held in York

Tue 18 Nov [ACoRP](#) members' autumn seminar for the South of England, held in London.

Tue 9 Dec [Chesham & District TUG](#) meets at Chesham Town Hall from 19:30.

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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