

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, please contact the Membership Secretary

Railfuture needs your views on the issues which the railways face, what changes or developments are needed to resolve them, and how Railfuture can help. This will help decide where to focus campaigning and publicity effort. – see page 8 for further details.

GUEST RAIL USER GROUP OF THE MONTH – Friends of the Brigg and Lincoln Lines

This group has just been set up to promote services on the Sheffield (Midland)-Worksop-Retford-Gainsborough-Lincoln line and the branch line from Gainsborough via Brigg and Grimsby to Cleethorpes.

Northern Rail operates trains on the Sheffield Midland-to-Lincoln route, and from Sheffield Midland to Cleethorpes on Saturdays only. FoB&LL argues that the Lincoln service needs to be improved and the Cleethorpes service should operate 6 days a week. They also want to see an end to the practice whereby Network Rail doesn't allow trains on the Sheffield-to-Lincoln route until 13:30 on Sundays. In the meantime, the group sees its role as encouraging more people to use existing services so that they can build the case for improvements in the run up to renewal of the Northern franchise.

An infrequent East Midlands Trains service between Doncaster and Peterborough also runs over the Gainsborough-Lincoln section, and again FoB&LL wants to see additional trains on this service. Station facilities across the region need updating, and some stations (most notably: Brigg and Gainsborough Central) need complete refurbishment to bring them into the 21st century.

Further details and a comprehensive picture gallery are to be found on the group's website at <http://e-voice.org.uk/friendsofbrigg-lincolnlines/>

We continue with the usual roundup of news items from rail user groups around the UK, starting at the top end and working down. There are rather a lot, so I've had to hold over a few until next time. As always, I'm grateful to RUGs that send me their magazines and bulletins.

Friends of the West Highland Lines – Charles Kennedy MP to be new Honorary President

Three members of FoWHL accepted an invitation from the Scottish Transport Minister to meet at Holyrood to discuss some of the enhancements to services and infrastructure along the line that might be possible under the new ScotRail franchise. The Minister was supportive of ideas to improve rolling stock and marketing for tourist services, and very enthusiastic about community engagement via partnership arrangements.

Community Rail Partnerships are only just getting underway in Scotland, and two development officers have been appointed: one for the North (which includes the West Highland Lines) and one for the South. The North-area officer has already set up his office in the former signal box at Upper Tyndrum, and has been busy arranging station adoptions. Formal CRP agreements are still some way off: "all this means a lot more work for your committee."

Back in the late 1990s, FoWHL had discussed renovating Dalmally Station on the Oban line - the building and platform canopy were in a shocking condition. Network Rail has since carried out essential repairs, and the Friends are pleased that new tenants have been found for the imposing building; they're busy transforming it into a textile studio and shop. The up platform is now adorned with all kinds of decorative and quirky items.

FoWHL's Strategy Officer has had his work cut out recently, dissecting the 84-page Invitation to Tender document for the Caledonian Sleeper franchise. They've had meetings with two of the bidders; the third seems to be ignoring overtures.

Charles Kennedy, MP for Ross, Skye and Lochaber, has accepted the Friend's invitation to become their new Hon President. Mr Kennedy was a well-received guest speaker at their 2012 AGM.

Lakes Line Rail Users' Group – surprise announcement of electrification by 2016

Everyone in the LLRUG party which met Transport Secretary Patrick McLoughlin, visiting the Lakes Line in August, was surprised and delighted when he announced that electrification of the line was being appraised by the Dept. for Transport, and that he was confident the verdict would be in favour. They were overjoyed when Mr McLoughlin added that he expected it would happen by the end of 2016!

LLRUG were unhappy about an engineering blockage on the West Coast Main Line right at the start of the peak holiday season, although it was over fairly quickly ... and two members did get the chance to visit the various worksites to see the men and machinery in action. "Repeated closures over bank holiday weekends are more annoying," says LLRUG "we question the assertion that weekend engineering works inconvenience the minimum number of people."

LLRUG members have once again been supporting the Lakes Line Community Rail Partnership by arranging 'meet and greet' teams for mid-day trains on summer holiday Saturdays. They've also helped out with passenger counts on trains and found that passengers were well up on 2011 figures. Many of the passengers were asked about their journey origin and destination, reasons for travel and type of ticket being used. The fact that some 9% were travelling on passes (rover tickets, staff passes, etc) suggests that national usage figures based on ticket sales seriously underestimate the total number of passengers.

First TransPennine Express has been trialling a mobile phone app on the Lakes Line that enables users to turn up at the station and purchase an electronic ticket (with appropriate railcard discount) just before getting on the train – one LLRUG member has tried it out on his phone and reports that it really did work as it should.

Wharfedale Rail Users Group – 1985 to 2013

The secretary of WRUG has written to tell us that the group is disbanding with effect from 31 October 2013.

WRUG was established in 1985, at a time when a severe reduction in Wharfedale train services, particularly those to Bradford, was threatened. It was the direct successor to the Ilkley Railway Supporters Association formed to fight the original Beeching closure proposals. Since then, it has successfully campaigned for the improvement of Wharfedale Line rail services and facilities. Today, the line is electrified, trains are more frequent, station facilities have improved and passenger numbers have greatly increased ... thus, many of WRUG's original objectives have been achieved.

The statement continues: "Though our local contacts with Northern Rail and Metro remain good, it cannot go on as it was, because the structure of the privatised railway means that most decisions about the levels of service provision involve consultation with other bodies such as Network Rail and the Department for Transport. In consequence, campaigning can be more effective through national groups, such as Railfuture or Campaign for Better Transport (CBT), who have the ear of the rail industry and government."

Contributing to their decision to disband is the fact that three of the long-standing members of the group are due to retire, leaving WRUG without operational leadership. We're assured that local station groups will be continuing with their work along the line.

Support the Oldham-Rochdale-Manchester Line (STORM) – response to Rail North consultation

STORM responded to the consultation draft of a strategy document from Rail North, agreeing with many aspects of the authority's vision for the North of England. The group made a number of specific points, including:

- Measures needed to increase capacity, esp. higher frequency and longer trains at peak times.
- Some stations lack basic facilities such as real-time information, waiting shelters and adequate parking.
- Poor quality of rolling stock and uncertainties about delivery of electric units.
- Omission of the Calder Valley route from investment plans; a direct link to Manchester Airport should be considered.
- Omission of the disused Skipton-Colne route from longer-term development plans.
- A simplified and fully-integrated fares structure with removal of some current anomalies.

A summary of consultation responses will be published on www.railnorth.org. It is anticipated that the draft final strategy will be adopted early in 2014.

Friends of Reddish South Station – charity event raises over £300

In a brief update, the Secretary of FoRSS tells us that they held a successful coffee morning in aid of Macmillan Cancer Support on the platform in September, and they raised well over £300. Various dignitaries attended including the Mayor and Mayoress, who were invited to unveil the group's landscaping project.

A second update from the group brought the very welcome news that Stockport Council unanimously agreed a motion in support of reinstating a train service from Stockport to Manchester Victoria via the line through Reddish South; the line currently has no regular passenger service.

North Cheshire Rail Users' Group – group travels to Wales to collect a special plaque

For the 150th anniversary celebrations at Helsby Station in July, not only did a slate quarry in Wales contribute an inscribed commemoration plaque, but members of NCRUG travelled to all the way to the quarry at Blaenau Ffestiniog, courtesy of Arriva Trains Wales, where they were met by the town's mayor and other dignitaries for the official presentation of the plaque. Helsby station roof is tiled with slate from the quarry, hence the connection. The slate plaque has now been installed in the new station garden.

Anniversary festivities spread out along the whole Hooton to Helsby railway with events involving: a special train via the Halton curve to Liverpool; commemorative mugs and booklets; refreshments and a birthday cake; a miniature steam locomotive; vintage and modern buses; top hats, bunting, information stalls and morris men! NCRUG thanked all the many organisations involved and was particularly grateful to Community Rail Officer Sally Buttifant who oversaw it all. NCRUG members are also involved in the 30th anniversary celebrations (on 18 Oct) for the station at Runcorn East, where wildlife-friendly gardens and a special Great War commemorative garden have been created.

Over the last eighteen months NCRUG has worked with professional consultants on the projects to re-instate the Halton curve and to have a regular service on the Ellesmere Port to Helsby line. Many interviews have been jointly conducted with all the leading stakeholders - most have been extremely supportive and none has been against. NCRUG has devised the project name "Mersey Connect" to signify that the two schemes, taken together, promise improved rail connectivity between Merseyside, the Wirral peninsula and North Wales.

At the ACoRP Community Rail Awards Ceremony in Llandudno, the first prize in the "Best Use for Station Buildings" category was awarded to NCRUG and partners for the restoration and innovative use of Frodsham station building.

Mid Cheshire Rail Users' Association – passenger counts were key to production of report

The *Study of the Mid Cheshire Line* commissioned by relevant local authorities has just been completed, and MCRUA's passenger counts have been key to the production of the report – 14 members have been involved with counting passengers on almost 1,000 journeys over a 12-month period. Performance on the Mid Cheshire Line had been deteriorating since February 2011, but the group now reports that things have improved, thanks in part to the extra minutes added to many train schedules from the May 2013 timetable change.

MCRUA's special train over the Settle & Carlisle Line in September, organised jointly with Compass Tours, was enjoyed by 463 passengers (despite a few operational hitches), and the committee is already discussing plans for next year. The group's Music Train season from April to October ran very well and was said to be great fun. Members have been busy supporting the work of the line's community rail partnership, including: preparing stations for the North West in Bloom competition, working with schools on artwork projects and helping with the line's 150th anniversary celebrations in July.

Elsewhere, we read that the Chairman's Blog on the group's [website](#) has now had over 80,000 hits, and that 54 people have joined MCRUA since the publication of their previous newsletter. (*Wow! can any other rail user group beat that? – Ed*)

Peterborough-Ely-Norwich Rail Users' Group – “environmental utopia” for East Anglia?

“Some see cycles and trains as a marriage made in an environmental utopia,” says PENRUG. “We want covered and secure cycle parking at stations, and we should like to see a ‘reservations only’ policy for taking non-folding cycles on express trains from Birmingham to Stansted Airport and from Liverpool to Norwich, with a late booking facility similar to that already in use on trains from Peterborough to Edinburgh and Leeds.” Further thoughts on the subject appear in a new webpage at www.penrug.org.uk.

The group welcomes the publication of a masterplan for Whittlesea station, which promises longer platforms, level access to platforms, new waiting shelters and car park improvements. However, the proposals for cycle parking appear leave much to be desired.

PENRUG is doing its bit to publicise the list of destinations that can be reached by through trains from Thetford. They argue that current tourist leaflets and websites undersell the convenience of accessing Thetford by rail, and have suggested a simple message for the Town Council to consider: “Thetford enjoys direct trains from and to Cambridge, Liverpool, Manchester, Norwich, Nottingham, Peterborough and Sheffield. Times and fares from www.nationalrail.co.uk.”

There's good and bad news from around the region. Members were impressed by the helpful staff on hand to assist passengers during the recent blockade of Nottingham station. However, there have been too many instances of ticket machines not working and station facilities locked when they should have been open.

Meldreth, Shepreth & Foxton Rail Users' Group (Cambridgeshire) – CRP agreement signed

The official signing of the Community Rail Partnership agreement with First Capital Connect, Network Rail and county & district councils took place at Meldreth Station in October. The main purpose of the event was to formally recognize the good community work already taking place around the three rural stations and to ensure support for continuing endeavours – including further liaison with local businesses, schools and community groups.

October also saw the replanting of flower tubs at the three stations for the winter season, and at Meldreth there was a special meeting of the station gardeners to make plans for the vegetable and flower gardens in 2014.

East Suffolk Travellers' Association – official opening of Lowestoft Interchange

On September 16th, ESTA's Chairman and Secretary attended the opening ceremony of the transport interchange next to Lowestoft rail station, performed by Transport Minister Stephen Hammond MP. The interchange consists of a long bus shelter with proper seating, increased car parking space and a shelter for motorcycles. A real-time bus information screen will be added in due course.

Earlier in September, ESTA sent a submission to the House of Commons Select Committee on Transport in response to its "Transport in Isolated Communities" enquiry. Their submission dealt with the value of the East Suffolk Line hourly service, the need for good bus feeder services and car parking at stations. ESTA members, assisted by Railfuture, have been carrying out footfall counts at Halesworth Station and comparing results with a similar survey last year.

After finding the ticket office closed on a number of occasions when it should have been open, ESTA's Chairman had a letter about the matter published in the local paper; Greater Anglia later announced that they were sorry for the situation, adding that they were recruiting relief staff to resolve the problem.

In August, a party of ESTA members enjoyed a trip to Dereham for a steam train excursion to Wymondham and back. ESTA's Christmas Lunch this year will be at the Angel hotel, Halesworth.

Felixstowe Travel Watch – station adoption scheme now 10 years old

There was fine weather for getting out and about during the summer school holiday period, but the local rail service failed to rise to the challenge with a lack of capacity and some cancelled trains. The operator didn't think to promote the rail service when there were road works disrupting traffic around Ipswich - another lost opportunity!

Some train reliability problems have been outside the operator's control, such as the rooftop trespasser at Ipswich who managed to halt all services on the branch for 12 hours. Helplines seem to be bereft of any useful information at times of disruption, and FTW thinks calls should be routed to a local traffic office and not to a call centre 5,000 miles away.

The local Station Adoption Scheme was started 10 years ago "to bring about a community feel and some tender loving care to local stations". An article explaining how the scheme works tells us that volunteers inspect items on an official checklist, report defects, and promote the use and care of the local rail line and station – which may include providing hanging baskets and flower tubs, and tending station gardens. "Why do we do it?" the writer asks "For much the same reason that we give our time and energy to Felixstowe Travel Watch. Because we think it is a thing worth doing and we get a sense of satisfaction from making a good job of it. Oh, and we get a green fluorescent tabard and a concessionary rail pass."

Finally, we're told that FTW will be running an information stall at the town's Co-op Superstore concourse on Sat 30 Nov.

Bedford-Bletchley Rail Users' Association – group continues to monitor EWRL developments

Local councillors have decided that Ridgmont should be the location for a new station on the East-West Rail Link through Central Bedfordshire rather than Lidlington. The BBRUA is surprised by the opposition of residents in Lidlington to EWRL trains stopping at their station, the main concerns being increased traffic and parking problems. The BBRUA argues that these problems are solvable and that many residents would benefit by being able to access the new rail service. The BBRUA would also like to see EWRL trains serving St Johns station in Bedford.

In September, members and friends enjoyed their annual Railway Ramble from Bow Brickhill station, a bonus being a visit to a garden railway. Unfortunately it rained later in the day ... and some people missed their train home by a whisker.

The BBRUA is supporting the restored station at Ridgmont, where a heritage centre is being created in the old ticket office; members are being asked to help out in the station shop. Meanwhile, the BBRUA is asking its members to continue pressing local MPs and councillors on the issue of extending rail services from Bletchley to/from Milton Keynes. Elsewhere, we read that the replacement of late evening train services on Saturdays by buses is happening on too many occasions and the BBRUA has complained to London Midland.

A news supplement from the Marston Vale Community Rail Partnership tells us that the CRP won an award in the Information Technology category at the national Community Rail Awards event in Llandudno - the judges were particularly impressed by the sending of regular news updates on social media and by the enabling of station adoption groups to update their own pages on the CRP's website.

Chesham & District Transport Users' Group – making a “valuable contribution”

Chesham Town Council launched a Town Partners' Scheme in October and CDTUG was fortunate enough to be invited by the Mayor to become an Official Member, in recognition of their "valuable contribution to improving the quality of life of all the residents of Chesham".

The group has been brainstorming ideas to raise the profile of CDTUG - suggestions included: meeting trains at Chesham station and giving out publicity; putting an advert board outside the station; arranging a 'Meet the Managers' session.

There are concerns that northbound rush-hour trains to Chesham are becoming overcrowded and the suggestion is that London Underground should be asked to cut-out the Wembley Park stop, which was only introduced in 2011.

Windsor Lines Passengers' Association – 10-car trains are on the way!

The WLPA is looking forward to the introduction of 10-car trains on the Windsor and Hounslow lines soon. The 'new' class 458 units have been spotted in test, platforms have now been extended and signs added telling drivers where to stop a 5- or 10-car set.

The group continues to argue that SW London needs a rail link to Heathrow and that as many stations as possible should have a through service. Their favoured model at the moment is for the Kingston loop via Richmond service to continue on from Twickenham to Heathrow when Crossrail 2 takes over the line from Twickenham to Teddington and beyond.

A campaign aim for the WLPA is for a half-hourly service on the Hounslow loop on Sundays: “our research shows that many more people would travel on the line on Sundays if this were the case.” They also suggest there should be a faster service in the rush hours from Sunningdale, Ascot and Bracknell, adding “with a good connection at Ascot, this could be of benefit to Bagshot, Camberley and Frimley.”

“It's not as easy as South West Trains think to get the ticket of your choice when the ticket office is closed.” says the WLPA. They also point out that a problem with 'add-on' fares on ticket vending machines has still not been resolved.

Bexhill Rail Action Group – group comments on franchise document

The publication of the tender document for the new Thameslink, Southern & Gt Northern franchise provided a good opportunity for BRAG to issue a press release, not the least because the document recognised aspirations for service improvements by local commuters. It had been suggested that the Brighton-Ashford service would be split forcing a change of trains at Eastbourne or Hastings, but

BRAG were delighted to see the through service had been safeguarded. They were also pleased to see an invitation to bidders to improve the service to London from East and West Sussex Coastway stations, and hoped that a single operator on the Brighton Mainline would lead to a more rational service pattern in the future.

South Hampshire Rail Users' Group – longer trains wanted for CrossCountry

Commenting on possible future congestion on the route north from Hampshire via Basingstoke and Reading, SHRUG suggests that the “pint pot” 4- and 5-car Voyager sets used on CrossCountry services should be replaced by less-frequent 10-car units, which could split at Birmingham to serve the North East and North West. They add that a good use for the displaced Voyager fleet would be on the Portsmouth-Cardiff route.

A representative from SHRUG attended a presentation at the New Forest Transport Forum about the proposed reopening of the Waterside Line from Hythe to Totton and onwards to Southampton. Hampshire County Council's Strategy Manager reported that the study was reaching its final stages, with the project looking to produce about the required cost-benefit ratio. SHRUG hopes that more trains will call at Totton once the line is up and running.

SHRUG has just published the fourth edition of its “History of South West Trains”, charting the story of the franchise under Stagecoach management from February 1996. The highly-critical document can be read on the group's website [here](#).

Tarka Rail Association (Exeter-Barnstaple line) – group issues its own strategy document

Over the summer months, the TRA has been working on its *Strategy for the Exeter-Barnstaple Rail Line* which sets out to make the case for further investment to cope with the projected passenger rise, and to provide evidence in support of the group's aspirations for the next Great Western franchise. In addition to statistics about passenger growth and overcrowding, the document contains details of developments in the Exeter city region which are expected to impact on the patronage of the Tarka Line – local knowledge which should prove invaluable to officers at the Dept. for Transport when drafting the next franchise specifications.

In its Strategy document, the TRA has carefully categorised its aspirations into the short, medium and long term categories, with comments about the various factors that might dictate timescales, for instance: the completion of improvement works already in hand, the migration of signalling to a regional centre at Didcot and the roll-out of electrification in the South West. The paper concludes: “We consider our strategy and aspirations to be reasonable and achievable. We hope that all stakeholders and especially First Great Western, Network Rail and Devon County Council, will adopt our objectives and we would be very pleased to meet and discuss with them a firm plan for implementation.”

A late spring caused the postponement of judging for the station gardens competition along the line until late August, but eventually the awards went to Newton St Cyres (1st) Yoeford (2nd) and Chapelton (3rd). Photographs in the TRA magazine show that the standard was very high indeed!

The appointment “people of standing who are sympathetic to our aims” to the honorary posts of president and 1st / 2nd vice presidents was seen as a way to raise the profile of the organisation, consequently the TRA was pleased when two MPs and a retired County Council official accepted the Association's invitation to serve in these roles.

The TRA has just published a new book entitled *Tarka Line Walks*, featuring “60 glorious mid-Devon walks from the wayside stations of the scenic Tarka Line”. It's on sale from bookshops and online retailers at £9.99.

Avocet Line Rail Users' Group (Exeter-Exmouth line) – passenger growth brings problems

Concern about rolling stock remains high on the agenda for ALRUG. Passenger growth is already running at nearly 10% per annum and, with new stations planned for Marsh Barton and Newcourt, there's the likelihood that not everyone will get a seat - also reliability is bound to suffer. Rail users in the region are entering a period of limbo, with the emergency extension of the Great Western franchise and uncertainty about who will be running the trains from 2016.

Relief may be in sight after 2016, when electrification in the Thames Valley and elsewhere will release diesel units (albeit over 25 years old) for cascade to other parts of the country. Meanwhile, the group argues that redoubling the track at the north end of the line would increase flexibility, and ticket machines at more stations would allow conductors to concentrate on opening doors promptly rather than having to sell tickets. It's hoped that the half-hourly Sunday trains, trialled in the summer months and in the run up to Christmas, will be made into a year-round service.

After completing their study of bus interchange along the line, ALRUG is now contributing to the setting of standards for stations in the Devon Metro area. Committee members are also working on an update of their manifesto for the line.

An unusual event at Topsham in July marked the 100th anniversary of the Great Suffrage Pilgrimage, and involved women in period costume, en route from Land's End to London, marching from the town museum to the station and taking the train to Exeter for further celebratory events. The railways played a great part in the 1913 pilgrimage, with women from all over Britain converging on Hyde Park for a rally; most will have returned home by train.

...news from Railfuture follows...

HAVE YOUR SAY ON RAILFUTURE CAMPAIGNS FOR THE COMING YEAR

Railfuture needs your views on the issues which the railways face, what changes or developments are needed to resolve them, and how Railfuture can help. This will help us decide where to focus our campaigning and publicity effort, so that we can move forward. **Please take a few minutes to answer our survey at: www.railfuture.org.uk/Have+your+say**

We value your opinion, and will publish a summary of the survey results early next year. No names will be published. The survey is open to both members and non-members. Feel free to forward this mail to your friends and colleagues who have an interest in or use the railways. Thank you for your help.
- Chris Page, Railfuture Marketing, Media and Communication Group

FREEZE RAIL FARES TOO

Railfuture's media spokesman was quick off the mark, issuing a press release calling for a fair deal for rail passengers, after George Osborne announced plans to freeze fuel duty for motorists.

"We look forward to seeing George do the fair thing and freeze rail fares too. Year on year we've seen rail fares go up ahead of inflation whilst the cost of motoring hasn't. Why shouldn't rail travellers get a fair deal as well? The Tory conference slogan is 'for hardworking people' - well many of those hardworking people take the train to work every morning. George needs to remember that rail passengers have the vote too."

RAILFUTURE RAIL USER GROUPS AWARDS, 2013

Railfuture's pioneering national awards for rail user groups were inaugurated last year to recognise and reward the struggles and particularly the resulting successes of the unsung heroes and heroines of local rail development campaigning.

This year four Railfuture Vice-Presidents have volunteered their time to judge the 2013 range of entries, in five main categories. Ian Brown, Barry Doe, Roger Ford, and Chris Green were joined by our President Christian Wolmar, who will chair our national Rail Users conference in Oxford on 2 November and present the award-winners with their framed certificates [and a year's free Railfuture membership]. One of last year's judges Adrian Shooter had also offered again but had to withdraw from the panel at short notice.

Principal awards are for best campaign, best campaigner, best new group, best website, and best newsletter. Two of the awards will be made in memory of two long-serving members who died during the year - Oliver Lovell of the Cotswold Line Promotion Group, a double award-winner last year, and East Anglia member and Railfuture Board Director Clara Zilahi.

The Rail User Groups in front of the judging panel include, in approximate alphabetical order, Avocet Line RUG, Barking-Gospel Oak RUG, Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group, Harrogate Line Supporters Group, Lancaster and Skipton RUG, Portishead Railway Group, Rail Action Group East of Scotland, Friends of Reddish South Station, South East Northumberland RUG, Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways, and Trains for Deal. Some might notice that their RUG is mentioned yet nobody from the group is known to have put in an entry. No matter, your efforts have shone through and come to the attention of the judges anyway.

Full details of the winners will appear in the next Rail User Express, on the Railfuture website, and later in the March issue of Railwatch.

Note

Oxford Conference, 2 Nov 2013: Places are still free to book, but bookings for this conference will close on 31/10/2013.

Railfuture's summer conference in June 2014 will be held in Cambridge.

RAILFUTURE CONSULTED OVER DIRECT AWARD TO SOUTHEASTERN

When the current SouthEastern franchise ends in November 2014, the Company moves into a "Direct Award" contract period. Mike Gibson of SouthEastern wrote to Railfuture in September seeking the Society's views on what developments and improvements could be achieved in the coming 4-year period; the Company promised to factor these ideas into their proposals which they will be putting to the Dept. for Transport.

[Chris Fribbins](#) responded on behalf of Railfuture by sending the Society's response document which was written for the franchise consultations in 2012, together with an additional document answering specific questions on the topics which SouthEastern had identified this time around. Chris took the opportunity to press for (among other things) more passenger involvement in decision making, further measures to mitigate overcrowding and a station accessibility audit leading to "quick wins" at key stations.

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

RAIL FARES AND TICKETING: THE NEXT STEPS

Following a consultation on rail fares and ticketing, the Government has now set out its plans “to secure passengers the best deals on fares, to improve current ticketing practices and to ensure that we build the smart ticketing system for the future for the benefit of passengers, whilst ensuring that the impact to the taxpayer is kept at a minimum.

“To reduce the impact of fares increases on passengers and improve the overall quality of the fares packages on offer to them, we will be:

- Reducing the current fares flex from 5% to 2%, thereby limiting the extent of the annual fares increases and putting money back into the hands of passengers;
- Trialling a scheme to regulate longer distance off peak tickets on a single leg basis to remove the confusing scenario where some single off-peak tickets cost nearly as much as return tickets, and to also to offer passengers increased choice and flexibility;
- Trialling more flexible tickets that can provide a more attractive offer for commuters travelling fewer than five days a week, or outside peak hours, that can better match more modern working patterns and potentially help to better manage capacity on the railways.”

“The following measures will be put in place to improve the ticketing experience:

- A Code of Practice on ticketing information that will ensure passengers can access the information they need to confidently select the most appropriate ticket for their journey;
- An improved approach to the way we manage approvals for changes to ticket offices with incentives for train companies to modernise ticketing facilities, while providing appropriate safeguards for passengers – including being able to get help and advice from a member of staff, where they can do so now;
- A stronger and more focused approach to quality and customer service in franchises including ticket retail;
- A market review by the Office of Rail Regulation to consider whether the current market for selling train tickets is operating as efficiently as possible;
- Publication of annual “mystery shopper” surveys of all retail channels to improve transparency for passengers;
- Supporting further steps by the rail industry to improve ticketing.”

“We have already seen the benefits of using smart ticketing in London through TfL’s Oyster system and have plans to roll out smart ticketing across the rail network.” Full details [here](#). – gov.uk

“IF THERE WERE AN ALTERNATIVE TO HS2, WE WOULD DO IT” – says new Transport Minister

An extract from Baroness Kramer’s first speech as Minister of State for Transport to the Railway Engineers Forum on 21 Oct, in which she discusses current transport issues and the benefits of HS2.

“My interest in transport goes back a long way. I ran a business advising on infrastructure finance in Central and Eastern Europe. I was on the board of Transport for London and I was Liberal Democrat Shadow Transport Secretary– under the leadership of Sir Menzies Campbell. So I’ve taken a close interest in HS2 over the years.

“We have studied the alternatives to HS2, and both Network Rail and Atkins confirm they will not offer the same benefits. We have considered 5 different packages of rail improvements as alternatives to phase 1 of HS2. Not only did these projects fail to deliver the astonishing extra capacity that HS2 will, the scale of work required for upgrades would cause so much disruption that the system would grind to a halt. I am sure commuters on the West Coast Mainline will remember the problems caused during the £9 billion upgrade programme. Yet the extra capacity released by this huge project has already been filled, and with passenger numbers growing, thousands of commuters are standing during the morning peak.

“Despite the huge investment, it wasn’t enough to finish the job - the overhead wiring on the West Coast line is getting on for 50 years old. If upgrading existing lines were a feasible and effective answer to rising demand and a genuine alternative to HS2, believe me we would do it.” – gov.uk
You can read the full text of Baroness Kramer’s speech [here](#).

ACORP COMMUNITY RAIL AWARDS

The Association of Community Rail Partnership (ACoRP) held their 2013 Community Rail Awards ceremony at Llandudno on 27 Sept. The full list of award winners can be seen [here](#). It’s worth taking a look, but beware: you may be inspired to go one better for next year’s awards!

Included in ACoRP’s list are many awards given to station adoption groups, rail user groups and RUG members - I started to write out my own list of these, but there were too many to show here! In any case, many RUG members had a hand in awards presented to other bodies, especially to community rail partnerships. All I can say is “very well done to everyone involved!”

CBT REPORT ANALYSES THE NEW LTBS

A new report from the Campaign for Better Transport looks at the 38 Local Transport Bodies which take charge of local transport funding from 2015. Each LTB had to submit a list of their priority transport projects to the Government by August 2013. The CBT have analysed these lists and are very worried by what they’ve seen. More than half the projects are centred on building and widening roads; rail and bus projects make up just 17%.

The CBT has ranked LTBS on how well they’re doing in terms of sustainability and how democratic the selection process has been. The top three LTBS were: Gloucestershire, Coventry & Warwickshire and Greater Birmingham & Solihull. The bottom three were: Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Tees Valley. The full CBT analysis is [here](#).

EAST WEST RAIL LINK – latest news from Andy Long

The various parties involved in the project (Buckinghamshire County Council and partner authorities) are due to sign a legal agreement in November 2013, with a binding agreement between Bucks CC and the Dept. for Transport to follow later. Chiltern’s Oxford-Bicester service has been brought forward to start in Summer 2015 and the full Oxford-Marylebone service should start in December 2016. On towards Bedford, various upgrades to the Marston Vale line will be required, such as higher line speed, redoubling of track and of course electrification; these works should begin in 2017 and take two years to complete. In the meantime, the current hourly diesel service on the MVL will continue to operate.

Highways engineers are currently analysing all level crossings along the EWRL route to decide what could be done at each to minimise delays to traffic. Consultants have been appointed to examine alternative rail routes east of Bedford; a direct line between Bedford and Sandy seems to be the preferred option. Sites for intermodal freight terminals are also being looked at.

Andy thinks that pressure should be kept up to make sure the timescale for electrification does not slip further, and to keep alive the idea that services on the line should extend beyond Bedford to Milton Keynes.

NEW FRANCHISE MAP AVAILABLE

A new edition of Barry Doe’s franchise map has just been produced. This version offers various improvements with additional stations and more clarity for towns that have two stations on separate lines, such as Canterbury and Yeovil.

Anyone may download copies for private or commercial use, including printing at any size, from the 'Rail Operators in the British Isles' section of www.barrydoe.co.uk.

HOPE VALLEY RETHINK BRINGS FRESH CALL FOR WOODHEAD REOPENING

Plans to slash train journey times between Manchester and Sheffield as part of the Northern Hub programme have been shelved because of cost concerns. The Northern Hub Conditional Output Statement, agreed in April 2009, recommended three fast trains per hour between Manchester and Sheffield with a journey time of 40 minutes. Currently there are two fast trains an hour with an average journey time of 51 minutes. But according to a paper presented to the Transport for Greater Manchester Committee in September, development of the Northern Hub outputs has concluded that, while there is scope to run additional trains, a 40 minute journey time will not be achievable at an acceptable cost.

The revelation raises questions about the decision to rule out reopening the Woodhead route tunnels currently owned by National Grid. A study arranged by the Northern Way and completed in 2008 highlighted the difficulties and significant expense of reopening this route to trains. At the time Transport for Greater Manchester agreed that if the Hope Valley route was developed as proposed by the Northern Hub work there should be no requirement to reopen the Woodhead tunnels.

However, TfGM as well as passenger transport authorities in Liverpool and South Yorkshire are now voicing their concerns to both the Department for Transport and Network Rail about the scaling back of previously planned Hope Valley enhancements. TfGM chief executive Dr Jon Lamonte says that, if the Hope Valley line is not to be improved, this increases the arguments for preserving the option of reopening the Woodhead route. – *from a Transport Briefing story, spotted by Andy Long*

WHERE'S MY TRAIN?

Have you ever wanted to: look up all the possible connections on a complicated journey; find out what the train that just passed you was doing and where it was going; look at all the departures from a given station; find out how late a given train was every day last week? For these and a myriad of other timetable related information, you need to go to: www.realtimetrains.co.uk

Realtime Trains is a free service run by Tom Cairns, a fourth year computer science student, and a team of volunteers. It takes information from Network Rail's open data feeds and presents it in a very readable format, combining the working timetable with movement data from TRUST and the National Train Describer feeds. The result is a very nearly real-time display.

The site is still a work in progress, with refinements being added all the time. An app for Androids has just been released, with one for iPads & iPhones to follow. Try it for yourself! – *from Avocet Line Rail User Group newsletter*

BIKE & GO

Last month, I reported on the growing number of Brompton (folding bike) Docks at stations. An item in ESTA's newsletter has now prompted me to look into the growing network of cycle hire facilities at stations trading under the **Bike & Go** banner.

There are Bike & Go facilities at 16 stations in the North West, Anglia and South East regions of England. Many more are being planned, including some in the North East and Yorkshire (ESTA's newsletter mentions a new one for Ipswich). As in the case of the Brompton scheme, you need to register in advance and pay an annual fee – but with Bike & Go, you exchange your membership card at the station ticket office for a key which unlocks the bike (in this case, a conventional machine which looks like a red version of London's "Boris Bikes"). For full details visit www.bikeandgo.co.uk.

Anything that creates business for station ticket offices has to be worth supporting! -Ed

EVENTS

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

- Mon 28 Oct** [ALRUG](#) AGM at the Manor Hotel, Exmouth from 19:30. Guest speaker from FGW.
- Tue 29 Oct** [Felixstowe Travel Watch](#) autumn meeting in St Andrew's Church Hall from 14:30.
- Thu 31 Oct** ORR publishes final determination of NR's Strategic Business Plan for Control Period 5.
- Sat 2 Nov** [Railfuture](#) conference, at the Town Hall, Oxford. Fee only £30.
- Sat 2 Nov** Oldham Loop 150th anniversary event.
- Mon 4 Nov** [Ribble Valley Rail](#) meeting at the New Inn, Clitheroe from 19:30.
- Wed 6 Nov** [LLRUG](#) AGM in Stricklandgate House, Kendal from 19:00. Guest speaker from FTPE.
- Thu 7 Nov** [Railfuture Sussex & Coastway](#) meeting from 18:00.
- Sat 9 Nov** [HPSRUA](#) meet at Stockmoor Village Hall from 10:00. Guest speakers from W Yorks Metro and South Yorks PTE
- Sat 9 Nov** [Railfuture London & SE](#) ride Bluebell Line to Sheffield Park for a talk and guided visit.
- Mon 11 Nov** [BRAG](#) meet at Hastings Direct, Conquest House, Collington Avenue, Bexhill from 19:00.
- Wed 13 Nov** Passenger Focus Conference and Reception at the Millennium Centre, Cardiff Bay from 13:00. Places are limited; you need to register by 1 Nov via: anne.dawson@passengerfocus.org.uk
- Wed 13 Nov** [Friends of the Barton Line](#) meet at the Sloop Inn, Barton from 20:00.
- Wed 13 Nov** [Railfuture London & SE](#) (Eastern division) meet at Stratford from 18:30.
- Wed 13 Nov** [SENRUG](#) talk on Cycling & Trains at Town Hall, Morpeth from 19:30; spkr from Sustrans
- Fri 15 Nov** [University of Huddersfield](#) conference: HS 2 'Is there owt in it for th'North?'
- Sat 16 Nov** [Railfuture London & SE](#) (Kent division) meeting in Canterbury from 14:00.
- Sat 23 Nov** [Railfuture North West](#) meeting from 13:00.
- Sun 24 Nov** [Penistone Line Partnership](#) Santa Special to Nottingham.
- Fri 29 Nov** [Ashchurch Tewkesbury & District Rail Promotion Group](#) meet at Tewkesbury Library from 19:30. Guest speaker: Lord Faulkner of Worcester. All welcome!
- Mon 2 Dec** [Ribble Valley Rail](#) meeting at the New Inn, Clitheroe from 19:30.
- Thu 5 Dec** [Railfuture London & SE](#) (Sussex & Coastway) meet at 18:00.
- Sat 7 Dec** [Barton-Cleethorpes CRP](#) Santa Specials: 2 return trips along the line.
- Sun 8 Dec** National rail timetable change.
- Mon 9 Dec** First day of new Grand Central service from Bradford to London & back
- Mon 9 Dec** [BRAG](#) meeting with Christmas meal at Conquest House, Bexhill from 19:00.
- Sat 14 Dec** Santa Special on the Marston Valley line, with Christmas gala at Ridgmont Station.
- Mon 16 Dec** [ALRUG](#) Christmas Social at The Globe, Lymestone (tbc) from 19:00.
- 2014**
- Mon 6 Jan** [Ribble Valley Rail](#) meeting at the New Inn, Clitheroe from 19:30.
- Sat 18 Jan** [Railfuture Yorkshire](#) branch meeting in Doncaster.
- Mon 3 Feb** [Ribble Valley Rail](#) meeting at the New Inn, Clitheroe from 19:30.
- Sat 10 May** Railway Development Society (Railfuture) AGM in Sheffield.
- Sat 21 Jun** Railfuture summer conference in Cambridge

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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