

railfuture

Northeast

BRANCH BULLETIN – NOVEMBER 2015

Railfuture is a national, independent body that advocates a modern and effective passenger and freight railway in Great Britain.

The North East is one of twelve branches in England along with Railfuture Scotland and Railfuture Wales that make up the national organisation.

Web site: www.railfuture.co.uk Twitter: [@Railfuture](https://twitter.com/Railfuture) and [@RailfutureNEast](https://twitter.com/RailfutureNEast).

1 Introduction

Our last bulletin was despatched early March 2015 just ahead of the Branch AGM on 14th March at which there were twenty-two members present. The guest speaker was James Wilkin, who described how Community Rail Partnerships are beginning to develop in Scotland. The business part of the agenda followed including elections - the existing officers and Committee members were all returned to post *nem com*.

Our branch Chairman, Trevor Watson, has been exceptionally busy ever since – more about some of his exploits later.

I will attempt is to provide a flavour of what the Branch has been up to over the last seven months as well as highlight some key bits of national and local railway news.

2 Branch activities

April 2nd 2015 – six Committee members met in private session with Tim Burleigh of Eversholt Leasing. As a working railway professional Tim is able to acquaint us with the realities of providing passenger rolling stock for the TOCs. Technical conundrums rank high among the matters engineers have to sort. For instance if trains from different operators are coupled together their respective information systems have to be compatible. And when carriages are

upgraded/modernised attention has to be paid to any resultant weight increases such as come with the installation of air conditioning.

We considered the respective Invitations to Tender (ITTs) for the Next Trans-Pennine (TPE) and Northern Franchises. Some mistakes had been noted in the TPE documents such as the number of seats available in particular units. It looked as though DfT intended that TPE should become more akin to an Inter-City operator.

Uncertainty over how many 185s would eventually transfer to Northern from TPE. And also uncertain what the specification of the 120 new DMUs would be and how they might be sourced since few manufactures actually produce them anymore. Tim believed it would be necessary to look at the national diesel scene, not just in the north, if a sensible allocation of units was to be achieved since the likes of Anglia, Great Western and Wales will also require DMUs for a long time to come.

April 29th 2015 – Meeting of Branch Committee. Nine people present plus Alison Cosgrove, Chair of Railfuture Scotland. Usual reviews and planning. The issue of recruiting new members was considered. We agreed that our Branch would try to secure a presence at some key railway model railway exhibitions in the North East. This had proved productive in Scotland. Chairman Trevor Watson will lead. Also importance of developing helpful relationships with the principal TOCs in our area highlighted.

May 22nd 2015 – presentation of student projects at New Rail, Newcastle University. Four Railfuture members attended and were able to question students about their various assignments. These included future designs for rail freight interchanges, possible use of METRO for the carriage of lightweight freight, the movement of passenger baggage by METRO from City pick up points to the Airport and the future liberalisation of the railways in Europe and Thailand. The student inputs were preceded by a short lecture outlining the development of rail passenger luggage-in-advance schemes in parts of Europe. Going to a New Rail event certainly gives a flavour of what the railway of the future might look like! Both University staff and students welcome Railfuture participation.

July 1st – Meeting of Branch Committee. Seven attenders including guest observer Michal Chantkowsky. Unfortunately, severe weather had affected ECML signalling which prevented three intending participants from arriving -

Chair Trevor Watson, President Martin Murphy and Alison Cosgrove, Chair of Railfuture Scotland.

Among matters considered:- arrangements for next branch meeting in Middlesbrough: branch representation at Blyth Model Railway Club's exhibition on 12/13th December: reports from Railfuture's national AGM at Blackpool (see later): respective roles of "Rail North" and "Transport for the North": direct rail services between Durham and Sunderland – Michal Chantkowsky interested in understanding nature of previous arrangements – noted that on 14 December 2015 Virgin East Coast intend to introduce one train per day each way from Sunderland to King's Cross which would call at Durham: next stage of Metro rejuvenation to include upgrade of Central low-level: plans for a new station at Horden (near Peterlee) seem to be progressing - subsequently confirmed by the Hartlepool Mail in August which indicated a 2016 opening: steep decline in carriage of coal by rail noted: and 'pausing' of cross-Pennine electrification noted (since 'un-paused' of course).

July 17th 2015 - Third day of New Rail's Annual Conference in the Hancock Museum, Newcastle. Railfuture members had been offered free entry (and refreshments) for this important event attended by some seventy delegates, many from abroad. Theme for the day was "Railway Talents". All about nurturing young people during schooldays and helping them appreciate the many attractive railway career opportunities that are available. And also about need for good quality developmental training within the industry to help encourage talented people stay in it.

An inspirational day and certainly a wake-up call for railway people to improve recruitment and retention strategies. Thanks to Marin Marinov and his colleagues at New Rail for organising this enjoyable and instructive conference.

July 18th 2015 – Branch meeting at St Mary's Centre, Middlesbrough. Guest speaker was Alan Williams, columnist with Modern Railways, and also chair of the Esk Valley Rail Development Company as well as being a Railfuture Vice President. In a wide ranging, illustrated address, Alan outlined recent developments on the Esk Valley route between Middlesbrough and Whitby including the construction of a second platform at Whitby station. He described Esk Valley as the "Cinderella Line". He also charted future possibilities arising from the proposed new pot-ash mine near Whitby.

Inevitably he included reference to the operations of the North Yorkshire Moors Railway which through the summer runs four trains a day into Whitby from Pickering. Alan didn't hide the fact that relationships between Northern, the Esk Valley TOC, and "the Moors" were sometimes strained. He foresaw likely future tensions if, as anticipated, the TOC wanted to increase train frequency. This could lead to pathing issues on the section of line between Grosmont and Whitby. It was useful that Alan was "up-front" about the dual company services because it highlighted that managing even a country branch line brings with it some difficult operational issues.

The meeting, held as a joint venture with Coastliners and Saltburn Line Rail Users Groups, attracted thirty attenders.

September 2nd 2015 – Meeting of Branch Committee. Seven attenders. Among matters considered:- brief review of Middlesbrough meeting in July: agreed branch would progress a joint meeting with Railfuture Scotland at Galashiels Station on 26 September (see later): Chair Trevor Watson to represent the branch at an AIn Valley Rail event 5/6 September – Trevor had prepared some written hand-outs and a banner: Trevor had also put together a branch "wish list" paper about future rail developments in NE which will be considered at the November Committee meeting: noted that preliminary planning has begun for replacement of the METRO fleet circa 2020 (see Newcastle Journal, 2nd July): further feedback and discussion re national AGM on 16 May: Chair to represent Branch at a special branches and groups meeting in Birmingham on 3 October 2015: Keith Simpson (Vice Chair) will represent us at Railfuture's Autumn Conference in Bristol on 7 November 2015, and some more thoughts about Durham to Sunderland direct links – noted there was a frequent Go North-East bus service which took approx. 56 minutes.

September 26th 2015 – Joint meeting with Railfuture Scotland at Galashiels. Four North East reps, plus two wives, travelled to Edinburgh, and then Tweedbank, and eventually Galashiels for this very special event. Not only did we traverse the recently opened Borders' Line, but we were also able to join a packed audience in the new Galashiels Transport Interchange centre to listen to an outstanding address by Dr Ann Glen entitled "The rebuilding of the Borders Railway".

Dr Glen had followed the rebuilding process from day one and had managed to enlist "inside" assistance from key Network Rail personnel which enabled her to take photographs from privileged sites. She showed some of these during her

presentation. In addition she had acquired information about the snags encountered by the engineers and she was able to relate these to her audience with both humour and passion.

Without doubt this was one of the finest presentations I have ever heard at a Railfuture event. Congratulations to Alison Cosgrove and her colleagues for mounting such a successful and enjoyable meeting.

3 Regional and National rail news etc

March 26th 2015 – Hitachi factory at Newton Aycliffe officially linked to national rail network. Also announced that Karen Boswell, former CEO of East Coast Trains, had been appointed as new boss of Hitachi (UK).

March 28th 2015 – HS2. House of Lords Economic Committee questioned strength of case in support of HS2. Suggested that a High Speed cross - Pennine line would do more to “balance” the national economy.

May 16th – Railfuture National AGM at Blackpool. Approximately 70 attenders, with three from North East Branch including our branch Chairman. The hotel venue and catering arrangements were excellent.

Key note address at the morning session by Stephen McFarlane, Head of Stakeholder Engagement for HS2. In a wide-ranging review the speaker provided useful contextual information for the project – why it was conceived in first instance and by whom (Geoff Hoon MP credited as the person to come up with the original idea). There followed detailed analysis of the proposed routes and main stations; provision of a very useful time line listing chief milestones between now and the opening of phase 1 in 2026; and a reminder that essentially the project is about inducing economic regeneration outside London, giving the railway additional capacity and creating a step-change in railway travel experience in GB.

Some 2,000 people are currently employed by HS2. Message from Stephen McFarlane seemed to be that the project cannot now be stopped. (I suppose he would say that wouldn't he?) But evident so much investment has now gone in that abandoning HS2 is politically unthinkable. There was mention of HS3 and its importance in establishing better connectivity across Northern England. My strong impression, however, is that as yet HS3 is very much the brainchild of Government with the railway planners, the designers and the engineers yet to get their heads around the details.

I picked up from McFarlane that phase 1 of HS2 (London to Birmingham) is nearly a “done deal” and that there is little scope left for major alterations to the plans. This has been officially accepted within Railfuture since 2013.

Conversely, plans and designs for the Phase 2 legs from Lichfield to Manchester and Leeds are more fluid and it will still be possible to influence these over the coming months. For instance, the debate about whether or not HS2 should serve city centres as opposed to out-of-town parkways is very much alive and Railfuture could be in there to help shape outcomes.

The city centre issue is particularly relevant to Sheffield for example. Intention at the moment seems to be to route the new line via an interchange at Meadowhall, some three miles from Sheffield centre. Yet there would appear to be a strong case for taking HS2 into the site of the old Victoria Station, which is close to the heart of the city.

And another station issue which will be of interest to Railfuture, including North East Branch, concerns Leeds. It has been suggested that the new HS2 station there (which will be near the city centre by the way) should be a terminus. But there are plenty of people in Leeds who advocate that its HS2 station must have a throughway design if maximum benefit is to be derived from it. Matter yet to be determined!

The main AGM business session followed after lunch. There was a videoed greeting from our President, Christian Wolmar: and thanks expressed by Chris Page to the outgoing national Chairman, David Berman, for his leadership over the past few years. Election results for directors were announced and a new Chairman, Chris Brown, introduced to the meeting. Sadly Chris, who promised to adopt a conciliatory approach to the role, has recently resigned for health reasons.

Here now I include a few personal observations about Railfuture. Must emphasise they are my own views.

Fair to say I think that leading a national, voluntary organisation like Railfuture requires the wisdom of Solomon (at least!). It's not only about how our thousands of members might be motivated by the leadership to play an active part in the life of the organisation, but it also requires us to identify the primary purposes of Railfuture. Furthermore we have to decide whether we continue to “go it alone” or join forces with another transport campaign group (or groups?) in order to increase our effectiveness.

At this moment there is clearly a leadership issue to sort out. But alongside that is the crucial matter of administration. Railfuture has no paid staff – it relies on the good will, and individual skills, of men and women who voluntarily give of their time. So such as the oversight of our national finances, the maintenance of a corporate web-site, the management of membership records, the production of official papers, the whole arena of media relations and a host of other jobs as well depend on the availability and willingness of individual members to help out. I for one hope Railfuture is able both to survive and thrive, albeit in a different form or even through an amalgamation with another body.

An inherent current weakness I think is that the relationship between the individual branches and the (national) centre is sometimes quite dysfunctional. Should the individual branches adhere strictly to a nationally directed strategy – a sort of collective responsibility if you like? This, I suspect, was the stance supported by former national chairman David Berman. Or should Branches develop their own policies and actions reflecting the wishes of their branch members and fine tune programmes and campaigns to the particular circumstances of their own geographic patch?

Examples when the “dysfunctional” element emerged were in connection with HS2 when significant divergence of opinions between a particular branch and the national Railfuture Board became evident. More recently was when our own Branch prepared a detailed paper outlining its specific suggestions for what should be included in the new Northern and TPE Invitations to Tender. In the event, our suggestions were incorporated by a national Railfuture representative from South East England into a generalised set of proposals which were then forwarded to DfT.

The reaction of the North East branch committee was that we had been “short changed” in that our proposals had been watered down. Conversely, the view from the centre was that the original North East proposals were unrealistic and would have stood little chance of being taken seriously by DfT. Therefore, to hope to make any headway with DfT it was necessary to couch the original suggestions (from us) in such a way to ensure that at least they would be taken into account, even if that did mean moderating what we had felt were significant bits.

Probably the respective views of both ‘sides’ were “right”. And it is arguable that this sort of stand-off between the national centre and the branches is inevitable. Yet, the way the matter was handled did generate some bad feeling

(and annoyance) in both the North and the South. And that was quite wearing. I don't pretend to have an ideal solution about this except to say I believe we should be willing to learn from those occasions when friction did develop and put in place measures to avoid repetitions.

Enough of our weaknesses. What is the strength of Railfuture, nationally and locally? For me it has two outstanding virtues. First, within its ranks (including in our own North East Branch) is the wealth of specialist railway knowledge it holds. Even some DfT officials acknowledge this. And so too among railway professionals there is respect for what we both say and do. Because many of our members specialise in following railway matters at close quarters (albeit as a hobby maybe), they accumulate an enormous amount of information about the railway and the way it operates. This means that quite often they are able to provide viable suggestions about a whole range of railway (and related) issues. It would, in my view, be regrettable if this (corporate) body of information was to be dissipated, or worse, was to be lost altogether. So even if Railfuture was to merge with another transport body it is vital that this specialist core understanding of the railway and its services is retained.

And the second strength? This has to be Railfuture's campaign record over the years whether in terms of re-openings, timetable improvements, station enhancements or service delivery. Often progress has been made in co-operation with Rail User Groups and Community Rail Partnerships, many of which originally came into existence as a result of work done by Railfuture.

The big reopening event of course this year has been the Borders' Railway and Railfuture played a part in bringing this project to fruition.

Closer to home the magnificent, energetic campaign to restore passenger services on the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne freight route has been led by North East Railfuture member Dennis Fancett. So too Peter Walker, a member of our Branch Committee, chairs the Coastliners RUG that monitors services between Sunderland and Middlesbrough. Over time Coastliners have beavered away to achieve a series of small improvements including getting a later evening departure south from Newcastle. Now, it looks as though their efforts to get a new station built at Horden will be successful.

Nor should we forget the patient work over the years of Saltburn Line Users' Group (SLUG) in which our Branch Vice-Chair Keith Simpson has been prominent.

And in the Tyne Valley Malcolm Chainey, another Committee member, plays a leading role in the Community Rail Partnership there. Malcolm has thrown himself into the work of the Partnership over a lengthy period now. Among other things he has become an able negotiator with Northern TOC bosses and a much respected transport guru in Tyne Valley area.

We see in the work of Dennis, Peter, Keith and Malcolm tangible demonstration of what Railfuture members are able to achieve. It is essential that the Railfuture organisation at both national and local level give the likes of these four as much support as possible.

That's the end of my wholly personal inputs!

June 26th 2015 – Transport Secretary announces ‘pausing’ of Cross-Pennine and MML electrification schemes. There has been wide media coverage and analysis of the implications of Patrick McLoughlin's statement to the House of Commons. And then of course there was the subsequent news barely ten weeks later that both schemes had been 'unpaused'. The sting in the tail for Cross-Pennine is that the completion date of the electrification between Manchester and York has been put back to 2022.

We mere mortals can only speculate on the behind the scene 'politics' of this particular charade. But there must be suspicion that the Minister, and more importantly, the Chancellor, were taken aback by the hostility of the media including the railway press, of northern business leaders and of some of their own MP's to what was being proposed. Probably they had little choice but to "U" turn.

At the beginning of June 2015 Mr McLoughlin had told a meeting in Leeds that "Trans-Pennine electrification was on track", yet less than four weeks after this he had to make his ill-fated announcement to the Commons. So he was targeted by the media on this account. Additionally George Osborne had previously made great play of Trans-Pennine electrification being an integral component of the "Northern Powerhouse". So, egg on faces all round.

September 3rd 2015 – Hitachi Factory at Newton Aycliffe, official opening. With an IEP (super express) carriage as background Prime Minister David Cameron declared the new Hitachi train building plant open. He was accompanied by the Chancellor, plus company officials.

Writing in *Modern Railways* earlier in the year technical columnist Roger Ford (another Railfuture Vice President) highlighted what he claims are technical deficiencies in the IEP design. He cites weight as an issue, particularly with regard to the bi-mode version, and says this factor will impact on the economics of actually running the trains. In any case he describes the concept of the bi-mode as “crazy”. He believes too that the cost of the whole IEP enterprise, now quoted as £5.8 billion, is “outrageous”.

September 25th 2015 – Northern Stakeholder Conference in Leeds. Our Chairman Trevor Watson represented the Branch at this important event where plans and aspirations for the railways of northern England were set out and considered. Outline content details and summaries of the presentations can be obtained from Trevor – just email him at: trevor.watson@railfuture.org.uk.

October 14th 2015 - Ashington, Blyth and Tyne Line. It was announced that Northumberland County Council have agreed to make £850,000 available to finance a GRIP 2 assessment of the line (by Network Rail). This viewed as an important step forward in the process of getting passenger services restored on what is currently a freight only route.

4 And finally.....

(i) Just to express disappointment that more of our members could not make the two “New Rail” events at Newcastle in May and July 2015: and disappointed as well that only four members were able to get to Galashiels for the excellent joint meeting with Railfuture Scotland in September.

I make mention because I know of the efforts that go on behind the scenes to bring our Branch programme together. And the Branch’s sustainability is dependent, of course, on a consistently good level of support from our membership.

(ii) **A request for help!!** You think the layout of this Bulletin is boring and conservative? Well, so do I. So, I’m looking for someone who would be willing to have a go at type-setting the next edition (due out in the Spring) using a more imaginative style of presentation, and maybe even incorporating a photo or two? Our Bulletin goes on the Railfuture web-site, and I would also like to make it available to the local media. It’s clear therefore we should spruce it up.

Come on – out of our 70 Branch members I’m sure there must be somebody who has the skills to make a better fist of the layout than yours truly. If you

would like to have a go (or you want some further information before deciding) do contact me on my email at: anthony.walker@railfuture.org.uk or phone (see details on www.railfuture.org.uk/Contact+Us). **AND BY THE WAY** – I'm happy to go on preparing and editing the actual content. It's just I need assistance with the layout and general presentation. Thank you!

TONY WALKER

5th November 2015

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