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The Way Ahead Post Covid 19

By Nina Smith



View from the cab of a Northern class 195 – Photo by Mark Parry

As I write this, most of us will be subject to the lock-down. The exceptions being those of our members, and those of our wider readership, who are engaged in essential services. That includes all our friends in the railway industry and, of course, those of our members who work in the NHS or the social care sector. I would like to pay tribute to all of these and, because we are a railway focussed organisation, to the railwaymen and women who have worked hard in difficult and perhaps frightening conditions to keep Yorkshire's railways running.

The same, of course, applies to bus drivers, a group whose close proximity to passengers has sadly led to a number of tragic deaths. So, hats off to Northern and Trans Pennine staff, as well as those of the other train operating companies and the bus companies who serve our region.

We don't know how long the lock down will carry on, and how much easement there will be. For the foreseeable future, it will not be possible to hold Railfuture meetings. The planned June Yorkshire Branch meeting has been cancelled, but our September meeting is still in the diary, although I think the chances of it happening are less than 50/50. It's not just the issue of social distancing in the meeting room, but getting there on public transport. Many people, myself included, stopped using public transport a week or two before then lockdown and won't resume until we feel it is safe to do so – which, sadly, may not be until we have been vaccinated.

The Government did the sensible thing in bringing all the train operating companies under management contracts. Indeed, it had no option. It is difficult to see how most of the train operating companies can revert to franchise agreements when this is all over, and we are still waiting to learn what Williams is recommending. The general consensus is that Williams will recommend replacing the current franchise system, as most agree it is no longer fit for purpose.

It is clear that it will be a long time before our trains are running to a full timetable and are being used to approaching previous levels. It is obvious that some existing custom will be lost forever, for the following reasons:

- Changes in working patterns with more people homeworking more often, so less commuting by these people.
- An increase in video conferencing replacing some face to face business meetings (but I think there will still be a big demand for face to face meetings as my experience of electronic meetings is that they are rather less than satisfactory).
- Increased levels of unemployment arising from the economic damage caused by the pandemic will impact on commuting – and this will most likely be even worse in the event of a hard Brexit on January 1st.
- Many people will have less disposable income leading to their making fewer leisure journeys.
- Some people may have bought a car to avoid using public transport during the pandemic, and continue to use it for journeys previously made by public transport.
- If low oil prices continue, car travel will become cheaper unless the Government bumps up fuel duty and tax as one way of raising necessary revenue, and/or introduces road pricing or workplace parking levies.

I also think that the “rush hour” will be lengthened. More flexible working may mean that some professional and executive staff are able to split their day’s work between home and office, arriving say at their office at 10.30am and leaving at 3.30pm. Others may be able to work different hours, such as 7 to 3, or 11 to 7, rather than “9 to 5”.

However, when we all feel safe again after we have been vaccinated (whenever that is), those who can afford it will probably want to make up for lost time by making many leisure journeys, be they to visit friends and family, go to a sporting fixture, visit the coast or many other leisure opportunities. The train operating companies will need to prepare for this, and be ready at short notice to lengthen trains to places such as Scarborough and Bridlington when the forecast is for sunny weather,

Until the crisis hit, there was widespread agreement that Northern would need to order more rolling stock to meet demand and reduce overcrowding. I hope that this will still be the case, as the “CAF” trains need to be lengthened whilst the production lines are there. If many commuter services operate at below pre virus levels after “normality” returns, then many services will cease to be overcrowded. This may present opportunities to increase either the number of services or the length of trains on lines that have suffered particularly chronic overcrowding and passengers being left behind at stations. It may also mean that there is rolling stock available to convert “Parliamentary timetables” into proper services – examples are Goole to Leeds and Sheffield to York via Pontefract Baghill. It may also make it easier to introduce new services, such as extending the Leeds - Wakefield - Pontefract services to Doncaster, with a reopened station at Askern.

Much needed infrastructure improvements in the north and midlands must not be delayed. Apart from the importance of investment to make certain lines fit for purpose, the construction jobs saved and created will be vital. Top priority has to be the Trans Pennine Route upgrade, four tracked where possible, and electrified throughout. This will not only speed up journeys between Leeds and Manchester but, and arguably more important, it will enable more semi fast and stopping commuter services to run, including doubling the frequency for the Manchester to Leeds via Brighouse service and enabling a much needed direct service from the upper Calder valley to Huddersfield.

We must not let the COVID19 pandemic, and the economic aftermath from it, deflect from the climate crisis. Of course, the planet is having a little bit of breathing space whilst transport use is reduced and many workplaces are shut, but the imperative to ensure the planet is fit for future generations, as well as wildlife, remains. We have to cut carbon emissions, and quickly, and that means *inter alia*, that a continuous, ambitious programme of railway electrification must proceed.

The Government has made £500 million seed corn funding available to potentially expand the railway by reopening lines and stations. Although public money will be tight after the pandemic, it is important that the railway is expanded and that the funding is found to do so. Connectivity is vital for access to education and

jobs. “Left behind” towns deserve a good railway service to enable them to prosper. In Yorkshire, priority expansion should include new stations at Haxby, Strensall, Elland, Askern, Crosshills and Methley. Line re-openings should include Spenn Valley and Wetherby – Leeds (as parts of a West Yorkshire tram system), also Colne to Skipton. Beverley to York (important also for climate resilience) and Harrogate – Ripon – Northallerton. New services on existing lines should include upper Calder Valley to Huddersfield, Pontefract to Doncaster, Stocksbridge to Sheffield and Halifax to York via Brighouse and Castleford.

Inadequate stations need upgrading, whether that be making the region’s stations fully accessible or building a new central station in Bradford to serve joined up north and south routes, the West Yorkshire tram system, and Northern Powerhouse Rail if it is routed through Bradford. If it is not, Bradford needs a spur to provide a high speed link to Leeds and Sheffield.

Northern Powerhouse Rail is, of course a must, and a new cross Pennine freight route is vital. Woodhead must be the solution to at least one of these needs.

Rail based passenger transport is not just about trains, it is also about trams or light rail. There is now much agreement that West Yorkshire needs a comprehensive tram system centring on Leeds, Bradford and Dewsbury. The South Yorkshire Supertram should be extended, initially in the southern corridor to Dore.

Of course, people will ask how can all this be afforded, to which I reply that the planet requires that we replace many car journeys by public transport, and the investment in infrastructure will provide tens of thousands of construction jobs.

The importance of rail freight has been highlighted during the pandemic. Although the sector has been hit by large COVID19 related reductions in construction and deep sea container traffic, its importance in domestic intermodal of food and medical supplies has been highlighted. In the future, we will need a bigger freight railway and that will require new and improved infrastructure, including a fast route from Liverpool across the Pennines. There also needs to be a major return to the trucking or parcels by rail, and the use of dedicated space on passenger trains and new high speed multiple units (converted from redundant electric passenger stock and High Speed Trains) must be part of the solution. The proposals by new company Varamis to run such high speed electric freight trains between London, Doncaster and Newcastle (and later to Scotland) is to be warmly welcomed.

The heritage railway sector is suffering massively because of the pandemic. They are unable to run services, and they depend massively on income from fares to balance the books. These railways have significant overheads even when not running, particularly staff costs and insurance. Furthermore, steam engines suffer when idle and track gets rusty. Many Railfuture members belong to heritage railways, and many of us will be making donations to their emergency appeals. The issue as to whether all can survive has been raised in the specialist press and I wonder if now is the time to consider whether some heritage lines should return to operating modern services as part of the national network, as well as their heritage services. There is no reason why such lines cannot be considered as part of the government’s wish to extend the passenger railway. To me, the most obvious such candidate is not in Yorkshire, but in Somerset, namely the West Somerset Railway. Unlike many preserved railways, this one connects significant destinations at each end. It runs from Minehead to Bishops Lydiard, and from there by main line connection to Taunton. As the West Somerset Railway seems to be going through a series of challenges, perhaps a future dual role could be considered, with the necessary investment (upgrading of track, and passing loops) funded from the public purse. Another possibility could be the section of the East Lancashire Railway from Bury to Rochdale via Heywood. A third would be to incorporate the Gloucestershire Railway into a reopened Stratford-on-Avon to Cheltenham service, again with infrastructure enhancements to allow national rail speeds and room for both a national rail and a heritage service. If the national rail element was to be battery powered tram-trains, a connection could be built from the current GWR terminus at Stratford Racecourse to Cheltenham town centre and the main line station.

Finally, let me return to a subject that I have raised on previous occasions. Seat comfort, and especially the hard seats on LNER’s flagship Azuma trains, as well as those on the sister trains on Great Western, and, even worse, the ironing boards on the Thameslink class 700s. It seems the common factor was the

Department for Transport's requirement to seat as many people as possible. Passenger comfort doesn't seem to have been a factor in the Department for Transport's considerations, yet it is likely that some passengers will be put off travelling on these trains. An own goal! Good news, of course, for Grand Central, as and when they resume their services! Perhaps sense will prevail and the Azuma seats will rapidly be replaced? Let's hope also that Northern's class 195 and 331 trains will be retrofitted with a second toilet, which can easily be achieved if these trains are lengthened.

Finally, can I wish everyone well and, please, keep safe.

Round the Region

by Mark Parry

Activity is now limited because of the lockdown, but there are a few stories from just before this period.

On 1 March, Bradford's Telegraph and Argus mentioned the Government's Operator of Last Resort Holdings Limited, taking over the Northern Trains operating company. It outlined the Government's commitments to improving services including the lengthening of platforms to allow the operation of longer trains. Our Aire Valley Rail User Group was mentioned as it has been campaigning for longer trains on the line to Skipton.

The Sheffield Star highlighted a campaign, on 29 February, for a new line between Sheffield and Stocksbridge. Miriam Cates, MP for Penistone and Stocksbridge, has worked with the Sheffield City Region Combined Authority and the Don Valley Railway Group has also been consulted as they have been campaigning for passenger services to be restored on the existing line. The new line proposed would involve re-opening the Woodhead line.

Our member David Pennie, of the Minsters Rail Campaign, has been pushing for the re-instatement of the Beverley to York line. Local councillors and MPs are now behind this scheme. On 3 March, the York press said East Riding Councillors were in favour of seeking funds to investigate the options further. The Minsters Campaign group have offered to work with East Riding Council officers on this.

In Loving Memory of Our Member Tony Ross

by David Pennie

I have to report the sad news of the death in April of Tony Ross. By profession a chemical engineer, Tony was a long-standing member of Railfuture. He served on its national Freight Committee for 25 years until his retirement for health reasons. He contributed hugely to its work, for example making contacts to enable a very successful Railfuture visit to Hull Docks about ten years ago. He regularly attended Yorkshire Branch meetings and was the Branch's Freight Officer from about 2015 to 2017. He bore his health problems of the last few years with uncomplaining patience.

Tony's interests in rail matters led him to be fully involved in many other bodies and societies. He was a founder member in 2001 of the Minsters Rail Campaign to promote the reinstatement of the Beverley to York line, and it was he who devised the name of the Campaign, making use of the title of those two ecclesiastical buildings. He remained on the committee of the Campaign until 2018, contributing from his considerable knowledge and experience. On his home territory, in the mid-1990s he re-founded the Hull and East Riding Rail Users' Association (HERRUA) after it had fallen into a period of inactivity, and was for many years its Secretary, until he had to withdraw from the role as his health declined. His minutes were a model of precision, accuracy and clarity. His role in HERRUA led also to involvement on the committee of the Yorkshire Coast Community Rail Partnership. He was a member of the Friends of the National Railway Museum and for many years a volunteer at the National Railway Museum.

Anthony Michael Ross was born in April 1937, and his early years were spent in the West Riding. Later, now in Bridlington, in his teens he developed a keen interest in railway photography and took many outstanding photographs of the railway scene in the East Riding from the 1950s onwards, beginning with his first camera, paid for out of paper-round earnings. Many of his photographs – including many of lines now lost – were

published in various collections. But he will be remembered above all as someone who in all his wide range of rail-related activities was an unassuming lovely man.



After my column had been written, I learned the sad news that Tony had died. I only knew Tony for a short period, but I remember an enthusiastic, positive, friendly man, passionate about railways, and a man who made pertinent contributions to branch meetings. In particular, Tony was very committed to the need to get more freight onto rail. When I became Chair, I felt that freight should have greater prominence, and I was delighted when Tony agreed to be the Branch's first formal Freight Officer, a post he held until ill health forced him to withdraw from active campaigning. So, thank you Tony for your contribution. You will be greatly missed.

Nina Smith, Branch Chair

Photograph of Tony Ross at Cottingham in July 2014 by the Hull & East Riding Rail Users Association.

The Bentham Line

Press Releases by Rod Tickner

COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP CELEBRATES HISTORY OF SOUTH CRAVEN STATIONS



Following on from the success of the historical posters designed by the Leeds-Morecambe Community Rail Partnership, (LMCRP), for Bentham and Wennington stations and the closed stations served by the old 'Little North Western' Railway, new artwork panels have been created for other stations along the Bentham Line; this time those in the Craven area. The research, photographs and descriptions for the new panels are the work of Brian Haworth, Community Rail Officer with the Partnership and a keen railway historian.

At each station, the panel shows the station in its previous forms as well as an up-to-date image, alongside a brief overview of the changes which have happened over time from the opening of the Skipton to Morecambe section in 1850.

The posters for closed stations such as Hornby, Caton and Halton hang in local village halls. One has also been prepared for the former Lancaster Green Ayre station which is displayed at the new fire and ambulance station, close to the original railway site.

The newly created station history panels are now on display at Clapham, Giggleswick, Long Preston, Hellifield, Gargrave and Skipton stations. Clapham and Gargrave still have some of the original buildings from the line's early days.

Gerald Townson, LMCRP Chairman said, "It is important to record and share the history of this early trans-Pennine route linking Leeds and Heysham with local residents and visitors, especially now as numbers using the Bentham Line continue to grow."



The Partnership is now looking to create similar panels for the western end of the line between Carnforth and Heysham Port, including Lancaster and Morecambe. Interestingly, this part of the line was also famous for a 'pioneering' electric service with overhead cables brought into use in 1908. It was converted to 25,000 volts in 1953 and continued in use until closed in 1966. It was used as a test bed for the eventual electrification of the West Coast Main line.

Brian Haworth with some of the new history panels at Bentham station.

BENTHAM STATION AT THE HEART OF THE COMMUNITY

The Friends of Bentham Station (FOBS) seek to involve the community in all they undertake. Their annual January coffee morning, held in the Town Hall, attracts around 100 local residents and visitors. It gives an opportunity to share details of the latest projects but also raise valuable funds for their activities. This year £340 was raised towards providing a defibrillator at the station for the benefit of those living and working nearby and those travelling on the Bentham Line.

With a £1000+ funding target in mind for the defibrillator, the members of FOBS decided to hold a quiz and pie & peas supper evening in early March which raised a further £320 for the project. A very entertaining evening was had by all 50 quizzers with a superb locally-made supper enjoyed at half-time. Northern, the train operator, generously provided travel prizes, not only for the quiz winners but a raffle and completion. Its success has encouraged the FOBS volunteers to hold further quizzes in the future. Unfortunately, along came Covid-19, so the winners have yet to enjoy their prizes.

During April three envelopes arrived at the station each containing a kind and generous donation to the defibrillator project: a £300 cheque from a local couple, followed by one from the Bentham Line Dancers group for £100, with a third donation of £100 from a project supporter. This brought the total raised to £1,160 and will cover the cost of the defibrillator, a cabinet and initial replacement supplies.

FOBS are looking to participate in '£999 Defibrillator Scheme' run by the Yorkshire Ambulance Service Charity.

The friends group at neighbouring Clapham station and their Parish Council, along with the Wennington and Tatham Parish Councils, have also indicated that they would like to site defibrillators at their stations. The Leeds-Morecambe Community Rail Partnership (CRP) has agreed to cover the cost of appropriate and reliable electrical installations at all three stations, whilst Northern will support the on-going running costs of the machines.

With existing defibrillators at Leeds, Skipton and Lancaster stations the CRP would like to support their installation at all stations along the Bentham Line.

Rail User Groups affiliated to Railfuture within the Yorkshire Branch

Aire Valley Rail Users' Group	www.avrug.org.uk
Askern Station, Friends of	Contact Graham Moss on graz.moss@sky.com or 07510 555722
Bradford Rail Users' Group	www.bradfordrail.com
Esk Valley	http://www.eskvalleyrailway.co.uk/evrdc.html
Halifax and District Rail Action Group	www.hadrag.com
Harrogate Line Rail Users' Group	Email: hlrug@live.co.uk
Harrogate Line Supporters' Group	www.harrogateline.org
Hope Valley Rail Users' Group	www.hopevalleyrailway.org.uk
Huddersfield, Penistone and Sheffield Rail Users' Association	Email: hpsrua@btinternet.com
Hull and East Riding Rail Users' Association	
Lancaster and Skipton Rail Users' Group	www.lasrug.btck.co.uk
Minster Rail Campaign	http://www.minstersrail.com/
Pontefract Civic Society Rail Group	https://en-gb.facebook.com/PontefractRail/
Selby and District Rail Users' Group	http://www.selbytowncouncil.gov.uk/useful-links/selby-district-rail-users-group/
Settle-Carlisle Line, Friends of the	www.foscl.org.uk
Skipton-East Lancashire Railway Action Partnership	www.selrap.org.uk
Stalybridge to Huddersfield	Email: markashmore@yahoo.com
Upper Calder Valley Renaissance Sustainable Transport Group	Email: Nina.Smith@railfuture.org.uk
Yorkshire Coast Community Rail Partnership (Yorkshire Coast Wolds Coast Line)	www.yccrp.co.uk

Branch Committee and the small print

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Our next issue (**Yorkshire Rail Campaigner 50**) will be out in September 2020. Please email photos, news and feedback to: Mark.Parry294@gmail.com to arrive by **Saturday 8 August 2020**. Alternatively, text or call 07941 642349. **Having your Yorkshire Rail Campaigner sent by email saves us time and money. Contact Andrew Dyson to request this.**

Railfuture subscriptions start from £14 a year. See: <http://www.railfuture.org.uk/join/> or contact our membership secretary Andrew Dyson, : andrew.dyson@platform5.com. *Let him know if you join online.*

Diary

Most groups have cancelled or postponed their meetings during this lockdown period. Some have tried meetings by email and video conferencing. The situation is fluid as the Lockdown restrictions could vary in the near future. In the meantime, you can check the websites of the groups you maybe interested in. Provisionally the next Railfuture Yorkshire Branch meeting will be on 26 September 2020. We hope there will be another edition of this Yorkshire Rail Campaigner issued before then with details of any meetings. If anyone is unfamiliar with video conferencing and would like guidance then you are welcome to contact Mark.Parry294@gmail.com.



A photo taken by Tony Ross when he was 16, on his first camera (paid for out of paper-round earnings).

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Railfuture: Campaigning for better services over a bigger rail network.