



London and South East regional branch

[London and South East regional branch](#)

Annual Meeting 2021

Saturday 17 April 2021

Agenda

11.00-12.00 ***“Re-growing our railway”***

Panel of guest speakers:

Steve White, Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway

George Paterson, Stakeholder Engagement Manager, Southeastern

Alex Hellier, Head of Strategic Planning Kent & Sussex Routes, Network Rail

Mike Smith, Restoring Your Railway & Better Value Rail, Network Rail

Linda McCord, Senior Passenger Manager, Transport Focus

Introductory remarks followed by moderated Q&A – please use ‘Chat’ function to alert event moderator to your question.

12.00 formal Annual General Meeting for members

Agenda

- 1 – Apologies for absence
- 2 – Minutes of AGM 27 April 2019 pages 2-11
- 3 – Matters Arising
- 4 – Results of elections to branch committee 2021-22 page 12

- Reports on 2020:
- 5 – Vice-Chairman page 12
- 6 – Treasurer page 12
- 7 – Membership page 13
- 8 – Divisions: pages 13-14
 - a – Eastern
 - b – Herts & Beds
 - c – Kent
 - d – London Metro
 - e – Surrey
 - f – Sussex & Coastway
- 9 – Branch campaigns page 15
- 10 – Branch communications page 15

- 11 – 2020-21? page 15

2 – Minutes of Annual General Meeting 27 April 2019

held in the Kwanglim Room, Wesley's Chapel, London EC1Y 1AU

The morning session opened at 11.00 am and focused on 'Rail access to London's airports'.

Guest speakers: Steve Costello from Heathrow Southern Railway, and Shamal Ratnayaka as Transport for London's Aviation Strategy Lead.

The formal 2019 Annual General Meeting for members commenced at 2.00 pm

1. Apologies for absence

2. Minutes of the AGM held on 28th April 2018

The minutes were not available in hard copy but were projected on to a screen. They can be viewed [here](#) which are also in the papers for our previous AGM in 2019 [here](#), all under 'What's on' in the L&SE branch page of Railfuture's national website, in 'Railfuture near you'.

3. Matters arising

There were none.

4 – Results of 2019 elections to branch committee 2019-20

Chairman: no nomination

Vice-Chairman: Roger Blake

Secretary: no nomination

Treasurer: Howard Thomas

Others: Charles King, Neil Middleton, Chris Page. There were insufficient nominations to fill the other three vacancies.

The divisional representatives are:

Howard Thomas (Eastern), Neil Middleton (Herts & Beds), Chris Fribbins (Kent), Charles King (Metro), Stephen Rolph (Surrey) and John Black (Sussex & Coastway).

Reports on 2018:

The reports, like the minutes, were projected on to a screen at the front of the room. They were subsequently placed [here](#) on the Railfuture website, under 'What's on' in the L&SE branch page of the national Railfuture website, in 'Railfuture near you'.

5 – Chairman/Vice-Chairman

Our London and South East regional branch has roundly 25% of the entire national membership of Railfuture, and London alone has about 25% of that branch total. Owing to our numeric size as well as geographic spread we are unique among Railfuture branches in having our sub-structure of largely county-based Divisions, and that is the level at which much of our engagement with members, rail user groups and other organisations, and campaigning activity, takes place. The former is fully reflected in item 8 (reports from Divisions) below, and the latter is dealt with in more detail in item 9 (Branch campaigns) below.

Your branch committee has continued to oversee and co-ordinate those various activities, and officers have led on some of the several consultation responses submitted. Our approach mirrors that of the national organisation, which has its eye focused firmly on our vision for Railfuture as Britain's leading independent pro-rail campaign whose views are respected by the rail industry, to which decision-makers come for advice, and which rail users are proud to join, and to recommend.

Clarity of objectives matters, not just in the subject-matter of our campaigning but in the manner in which we conduct that campaigning. The stand-out example for 2018 was, ironically in view of the national headlines, the success of GTR's new Southern timetable for East Coastway/MarshLink services introduced on Sunday 20th May. That marked the culmination of months of close engagement with the operator and a variety of local stakeholders, especially the half-dozen rail user groups. Their reward, as the newly-forged Hastings & Rother Rail Users Alliance, was Railfuture's Gold Award for Best Campaign in the annual Rail User Group Awards.

The branch's regular column in the quarterly Railwatch, and the branch's own quarterly newsletter *rail/se*, continued to document the content and conduct of our activities, be they responding or contributing to around two dozen consultations within or affecting our regional branch area, or participating often in other people's meetings in order to interpose our particular viewpoint and influence.

Sometimes uncomfortable, always constructive is one characterisation of our style – that of a ‘challenging supporter’. We can demonstrate that our choice of modus operandi, to engage and negotiate, delivers real results for passengers’ benefit.

There are many and diverse opportunities for members and supporters to add further value to our activities, much of it through helping to develop our relations with those whom we seek to influence in organisations of every scale and at every level.

We must thank our fellow branch committee members for all their efforts in continued commitment to our cause. Particular thanks are again due to John Fowden for filling part of the gap left by the vacant position for Secretary, by being our de facto Minutes Secretary!

6 – Treasurer

The London & South East Branch received a subvention of £3,315 in support of its budget proposal for the year. Although a further £2,000 was made available to support campaign and lobbying work, this was not drawn upon. The main feature of the Branch’s accounts for 2018 was the surplus of £1,122.57, up from £792.30 in 2017. The Accumulated Fund now stands at £5,385.41. As in 2018, this is largely accounted for by underspending against the 2017 budget in a number of cost centres, as follows:

- Campaigns and lobbying: the amount spent was only £25. However, there was capital expenditure of £543.41 (£369.99 on a second projector, and £173.42 on a Railfuture-branded table cloth) on items used as part of campaigning.
- The 2016 AGM came in at £168.00, considerably less than the £300.00 budgeted, largely because of the choice of venue.
- Running the Divisions came to £768.70, against a budget of £1,125.00.

Unbudgeted income and expenditure included:

- £10.00 for the sale of Railfuture pens.

There was a net increase in cash and cash equivalents of £669.56 in the bank balance from £4,426.81 at 01/01/2018 to £5,106.70 at 31/12/2018.

Railfuture’s policy is to provide for 20% depreciation on cost in each of the first four accounting years of use, and to write down the value of non-current (fixed) assets to £1.00 in the fifth year. Thereafter, the non-current assets remain at £1.00 until they are disposed of. Following this policy, I have charged £140.23 for depreciation in 2018 (see: *Statement of Comprehensive Income for the year ended 31 December 2018*). Following this, the net values of the gazebo, the first projector, and the two leaflet stands are now down to £1.00. During the year, a second projector was bought for £369.99, and the branch table cloth for £173.42.

In 2018, Divisions were asked to prepare their own figures for inclusion in the Branch budget for 2019. This went well, and the Branch proposals for 2018 have been approved by Railfuture’s national Board of Directors. I should like to take this opportunity of thanking the Divisions for their work and cooperation on this. Inviting and encouraging the Divisions to submit budget proposals is now a regular activity.

7 – Membership

We gained 18 new members during 2018 (including three new affiliated Rail User Groups – Abbey Flyer Users’ Group, Hastings & Rother Rail Users Alliance, and Reigate Redhill & District Rail Users Association), down from 26 new members in 2017. We lost 29 members in 2018, including the Transport Salaried Staffs’ Association, less than the 40 in 2017.

At the end of 2018 we had 450 members, a net loss of 13 on 2017, and now including 22 Rail User Groups which is up three from 2017, and 20 members who belong primarily to other branches.

Although the majority of new members joined online, so we do not know what prompted them, we do know that the remainder were either introduced by a member, picked up one of our leaflets at an event or their local station, or heard about us on the radio. We need to continue to raise our profile by being seen to be active and campaigning, maximising opportunities for publicity and telling our friends, relatives and colleagues about Railfuture, so that we can recruit more members and grow. We desperately need more active members so must make our meetings more welcoming to new members to encourage them to stay and become active.

We have to make use of electronic and social media. We need email addresses for all our members so that we can communicate by email - post is now too expensive to notify details of meetings or events, or request support for campaigns. Please let the national membership secretary loyd.butler@railfuture.org.uk or the branch membership secretary chris.page@railfuture.org.uk have your email address - it will not be passed outside Railfuture.

8 – Divisions:

a – Eastern

The main developments in 2018 have been work on the development of the Essex Rail Strategy, continuing work and problems associated with the Barking-Gospel Oak line electrification, and the capacity improvement on the Lea Valley line, including the building of Meridian Water station to replace Angel Road.

- **Essex Rail Strategy**

A key development in 2018 saw local authorities in Essex, and especially Essex County Council, start to work on the Essex Rail Strategy to link in with those of neighbouring authorities. Among items to be included in the Strategy are better rail/bus integration, improved ticketing and infrastructure improvements. The Eastern Division has established a link with this process, and East Anglia branch's Martin Cooper is now involved with Eastern Division as part of its oversight on this development.

Other developments and activities during the year have been:

- **Vicky Ford MP**

In May, Vicky Ford, MP for Chelmsford, organised a meeting with representatives from Greater Anglia, Network Rail, Essex County Council and Chelmsford City Council to discuss and move things forward on rail transport in the area. Topics included Beaulieu Park station and weekend engineering works.

- **Beaulieu Park Station**

We now know the design and track configuration proposed for the station. Taking into account the Network Rail GRIP process, Beaulieu Park station is now expected to be open in 2025.

- **Weekend engineering work**

2018 has seen a significant number of weekend closures of the GEML, mainly for infrastructure work in connection with the Elizabeth line. Most weekends have involved trains terminating at Ingatestone and passengers being bussed to Newbury Park on the TfL Central Line adding at least 1 hour to the normal journey time. Network Rail said that weekend engineering work would become the exception rather than the norm. By the end of the year, weekend disruption was still the norm.

- **Ongoing work to electrify the Barking – Gospel Oak Line**

Many of the problems faced in 2017 continued into and through 2018. There have been further blockades during which, as in 2017, alternative arrangements for passengers have

not always been satisfactory. By the end of 2018, electrification work appeared to be complete, but there was still no firm date for the delivery of the long overdue Class 710 emus and for them to be in squadron service. The Barking – Gospel Oak line had just 6 dmus to cover 6 diagrams, meaning that there was no spare capacity to cover for maintenance and breakdown. Service performance and reliability has suffered. TfL have carried some testing of the electrification with a Class 378 emu reduced from 5 to 4 cars, with a view to possible use as a stop-gap pending the inauguration of the 710 fleet.

- **Lea Valley line capacity improvement**

Work on building a third track on the Lea Valley line north from Lea Bridge station has progressed during the year. Meridian Water station, which is to replace Angel Road station in May 2019, appears to be complete.

In the meantime, the Eastern Division has kept a watching brief on other matters such as passenger service reliability, fares and other local issues including the growing problem of overcrowding at Stratford station during peak times. The division has continued its work on evaluating station facilities in its catchment to focus on a range of issues including access for the disabled, toilet facilities, etc. It has started to establish links with Community Rail Partnerships in its area, in particular the Essex and South Suffolk Rail Partnership.

b – Herts & Beds

The Division met in St. Albans – in March, June and October – but unfortunately the practicalities of life meant that we couldn't schedule our planned early-2019 meeting. Our next meeting is on Saturday 11 May in St Albans (our usual venue, the Garden Room at St. Paul's Church, Hatfield Road, AL1 4JP [walking distance from City station for most, otherwise buses available; fully accessible]) - 10.45 for 11.00-13.00. Attendance at the meetings was around 15, with a mix of Railfuture members, User Groups (some of them affiliated) and also representatives from Hertfordshire County Council and GTR.

Our focus for the year was the 'current railway'. The GTR timetable issues were a key topic, with the June meeting focusing on the then current meltdown being suffered by both Thameslink and Great Northern travellers following the May timetable change. GTR apologised for the then terrible service (this was before the reduced timetable came in, so travellers were plagued by short notice cancellations and long service gaps). GTR also explained the root causes – which are now well-documented in various reviews and so not repeated here. Members and RUGs both raised the matter of enhanced compensation, which was eventually agreed by the Government. By October, the focus moved to timetable design, with attention given to the impacts on Thameslink users of East Midlands Train's decision not to call at Bedford and Luton in peak hours.

We also discussed the 'want' for East Midlands Trains to disclose both passenger loading information and make an earlier than planned return to peak hour services at Bedford and Luton; something that unfortunately remains an unfulfilled desire. We reviewed options for the information we needed for informed decisions and our options for lobbying – both with EMT and via politicians. RUGs affiliated with Railfuture (APTU & BCA) are leading the work in this area.

We heard from ABFLY about the outcome of their successful campaign to crowdfund a study into options for a passing loop on the Abbey Line (St Albans Abbey to/from Watford Junction: currently operated on a one train in use basis: there is no signalling beyond Watford).

During the year we also heard about successful '[Treetgate](#)' campaigns on the Great Northern route for Network Rail to take a more reasoned approach to vegetation management and tree felling, where contractors had strayed a long way beyond reasonable in tree felling as regards distance from the live railway (do note that this is not a disagreement about felling trees / clearing vegetation that is needed for a safe reliable railway).

Meetings also spent time reviewing possible changes in services on the Marston Vale line (Bedford / Bletchley) and London North Western Services between Euston and Hertfordshire.

For 2019/20, a key topic will be to review passenger 'wants' for the franchise or other arrangements that will replace the Govia Thameslink Railway management contract which is due to expire in September 2021 (subject, of course, to the Williams Review and other political developments).

If you live in Hertfordshire or Bedfordshire, use the trains in the area, or just have an interest, we hope to see you at our next meeting. Along with our 'business as usual' we shall spend some time thinking about how the Division should work in the future – eg should we start asking external speakers, are Saturday mornings or weekday evenings better etc.

c – Kent

Following a busy year in 2017, there were major delays to key decisions in 2018. The Franchise Award had already been delayed to April 2019, and has been further delayed due to the workload and higher priority issues at the DfT. Announcement of the Franchise will now be in 2019. The Kent Route Study was also delayed, appearing in May 2018 – it has a higher priority on maintenance issues, and improvements as suggested by the division clearly need external funding.

The introduction of further Thameslink services was very disappointing and saw some services reduced from half-hourly to hourly, or even worse. Suggestions were made about stopping Highspeed trains to reduce the impact at the worst affected station – Higham, but a rail replacement bus was introduced from/to Strood and Gravesend instead.

The division's suggestion of re-opening the freight-only Hoo branch on the Isle of Grain has now been mentioned as an option in the Kent Route Study and is backed up by Medway Local Plan documents. A bid to the Government's Housing Infrastructure Fund has been made for funds to progress this; decision on the grant is expected in the Spring.

More help is needed with the division's administration. There were only two meetings in the year, down from three in 2017. There is an intention to return to more meetings in 2019, but more assistance and input from local members is required to make meetings effective.

d – London Metro

The year 2018 is clearly a year which we can put down to things not going to plan in the London Metro area.

May 2018 GTR Thameslink/Great Northern timetable fiasco which was supposed to be a new dawn in integrated rail travel across London. However, it resulted in hundreds of trains not running, leaving thousands of passengers stranded on station platforms. This required at least four temporary timetables almost on a daily basis within the six weeks to July 2018, when a more stable temporary timetable was introduced. This was further enhanced in

December 2018 and will have some more enhancement in May 2019, but is unlikely to have the full proposed May 2018 until December 2019 or even as late as May 2020.

Railfuture had supported the proposed GTR May 2018, but expressed a number of concerns about reduction of services in the Metro area. We welcomed the exclusion of the Caterham and Tattenham Corner lines from Thameslink, and the May timetable fiasco showed that we were right to do so. We welcomed the ability that offered through journeys to Finsbury Park from East Croydon and stations to Redhill and Gatwick along with those from the Greenwich line and other parts of south-east London and Kent. We welcomed increased services on the Wimbledon loop especially in the peaks and on Sundays, along with the increase to four trains per hour on the Catford loop line.

On the Southern Metro we welcomed the new semi-fast services from London Bridge to Norwood Junction, West Croydon and Sutton to Epsom, the doubling of frequency and reintroduction of a Sunday service on the Epsom Downs service improving the service to Belmont for the Royal Marsden Hospital and the increase in frequency of calling at Carshalton, along with and the new all-day service from Dulwich, Tulse Hill and Streatham to East Croydon and Caterham.

On the down side we had and still have concerns over the reduction of the metro service at Norwood Junction which has been reduced from 6 trains per hour to 4 trains per hour and at certain times to 2 trains per hour. We raised concerns over the reduction to 1 train per hour on the metro service from East Croydon to Balham, and the loss of Thameslink services at New Cross Gate which has step free access.

We were disappointed that there was no plan to increase the services on the West London line between East Croydon and Milton Keynes in the off-peak to 2 trains per hour at least between East Croydon and Watford. There is clear demand both actual and latent for this increase which would also resolve the East Croydon to Balham problem.

Railfuture met both TfL and GTR to discuss this and there is a desire by both to resolve this issue. However, the problem seems to be one of committed paths given to both freight and Channel tunnel freight trains, the latter enshrined in legislation which both DfT and Network Rail are reluctant to seek to change.

Crossrail was the next bad news as this was due for opening in December 2018. This was delayed due to problems commissioning trains, stations and signalling which at year-end were still not working as planned.

Heathrow services on the positive side TfL has taken over the Heathrow Connect service between Paddington and Heathrow T4. As this had run with a premium fare beyond Hayes and Harlington TfL has integrated it into the Oyster scheme with a special premium fare on single fares to the and from the airport, but has agreed to the same daily fares Oyster 1-6 cap for passengers who use additional TfL rail or bus services during the day. In addition, London Freedom Passes are now valid throughout. GWR has taken over running the Heathrow Express and will update recently-introduced Bombardier 387 stock for the purpose.

Gospel Oak - Barking has been another sorry tail. The long over-running electrification of the line finally happened and was completed in 2018, only to find that the new electric passenger rolling stock was delayed and not accepted into service. As there was commitment to cascade the eight existing class 172 diesel units to other parts of the country, this left TfL's London Overground with a looming problem as they progressively went off-lease and were cascaded to the West Midlands.

e – Surrey

During the year Stephen Rolph took over as Division Convener from Chris Page.

Division members were invited to attend two joint meetings with Sussex & Coastway Division in Haywards Heath. Guest speakers on 7th June were Antony Merlyn from GTR and Victoria Garcia from Brighton & Hove Buses, on the theme of Accessibility. On 19th July the guest speakers were Catherine Folca from Transport Focus and David Statham and Andy Wakeford on behalf of the Rail Delivery Group, on the topic of fares and ticketing then out to a consultation.

Surrey Division reversed the arrangement on 27th November when guest speaker was Andrew Wood from Network Rail, updating us in Redhill on progress with the Brighton Main Line Improvement Project, the planned Croydon Area Remodelling Scheme, the additional platform proposed for Reigate station, and the planned North Downs line 3tph GWR service and some associated level crossings issues.

All presentations can be viewed on the respective Division's web pages.

f – Sussex & Coastway

The Division maintained its pattern of regular monthly evening meetings, except in March (due to bad weather) and August, at various locations throughout East and West Sussex, providing reasonable access for a majority of members and affiliates.

An acceptable balance has been achieved between business and guest speaker meetings. In June the theme was Accessibility in Public Transport, with Antony Merlyn (GTR's Accessibility Manager) and Victoria Garcia (Brighton & Hove Buses' Accessibility & Communities Manager). In July the subject was Fares and Ticketing addressed by Catherine Folca, Stakeholder Manager, Transport Focus (London Office) and David Statham and Andy Wakeford from the Rail Delivery Group. Both these meetings were held jointly with the Surrey Division. In September we were brought up to date on community rail partnership matters by Rowena Tyler, representing Arun Valley and the new West Coastway CRPs. In October our member Robert Baugham spoke about the London Bridge signalling project, in which he had been involved. In November our members supported the Surrey Division in its meeting at Redhill addressed by Andrew Wood of Network Rail. Attendance at ordinary meetings has remained steady, at around 15 to 20.

During the year our convenor, Nigel Denton, decided to stand down, after four years in the post and we are grateful for all his hard work during this time. We are pleased that John Black has taken over.

The Division is represented on various rail user and CRP groups. Members continue to have a continuing involvement with the Hastings & Rother Rail Users Alliance in seeking improvements to the East Coastway/MarshLink service. There has been much reference to the 2018 Timetable changes and we contributed a response to the consultations on this. The Division was represented at the Uckfield Big Day with our gazebo, where interest is always shown in the possibility of reopening the line bridging the gap from Uckfield to Lewes (the Wealden Line Extension), but there is no practical progress to report and all depends on a business case based on increased housing development in the relevant area.

A full programme is planned for 2019, including a special emphasis on encouraging support in West Sussex and seeking ways of improving West Coastway services.

9 – Branch campaigns

As noted last year, Railfuture continues to occupy the unique and valued position of being the only long-established, national, independent, and voluntary pro-rail lobby group. Our campaigning for expansion and improvement to develop a bigger better railway in Britain continually seeks to inform and influence, to promote and persuade. We do so in the relatively benign environment of high levels of passenger patronage, with passenger journey volumes in 2018 showing only variable fluctuations to sustained long-term growth across our region's operators taken together, albeit with some significant signs of change in journey patterns. Strong and sustained capital investments in the railway assets of rolling stock and infrastructure appear likely to continue, with some new train fleets in 2018 part of a continuing trend and with a substantial SoFA (Statement of Funds Available) from the DfT for 2019-24 in Control Period 6, to be focused on operations, maintenance and especially renewals.

That said, maintaining credibility and confidence against a background of high-profile Hatfield-like collective nervous breakdowns such as May's GTR timetable meltdown and TfL's late-notice and open-ended postponement of Crossrail's cross-London services presented unexpected and unwanted challenges to our chosen stance of 'critical friend'; where did, should, the balance between 'critical' and 'friend' lie?

Our own campaign to reconnect Brighton and coastal communities in the west of East Sussex with their Wealden neighbours and London had a seventh if perhaps less eventful year overall in 2018. In April we responded to an invitation from Lewes District Council to present our current thinking to its Scrutiny Committee; it can be viewed in our web page for our [Uckfield-Lewes campaign](#). Opening with 'imagine there never was a railway between the two places, why build one now?' and concluding with 'no new (housing) growth = no new railway' we sought to answer our own question with an invitation to collaborate around a new paradigm of a sub-regional scale of new housing situated in a growth corridor connecting the two towns. In July we had our annual campaign stall at the Uckfield Festival's 'Big Day'.

Elsewhere in East Sussex we continued our active engagement with the local campaign, with the objective of rejuvenating the coastal economies of Hastings and Bexhill, to reduce journey times by rail to/from London. Earlier responses to GTR's consultations on their May 2018 timetable finally bore fruit when the Railfuture-inspired new timetable structure was implemented. Some refinements to the morning peak service, in response to user feedback, were then added in December. As can be inferred from the report by the Chair/Vice-Chair above, the entire process can be seen as a model of effective campaigning.

Our other principal campaigning activity has been responding to the steady flow of consultations throughout the year. Experience in our branch and others is that evidence of active campaigning is one of the surest ways of attracting new members. During 2018 we responded directly to, or contributed to responses on these 26:

- TfL's proposed Canary Wharf-Rotherhithe river crossing
- Hertfordshire County Council's Local Transport Plan 4
- the DfT's draft Community Rail Development Strategy
- the ORR's 'Improving Assisted Travel'
- Network Rail's East West Rail central section, round 3
- South Western Railway's optimisation of train services
- the DfT's next Great Western franchise
- Network Rail's East Coast Main Line Route Study
- Coast2Capital LEP's Strategic Economic Plan
- South Western Railway's possible Boxing Day services
- Rother Valley Railway's Transport & Works Act Order application for the Robertsbridge-Bodiam connection
- the House of Commons' Transport Committee inquiry into rail timetable changes

- the Medway Local Plan
- TfSE's Economic Connectivity Review
- the ORR inquiry into the May timetable, first and second phases
- the GLA's Transport Committee call for evidence on the future of rail in London
- the GLA's Budget & Performance Committee's investigation on who will pay for the TfL of the future
- DEFRA's draft Clean Air Strategy
- the Rail Delivery Group's 'Easier Fares'
- Network Rail's Transport & Works Act Order application for East West Rail's western section phase 2, and a Statement of Case for the public inquiry
- the Wealden Local Plan
- London TravelWatch's review of TfL's planned closure of 51 London Overground ticket offices
- the DfT's proposed closure of Angel Road station
- Network Rail's Croydon Area Remodelling Scheme.

10 – Branch communications

Four eight-page colour issues of the quarterly *railse* were published during 2018, as in previous years, and were as usual distributed by post with each Railwatch. In addition, views/downloads of all editions, for the past nine years, are always available from the branch web page at [L&SE Branch news](#). While very little comment on the established format, or material suitable for publication, is received such feedback as there is remains positive and encouraging.

An innovation for 2018 has been, in response to a member's suggestion, the introduction of an additional two-page monthly e-newsletter *inter-railse* available by email upon publication to members notifying their wish to become a subscriber; over 100 members currently do so. It enables more up-to-date communication of events and consultations than is possible with the quarterly *railse* with its necessary pre-publication lead times. Again, all editions on *inter-railse* are available for viewing or download on the branch web page.

11 – 2019-20?

This is where you, our members, come in!

As a taster, your branch committee has, in common with the national approach for every one of Railfuture's 14 branches to have one headline campaign for a year, applied the same principle to our six divisions and put forward these for discussion:

Eastern: Connecting new Essex garden communities

Herts & Beds: New East Midlands franchise and Main Line timetable

Kent: Hoo Peninsula passenger railway

London Metro: West London Line development

Surrey: North Downs Line development

Sussex & Coastway: West Coastway development

For the branch as a whole:

Transport for the South East's Transport Strategy 2050

Vote London 2020 – manifesto for Mayoral and London Assembly elections

3. Matters Arising from Minutes of 2019 AGM

4. Results of elections to branch committee 2020-21

The following were elected unopposed:

Chairman no nominations

Vice-Chairman Roger Blake

Secretary no nominations

Treasurer Howard Thomas

The other elected branch committee members are:

Charles King, Neil Middleton and Chris Page. There were insufficient nominations to fill the other three vacancies.

The divisional representatives on branch committee are:

Howard Thomas (Eastern), Neil Middleton (Herts & Beds), Chris Fribbins (Kent), Charles King (Metro), Stephen Rolph (Surrey) and John Black (Sussex & Coastway).

Railfuture's Company Secretary / Accountant and Sussex & Coastway Division's Secretary Trevor Davies, and branch Independent Examiner Gordon Pratt, also attend.

Reports on 2020

5. Vice Chairman

The Vice Chairman notes that the London & South East regional branch still has c.25% of the entire national membership of Railfuture, and London postcodes alone have c.25% of that branch total. Due to our numeric size and geographic spread we are unique among Railfuture branches in having a sub-structure of essentially county-based Divisions and it is at that level that much of the engagement with members, rail user groups and other organisations and campaigning activity takes place. It is therefore pleasing to be able to report that after the inevitable period of adjustment at the start of the pandemic over a year ago, the branch quickly regained much of its rhythm with regular committee and Division and meetings held online. The one notable casualty was our AGM in April 2020, so the record of branch activity in 2019 is confined to our quarterly newsletters and monthly e-bulletins.

As well as a Chair and a Secretary, the branch has lacked a membership secretary for a while now and so this important aspect of our work, not just monitoring but actively welcoming and seeking out potential new members, is not receiving the attention it requires. We do need to continue to raise our profile by being seen to be active and campaigning, especially in the increasingly-important social media sphere, maximising opportunities for publicity and telling others about Railfuture, so that we can attract more members and continue to grow. One of the few beneficial side-effects of the pandemic, not being able to travel for meetings in venues, has been increased levels of participation in some of our online meetings; Herts & Beds and Sussex & Coastway Divisions have been particularly good examples of this.

6. Treasurer

The year ended 31st December 2020 saw the deficit carried forward from a year earlier of £2271.51 reduce to £1318.93 due largely to dramatically-reduced expenditure on division meetings, and net total assets reduce from £3113.90 to £1794.97 due largely to less cash held in the branch account, the year closing with £1531.30. Branch proposals for the 2021 budget have been approved by the Railfuture Board of Directors. The branch accounts are examined by co-opted committee member, Gordon Pratt who has no financial role in the branch, and then passed to the national accountant. The company's accounts are audited.

7. Membership

We gained 39 members over the last two years, including one new affiliated Rail User Group: SE5 Forum for Camberwell. This did not however make up for the loss of 71 members. The net loss is 32, a marked decline in our membership. We currently have 418 members, including 20 Rail User Groups and 17 members who primarily belong to other branches.

The pandemic has shown that we can operate effectively online with virtual meetings, social media and e-mail. If you have not already done so, please let the national membership secretary lloyd.butler@railfuture.org.uk or the branch membership secretary chris.page@railfuture.org.uk have your email address, and confirm your permission for us to use it - it will not be passed outside Railfuture.

8. Divisions

a Eastern

The Division held five of its six scheduled alternate-monthly meetings, the first two as usual in Stratford and then, after cancelling May, continuing the remaining three online. An enduring topic of interest was the prospects for establishing direct services between Chingford, Walthamstow and Stratford, with capacity at the south end of the Lea Valley line and in Stratford station being a core issue and the possibility of an only half-hourly service being insufficiently attractive. A key consultation as the year closed was Greater Anglia's new timetable for the Great Eastern Main Line planned for December 2021, neighbouring East Anglia branch leading on Railfuture's 'single-voice' response.

b Herts and Beds

Prior to Covid-19, we met approximately quarterly in St. Albans and since March 2021, we have met monthly via Zoom, either on Saturday mornings at 10:30am or Monday to Thursday in the evening (7:30pm); we have varied times to increase options for attendance and to avoid consistent calendar clashes for some members. Our meetings are typically attended by 15 - 20 people, a mix of local Members, representatives of adjacent Branches and Divisions, Rail User Groups, GTR and other stakeholders (eg local councils); this is an increase from our in-person meetings. We have generally debated live railway topics including service levels, Railfuture's flexible fares campaign, performance problems et al. We have also explored topics in more depth such as 'The challenges of Data in the Railway Industry'. Once the Government allows us to again meet in person, we intend to switch to a mixture of further Zoom sessions and in-person sessions; hopefully our first in-person gathering will be outside in July. We are of the view that Zoom has a continuing role in our meetings, as it significantly reduces the time commitment for a meeting and makes it easier to meet during the week from time to time; but on the other hand, we are also keen to see each other in real-life, not just Cyber space!

c Kent

The Division began 2020 with a stall at the annual Erith Model Railway Society weekend exhibition at the Longfield Academy. The Division's February meeting was held in Tonbridge, however all three subsequent quarterly meetings had to be held online, and the hope of having a stall and giving a talk at the annual Faversham Transport Festival to coincide with the May meeting was dashed by the pandemic. Topics for the Division have included the new Rail Strategy for Kent, the Housing Infrastructure Fund for restoring passenger services to the Hoo Peninsula to support 10.6k new homes (local resistance hoping to halt the new homes), London Resort Company Holdings' proposed theme park at the Swanscombe Peninsula, and Network Rail's North and East Kent Connectivity Study.

There has been an expansion of Community Rail Partnerships in Kent. A new one on the Ashford to Otford Line (Kent Downs) has been added to the two existing lines in the Kent CRP, Tonbridge to Hastings to the Southeast CRP lines, and new lines (White Cliffs (Dover/Folkestone), Thanet (Ramsgate/Margate) have come alongside recent newcomer Darent Valley CRP (Sevenoaks to Swanley). The new CRPs come with new money from the train operator and the involvement of their local communities (including Railfuture members).

Outside Railfuture, Gordon Pratt continues to press the benefits of a light rail / tram solution between Ebbsfleet / Gravesend and Grays / Purfleet in Thurrock.

d London Metro

Although led by Herts & Beds Division as that area would be the more significantly affected, a live issue for both Divisions has been the gathering momentum towards the transfer of GTR's Great Northern Metro operation to TfL. As part of London Overground it would be a very substantially greater extension of TfL's geographic 'reach' beyond the GLA boundary than other parts of that network; TfL Rail reaches into Essex and extensively into Berkshire.

e Surrey

Common interests dictate that most Surrey Division meetings are held under the auspices of Sussex & Coastway Division. The exception was in October when Gareth Owen, Communications Manager for Crispin Blunt MP (President of the Reigate & Redhill Rail Users Association) spoke about *Effective campaigning strategies for rail issues* and concentrated on:

- * The importance of a co-ordinated approach – community and pressure groups to combine campaigns to make them more effective. More than one MP involved in campaigns and communications with Ministers, if possible.
- * Identifying and prioritising issues in order of importance and likely success with DfT/ Ministers
- * Remembering the wider national and regional context when pressing for local changes
- * The difference between operational, strategic, and policy issues – making representations at the right level
- * Monetising proposals. Anything that sounds as if it will cost more is unlikely to be welcomed.

Consultations responded to during the year were on the draft Local Plan for Mole Valley District and Surrey County's survey for their new Rail Strategy.

f Sussex & Coastway

This past year or so has been interesting for us all. However, I am pleased to report that this Division has managed to meet most months on the first Thursday or its nearest substitute. In some ways it has been easier to secure guest speakers from within the industry and beyond since they are not having to travel to our meetings, which had been deliberately spread across the whole of Sussex and occasionally into Surrey, after a day at the office. My thanks to them all. We have continued to focus on the planning to improve the West Coastway as well as other hot topics such as the Passenger Benefit Fund – from water butts at Winchelsea to chairs at Chichester! All have featured. I wish to thank all those who have assisted this division to be such a hive of activity both from within and beyond to the wider Railfuture family.

As Convener I shall finish by marking, with much gratitude, the passing on the 5th October 2020 of Rev. Michael Davies who had, only a few weeks before, handed over the Minute Secretary tasks to his successor. Right to the end he had maintained his enthusiasm for a bigger, better Railway by being part of Railfuture, and building a suitably sized model layout at his home!

9. Branch campaigns

Railfuture occupies the unique, valued, and increasingly-respected position of being the only long-established, national, independent, and voluntary exclusively pro-rail lobby group. Our campaigning for expansion and improvement to develop a bigger, better railway in Britain for passengers and freight users continually seeks to inform and to influence, to promote and persuade at all levels, local-regional-national, and across all sectors and agencies.

Details of the various campaigns undertaken within the regional branch area can be found on the Railfuture website – find the branch page in ‘Railfuture near you’. These include continuing efforts to restore a rail link between Uckfield and Lewes, and to extend HS1 services to the east of East Sussex.

Our other principal campaigning activity has been responding to the steady flow of consultations throughout the year; for our branch 17 are listed in the Railfuture library for 2020. These responses can be viewed at or downloaded from ‘Consultations responses’ under ‘[Campaigns](#)’. Experience in our Branch and others is that evidence of active campaigning is one of the surest ways of attracting new members.

10. Branch newsletters and bulletins: quarterly *railse* and monthly *inter-railse*

Four eight-page colour issues of the quarterly newsletter *railse* were published during each of 2019 and 2020 as in previous years, and were as usual distributed with each *Railwatch*. The March 2020 edition marked the completion of a decade under new editorship, his first for July 2010 (and not a few which followed) now a pale comparison with current issues! After a couple of years colour was introduced for the June 2012 issue.

Twelve two-page colour issues of the monthly e-bulletin *inter-railse* were published for the start of each month during 2019 and 2020, having commenced in July 2018 and, like the longer-established monthly Rail User Express, available by email at the time of publication on request. In addition, views/downloads are always available from the branch web page at [Branch news](#). While very little comment on the now-familiar formats, or material suitable for publication, has been received such anecdotal feedback as there is has remained positive and encouraging.

11. 2020-21?

Regular readers of the quarterly branch newsletter will be familiar with our five national campaigns, reflected on our [website](#):

*Attracting passengers back to rail* – improving the travelling environment

*Climate change and modal shift* – how the railway can help reduce the carbon footprint of transport

*Restoring Your Railway* – restoring communities’ rail connections by reopening lines and stations

*Fares and ticketing* – making the system easier and fairer

*Industry structure and Williams* – taking the opportunity to move to devolution and concessions.

Also worth noting for celebrating is that 2021 marks the 70th anniversary of the founding of Railfuture’s forebears, the Society for the Reinvigoration of Unremunerative Branch Lines in the United Kingdom (SRUBLUK) – soon reduced to the Railway Invigoration Society – and the Railway Development Association, which came together in 1978 as our immediate predecessor the Railway Development Society.