



September 2022

Welcome to the Rail User Express

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How ironic that Rf's Annual Conference in Leeds on 15 September on the Turning Point for the Railway has had to be postponed until March or April next year due to industrial action, as any turn will be for the worse. The unions think they have the Government over a barrel, but the barrel is in danger of going over Niagara Falls, with any gains in the short-term funded by cancelling long-term projects.

Roger Smith

We continue with the usual roundup of news items from groups around Great Britain. Please keep your contributions coming: they are all gratefully received.

South East Northumberland Rail User Group

At Seaton Delaval, in sight of the new Northumberland Line railway station, Rf North East Branch Chair Keith Simpson presented SENRUG with no fewer than four RUG Awards. Joint Gold for Best Newsletter went to its Editor Dave Shaw. The group also won Joint Silvers for Best Website and Best Campaign, while SENRUG Chair Dennis Fancett was awarded another for Best Campaigner.

Organiser of the Awards Roger Blake added: "SENRUG epitomises all the qualities which are so essential for local rail campaign groups: persistence, patience, persuasion, pragmatism and professionalism. Whilst its premier campaign, the Northumberland Line, is now coming to fruition, their other activities such as seeking to improve services at Cramlington, campaigning for a Newcastle to Berwick local service, and fighting proposed cuts in long distance trains at Morpeth all carry weight and are increasingly recognised on the national stage".

SENRUG Chair Dennis Fancett added "it's pleasing to know what we do here in Northumberland is recognised. When we launched our campaign for The Northumberland line some 19 years ago, it was hard to be taken seriously. Everyone said it could never happen. But we stuck with it. Never let anyone tell you that campaigning from volunteer groups like ours will not pay off".

Ribble Valley Rail

At long last, RVR was able to hold a "proper" AGM, and nowhere better than in the brand new Trinity Church Community Hub in Clitheroe. All the Committee and Officers were re-elected.

The RVR service has been fairly reliable, although other lines in the north west have suffered multiple cancellations, apparently caused by a rostering dispute arising from the May timetable. However, Community Rail Lancashire and RVR have strongly protested the proposed December 2022 timetable, as passengers travelling between the Ribble Valley and Preston would have a half-hour wait at Blackburn. Nor do the changes include a students' train, although TOCs are obliged to consider their travel needs.

Although the Restoring your Railway bid to extend the Clitheroe service to the Settle – Carlisle line was among the first to be accepted in March 2020, and a Strategic Outline Business Case was prepared, the scheme is not being progressed to delivery under RYR. However, the SOBC can yet be taken forward through the Ideas Fund, which will provide detailed feedback, and recommend next steps and potential alternative routes, so RVR still hopes for a positive outcome.

Huddersfield Penistone Sheffield Rail Users Association

After her initial bid to restore passenger services to the Stocksbridge branch was unsuccessful, Penistone and Stocksbridge MP Miriam Cates spoke in the House of Commons on 9 July about her joint bid with Mark Eastwood, MP for Dewsbury, to improve the rail service in their area. That bid is still pending, but the one for a passenger service and new stations on the Sheffield - Chesterfield line via Barrow Hill is being progressed. Could it be a through service from Stocksbridge?

Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group

The line between Castle Cary and Taunton will close from 1 – 11 October for engineering works, with West of England services diverted via Bristol. So the 0651 and 0803 from Bedwyn will not run, and the 1836 from Paddington won't call at Kintbury, Hungerford or Bedwyn.

South Hampshire Rail Users' Group

In its response to NR's consultation on proposals for re-introducing passenger train services on the Waterside line, SHRUG marginally prefers the New Road site for Hythe station, as it is slightly nearer the hospital and (for ramblers) the New Forest Country Park. If trains could have increased space for cycles, boosting revenue, Hythe might gain an enhanced role as a gateway to the Forest. Continuing population growth in Totton and the Waterside is causing road congestion, so buses have slower timetables at peak times but still run late. The rail proposal could also benefit people on the western side of Southampton.

In Transport for the South East's Strategic Investment Plan, the big local operational issue for rail is the constricted section between Southampton Central station and the junction at St Denys where Portsmouth line diverges from the main line. The circuitous route causes problems programming dozens of freightliner workings daily, as well as slowing and limiting the Portsmouth service. The Plan contains a proposal to maximise the benefits of these operations by investing in a tunnel between Southampton Central and Woolston. SHRUG suggested this to NR in 2019, and further promoted it in a letter published in the Southern Daily Echo on 8 July.

RAILFUTURE

Rf welcomes new members, both individual and groups: the more we are, the more weight to its campaigns. Join [here](#): from the "Membership Types" menu top right, select either the appropriate category of individual or, to affiliate, select "RUG or similar". Read the latest from Rf on [News and views](#), [Press releases](#), [Railfuture in the news](#), and [Consultation responses](#).

NEWS

Given the economic downturn, and the Government's view that the rail industry is sub-scale to meet national economic and environmental objectives, the Rf Board has reviewed its policy focus.

Campaigning for funding to enhance the railway is unlikely to succeed, so instead Rf will seek to combat the widely held perception that rail is unreliable, expensive and offers a poor service, focusing on three areas: the needs of users, freight and rail reform. However, Rf Yorkshire Chair Nina Smith maintains that the railway must be fit for the rest of the century and beyond, so Rf should be bold, and lobby politicians for what is needed, not just for what is expedient.

Whilst approving a new dual carriageway from the notorious A421/A1 Black Cat Roundabout to the A428 at Caxton Gibbet, Transport Secretary Grant Shapps dismissed claims that the road scheme is not needed as it runs along the same corridor as EWR. "This rather looks like Mr Shapps is softening us up for a future cancellation announcement" said Ian Brown, Rf Policy Director. "There needs to be a much more ambitious case for the railway line" added Rf Chair Chris Page: "Electrify it, use it for freight services as well, [and] run proper regional services on it such as Swindon to Ipswich, and Oxford to Leicester. It can be a diversionary route as well".

COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

Along with South Cambridgeshire District Council, NHS Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Infant Feeding Team, and the 'Best Start in Life' partnership, Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton CRP supports venues that welcome mothers who breastfeed and/or pump in public. These include Shepreth Wildlife Park and Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR), so a group of them launched their campaign by taking the train from Cambridge for a day out at the animal park.

CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT

13% of UK flights are internal, and many have an equivalent rail journey that could be completed in a similar time, with much less pollution and greenhouse gas. Yet the aviation industry pays no fuel tax. Doing so on domestic routes would fund a rail fare freeze, encouraging more people to take the train, and reducing the number of unnecessary flights.

TRANSPORT FOCUS

Mrs G and family purchased tickets through Trainline for travel from Victoria to Brighton. However, on the day of travel, having got through the ticket barrier they found the train was so busy they couldn't get on board. When contacted, neither Southern nor Trainline would offer a refund, so Mrs G turned to Transport Focus. Southern confirmed that the previous train had been cancelled, which was why the next train had been so full. When presented with this evidence, Trainline agreed to offer a full refund.

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

Engineering trains are now running on the first mile of the new Levenmouth line from Thornton junction to deliver material for subsequent phases of work, so people must stay clear of the line.

Whifflet South junction that links Coatbridge Freight Terminal to the West Coast Main Line is being renewed with a stronger track, concrete sleepers and fresh ballast – at a cost of £2.2 million.

A railway bridge in Backworth on the Newcastle - Ashington freight line has been replaced, along with nearly 200m of new track, as part of the scheme to reintroduce a passenger service by 2024.

Up to 250,000 tons of slate waste aggregate a year is currently being transported to Luton from Llandudno Junction rail freight yard, which is back in operation after several years. The Breedon Group received match funding for the revival from the Welsh Government's Freight Facilities Grant scheme, which drives modal shift by taking HGVs off the roads.

Bloy's Grove solar farm, south of Norwich between Swainsthorpe and Mulbarton, will generate around 15% of NR's non-traction energy. The agreement with EDF Renewables UK builds upon its traction supply partnership with the EDF UK Group, and supports its Environmental Sustainability Strategy commitment for all non-traction energy to come from renewable sources by 2030.

Following the grant of a Transport and Works Act Order (TWAO), NR has been awarded £78.6m to transform Oxford station, with a new western entrance next to Botley Road linked by a subway, stairs and lift to a new track and platform alongside Platform 4. Track work to create three new high-speed crossovers at Oxford North Junction means no weekend services in or out of Oxford until 8 October.

Train services on the main line west of Salisbury have had to be recast after a speed restriction from 80mph to 40mph was put in place on 4 miles of single line between Tisbury in Wiltshire and Gillingham in Dorset. Sections of clay-based soil have dried out and shrunk, leaving the track uneven and dangerous to trains running at full speed. The restriction is likely to remain until October, as the soil must regain some of its moisture before repairs can be made.

,,,and finally

NR volunteers are helping the Cornish Birds of Prey Centre and supplying materials for an aviary and a new wild bird hospital. Two hundred sleepers left over from a local track renewal will form a retaining wall in preparation for the construction of the hospital later this year.

CONSULTATIONS

- GBRTT: [Rail Freight Growth Target Call for Evidence](#), closes 27 September.
- ORR: [Holding NR/GBR to account in CP7](#), closes 30 September.

Please advise [Roger Blake](#) of any other consultation, eg that of a local transport authority.

EVENTS

Please keep your events coming, and update websites with any changes as soon as they are made. Stand-alone lists are helpful, as newsletters may be discarded. Also copy [Roger Blake](#), who maintains lists of [Events](#) and [Key Dates](#) on the Rf website.

Blob colour indicates the type of event:

- Rf events (RUGs are cordially invited).
- National & regional rail events.
- Local Group events.

September

- Saturday 10. Rf London South East, Herts & Beds Division, **Kings Cross**, 1100.
- Saturday 10. English Regional Transport Association, The Swan Pub, 1 Dunstable Road, **Flitwick**, Bedfordshire, MK45 1HP, 1400.
- Wednesday 14. Rf London South East, Eastern Division, **Online**, 1900 (Also 9 Nov).
- Wednesday 14. Rf West Midlands.
- Thursday 15. Friends of the Barton Line, No 1 Inn, **Cleethorpes**, (Also 16 Nov, White Swan Barton.)
- Thursday 15. Meldreth Shepreth and Foxton Rail User Group, venue TBN, 1930.
- Tuesday 20. Chesham & District Transport User Group, Town Hall, **Chesham**, HP5 1EP, 1930 (Also 25 Oct, 6 Dec.)
- Thursday 22. Salisbury-Exeter RUG AGM, Yeovil Railway Centre, Barwick, Yeovil, BA22 9UU (opposite Yeovil Junction Station), 17.00.
- Saturday 24. Rf East Anglia, Friends' Meeting House, 5 Upper Goat Lane, **Norwich**, NR2 1EW, 1400 (Also 3 Dec, Cambridge).
- Tuesday 27. Levenmouth Rail Campaign, **Online**, 1830 (Also the last Tuesday of every month).

October

- Wednesday 5. Community Rail Awards, Manchester Central Convention Centre.
- Thursday 6. Rf London South East, Sussex and Coastway Division, **Brighton?** 1800. (Also 3 Nov).

- Tuesday 11. STORM, Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, **Castleton**, OL11 2SP, 1400 (Also the second Tuesday of each month).
- Tuesday 11. Rf London South East, Herts & Beds Division, **Online**, 1930.
- Saturday 15. East Suffolk Transport Association, Market Hall, High Street, **Saxmundham**, 1400.
- Saturday 15. English Regional Transport Association AGM, St Peters Court House, Church Lane, **Berkhamsted**, Hertfordshire, HP4 2AX, 1400.
- Friday 21. Avocet Line Rail Users Group AGM, Manor Hotel, **Exmouth**, 1900.

Further Ahead

- 1 November. Community Rail Network AGM, **Online**, 1400.
- 19 November. Rf London South East, Kent Division, 1400.

Disclaimer: unless otherwise stated, views expressed are those of the contributor, and not necessarily shared by Rf.

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