



January 2023

### Welcome to the Rail User Express

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The New Year sees a railway scene as bleak as ever, with co-ordinated industrial action aimed at causing as much disruption as possible, commuters working from home again, and leisure travel deemed “non-essential”. And who would plan a holiday around a train journey that may not be running when the time comes? So the fare increase in March could be of little consequence: by then there won’t be any passengers!

Roger Smith

*We start with news from groups around Great Britain. All contributions are gratefully received.*

### Levenmouth Rail Campaign

LMRC remains engaged in consultations around stations, active travel connections and associated projects such as Levenmouth Reconnected and River Leven. It is pushing for the ‘almost promised’ freight provision on the line (vital for the local economy and the Scottish Government’s climate action) and also for a train depot, both to increase the reliability and viability of the rail service, and to create significant local employment.

### Lakes Line Rail User Group

Working with Tim Farron MP, Avanti West Coast has helped restore a Post Office service to Oxenholme after a two-year gap. Local Postmaster Phil Ballantyne provides a counter service at the station from 1100 – 1300 on Mondays and 1230 - 1430 on Thursdays. It is believed to be the first of its kind on the West Coast Main Line, and one of only a few Post Offices operating at a railway station in the UK.

Northern has listened to LLRUG and reinstated the 2018 service from Oxenholme on Mondays to Saturdays that connects with services from both north and south, including the peak Euston departure at 1730. Its return from Windermere at 2042 also connects into services both ways. However, the 1429 from Manchester Airport to Windermere waits at Oxenholme for 25mins, although this nonsense can be avoided by changing to an Avanti train at Preston to reach Oxenholme much sooner, and taking the bus to Kendal.

Avanti has introduced an earlier Oxenholme service to Glasgow at 0714, and reinstated its 0743 to Crewe and Birmingham, but has withdrawn the 1243 to Birmingham, leaving a 7-hour gap from 1042 to 1747. The 1030 and 1230 ex-Euston no longer call at Oxenholme as they did during the Covid timetable, so the morning service from London has reverted to unacceptable 3-hour gaps.

### **Northern Weekly Salvo – Paul Salvesson**

The general view of the railways at the moment ranges between ‘awful’ and ‘disastrous’. The combination of industrial action and ongoing problems related to Covid have resulted in cancellations and poor reliability, even when trains are supposed to be running. Some reform is needed, particularly around Sunday working and more flexible use of NR maintenance teams. However, blanket closure of ticket offices would be hugely unpopular with the travelling public, even if there are no compulsory redundancies.

Meanwhile, is it time to re-visit the local operation of secondary railways? ‘Microfranchising’ was the dog that never barked, but as the railways enter a new era of possible cuts, different ways of operating and managing the more peripheral parts of the network should be explored once more. What a shame Adrian Shooter is no longer around to help with the vision.

### **Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester lines**

Over Christmas and the New Year, work on the Transpennine Route Upgrade included the installation of a new track crossing into Holbeck depot, improvements in Wakefield Kirkgate so the line can be used as a diversionary route, and track renewal in preparation for the new, fully accessible station at Morley.

### **East Suffolk Transport Association**

In ESTA’s annual train and bus survey, detailed questionnaires were completed for 81 rail journeys. Most of the respondents were regular users, but 19% had used a printed timetable to find out about their train, and no fewer than 40% had used a ticket office. Passengers liked the new Class 755 trains, in particular the extra space, level boarding and information displays. Some commented that their superior acceleration should enable Greater Anglia to revise its timetable and reduce end-to-end journey times.

### **English Regional Transport Association**

In October, Executive Member Colin Crawford represented ERTA at a House of Lords reception to launch the Next Generation Entrepreneurs Report. It would like to expand its representation in various corridors of power, be it Westminster, local authorities and agencies/other organisations, the better to get its messages across and contribute to the pool of what needs to be done.

The Friends of Askern Railway Station campaign to reopen it as part of a scheme for a new Leeds – Doncaster service via Pontefract. What sets the Strategic Outline Business Case for the line apart is that it would not only provides significant benefits for local communities, but also deliver strategic connectivity and resilience across South and West Yorkshire. There are also plans to reinstate the Harrogate - Ripon – Northallerton line. The project has broad support from North Yorkshire CC, Ripon City Council and Kevin Hollinrake MP, but it would be a medium to long-term project that could take between five and 30 years.

Studies are needed on orbital routes or new build in or around Rugby, which suffered with withdrawal of Great Central rails. Consideration should be given to a Rugby WCML - Magna Park - Lutterworth area – Narborough line, where it would join the Nuneaton - Leicester line. And Bedford – Northampton, with a new route around Olney, would open up Brighton – Bedford – Birmingham, linking three airports, Eurostar and HS2.

### **Bedford Commuters Association**

The new Transport Interchange at Flitwick was scheduled to open officially on 9 January. NR is aiming for a design for the provision of lifts by next April. BCA has lobbied for a platform on the southbound fast line at Bedford to improve the performance and reliability of EMR services. Last July, a NR report 'Bedford Area Strategic Advice' concluded that it should be under consideration: by freeing up space on the slow lines, housing north of the station would not need to be demolished to make way for new East West Rail lines. The outcome of a public consultation on a station at Wixams is also awaited.

Launched in May 2021, "EMR Connect", the all-electric Class 360 service to Corby, is its best performing service group in customer surveys. It is exploring options with the DfT and the supply chain for delivery of a programme to refurbish these trains within the available funding envelope. EMR has also communicated with BCA about providing First Class.

### **Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group**

GWR is abandoning the bi-mode Class 769 trains that could have given Bedwyn a direct service to Reading or even Paddington as an alternative to the IETs. BTPG has asked whether a 10-car IET could be split into two 5-car units to release an IET set, or if a Class 387 on the Newbury route can be swapped for an IET on the Cardiff route. Otherwise, the off-peak turbos to Newbury will remain for the foreseeable future. BTPG will also continue to press for service improvements, especially to the first and last morning and afternoon off-peaks.

### **Tarka Rail Association**

TRA's Atlantic Coast - Exeter Rail campaign (ACE) has continued with a presentation by project lead Tim Steer to the Parish Councils around Eggesford station, which has one of only two passing loops on the 40-mile line. And the campaign gained further publicity through articles in the Lynton Lynmouth & Exmoor Advertiser, the Crediton Courier, and the column in the North Devon Journal by Torridge MP Sir Geoffrey Cox KC.

GWR MD Mark Hopwood CBE and his executive team met Devon CC's Environment, Climate Change and Transport lead (and TRA President) Andrea Davis, together with members of TRA's committee at Barnstaple to discuss the high level of cancellations that are causing overcrowding, and also the speed restrictions at Chapelton that delay services and create yet more cancellations. After the constructive meeting, Mark had the first public showcase of the official TRA ACE Rail banner, proudly bearing the logos of GWR and Tf, that will go on display at various Tarka line stations. A subsequent interview with the local transport leads is now on Mark's LinkedIn page.

And 24 December marks the anniversary of West Country class loco 34019 'Bideford' entering traffic in 1945. It was the [return](#) of her original name and number plate to Bideford in 2021 that prompted what has become the ACE Rail campaign, when the then-Mayor let it be known that he wanted the return of those artefacts to be followed by the return of the town's railway!

## 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

On the Rf website, Neil Middleton discusses [the future of ticket offices](#). Although 7 in 8 people now buy their ticket some other way, the remaining 1 in 8 still need a personal service, although this need not be from behind a ticket office window. Staff should continue to sell tickets and assist passengers, but from around the station. Online selling, ticket vending machines (TVMs), and Pay as You Go must also be improved before any wholesale ticket office closures.

Rf is pleased that rail fares will increase by 5.9% in line with earnings not inflation, but likens it to [rearranging the deckchairs on the Titanic](#): the current service offering isn't value for money, so an increase can't be either. A switch in focus is essential, where growing revenue is at least as important as managing costs. The railway needs to run itself as a business, not a cost-centred Government department.

## COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

Three pilot projects run by Severnside and Gloucestershire CRPs, Community Rail Lancashire and Catch22 aim to engage some of the most at-risk groups of young people with transport in order to tackle loneliness, and improve their confidence, wellbeing and access to opportunity.

Developed specifically for the GB rail industry, the Rail Social Value Tool (RSVT) monitors and measures the social value of its projects and day-to-day operations. At a CRN information session, Tom Hall from RSSB will outline the background to the tool, explain how and why the rail industry is using it, and discuss opportunities for community rail to engage with it.

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

ORR has published a [progress report](#) on its 2023 Periodic Review that will determine NR's outputs and funding for Control Period 7 (CP7). It is conducting the Review amid a complex and challenging context for the rail industry as it recovers from the pandemic against a backdrop of inflationary pressures, changed passenger journey patterns, industrial action and rail reform.

With a £15m subsidy from the Scottish Government, ScotRail is suspending peak and anytime fares for six months from next April in a bid to make train travel more affordable. The cost of some will almost halve, eg Glasgow – Edinburgh down from £27.60 to £14.20.

Following the successful trial installation of a request-stop kiosk at Scotscauder on the Far North Line, those at Kinbrace, Kildonan, Rogart, Invershin and Culrain went live on 20 December. Kiosks at Altnabreac and Dunrobin Castle will be activated early in 2023 to complete the programme.

At the heart of the railway network since 1966 and capable of directing up to 1,200 trains/day, the Grade II listed Birmingham Power Signal Box (PSB) moved its last service on Christmas Eve. Control has switched to the West Midlands Signalling Centre in Saltley, the final piece of a £700m digital jigsaw.

The DfT has granted NR a Transport and Works Act Order for the construction of Cambridge South station next to the Biomedical Campus. It will have four-platforms, step-free access, a ticket office, TVMs, accessible toilets, a waiting area and space for retail and catering. The detail is subject to planning authority approval, and the work will also include improvements to Shepreth Junction, and a new connection between existing lines at Hills Road.

After extensive stakeholder engagement, two [connectivity studies](#) from England's Economic Heartland identify ways to improve the transport system across the Oxford - Milton Keynes, and Oxford - Northampton - Peterborough corridors. Compliant with DfT appraisal guidance, they set out investment opportunities that EEH and its local authority partners can now seek to progress. In 2023, EEH expects to complete another study for Swindon – Didcot – Oxford, and start two more: Thames Valley - Milton Keynes – Northampton, and the Southern east-west corridor.

At Royston Station a new footbridge with lifts to each platform will allow Thameslink and Great Northern passengers with limited mobility to change platforms without having to exit the station and use the main road. The old bridge will be demolished before the new structure and lift shafts are installed.

GTR has modernised all of Southern's 75 Class 377/4 Electrostars, and started on the 62 slightly older 377/1s. It is a key milestone in a five-year programme funded by Porterbrook that could rise from £55m to £100m with further upgrades. Passengers will now enjoy facilities such as at-seat charging points, and the upgrades will also streamline the trains' maintenance and repairs.

From 25 May, an overnight sleeper will run between Brussels and Berlin. Leave London by Eurostar on Friday at 1500, arrive in Brussels at 1800 in time to catch the sleeper at 1922, and be in Berlin just before 0700 on Saturday morning. The return on Sunday departs Berlin just before 2300, arriving in Brussels for 0930, so with a quick change, you can be back in London by 1045 - ideal for a long weekend. The fares will total about £160 return from London to Berlin, cheaper than British Airways and comparable to Ryanair.

According to University of Cambridge research, the air in the London Underground network is polluted with metallic particles small enough to enter the human bloodstream. Dust samples from ticket halls, platforms and train driver cabins had high levels of maghemite, a type of iron oxide. The academics did not investigate whether the particles pose a direct health risk.

Work by G-volution and SBL-Rail could significantly reduce emissions from Class 37, 59, and 66 diesel locomotives. The partnership has been developing dual fuel engines for almost two decades, and is now ready to show how their technology can benefit UK freight operations.

***,,,and finally***

From a Matt cartoon in the Daily Telegraph: "There's no rail strike today. All cancellations are running normally".

The Hardy Tree, an ash that stood in Old St Pancras Churchyard, Camden has finally come down. In his youth in the mid-1860s, the renowned Dorset author Thomas Hardy was in charge of excavating part of the churchyard during construction of the Midland Railway's new London terminus at St Pancras. As the graves were exhumed, he placed their headstones around the base of the tree.

## **CONSULTATIONS**

- Eastbourne Borough Council: [Draft Growth Strategy for Local Plan to 2039](#), closes 20 January.
- Bristol City Council: [Local Plan Review](#), closes 20 January.
- Welsh Government: [Just Transition to Net Zero Wales](#), closes 15 March.

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 [Rail 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.

### January 2023

- Thursday 19. Friends of the Barton Line, No.1 inn, **Cleethorpes** station, 1900).
- Saturday 21. Rf London South East, Herts & Beds Division, **London**, 1100 (Also 16 February Online, 1730).
- Saturday 21. English Regional Transport Association, Rupert Brooke, 8-10 Castle Street, **Rugby**, Warwickshire CV21 2TP, 1400.
- Tuesday 31. Levenmouth Rail Campaign, Fife Renewables Innovation Centre, Ajax Way, **Methil**, Leven, KY8 3RS and **Online**, 1830 (Also the last Tuesday of every month).

### February

- Thursday 2. Rf London & South East, Sussex & Coastway division, **Online**, 1800 (Also the first Thursday of every month).
- Saturday 11. English Regional Transport Association, The Swan, 1 Dunstable Road, **Flitwick**, Bedfordshire, MK45 1HP, 1400.
- Monday 13. Ribble Valley Rail, New Inn, Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, BB7 2JN, 1900 (Also the second Monday of every month).
- Tuesday 14. STORM, Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, **Castleton**, OL11 2SP, 1400 (Also the second Tuesday of each month).
- Saturday 18. Rf London South East, Kent Division, **Online**, 1400.
- Saturday 25. English Regional Transport Association, The High Cross, 105 High Street, **Leicester** LE1 4JB, 1400
- Saturday 25. Rf East Anglia AGM, Friends Meeting House, St. John's Street, **Bury St. Edmunds**, Suffolk, IP33 1SJ, 14.00 (Also 17 June, Ipswich).

### March

- Thursday 2. Rf London South East, Sussex & Coastway division. **Bishopstone** Station, 1800.
- Saturday 4. East Suffolk Transport Association, St Mary's Church, **Halesworth**, 1400 (Also May 20 (AGM), Oulton Broad).
- Wednesday 8. Rf London South East, Eastern Division, **Online**, 1900.
- Saturday 11. English Regional Transport Association, Methodist Church, Northampton Road, **Market Harborough**, LE16 9HE, 1400.
- Monday 13. SELRAP AGM, Municipal Hall, **Colne**, BB8 0BP, 1900.
- 27/28 March. Community Rail Conference, **Nottingham**.
- Thursday 30. Rf Annual Conference, St Georges Centre, 60 Great George Street, **Leeds**, LS1 3DL.

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

Contact the editor by e-mail: [ruglink@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:ruglink@railfuture.org.uk), or phone: 01462 815992.

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*Registered Office: Edinburgh House, 1-5 Bellevue Road, Clevedon, BS21 7N – **for legal correspondence only.***

*All other correspondence to: 14 Ghent Field Circle, Thurston, Suffolk IP31 3UP*