



April 2023

Welcome to the Rail User Express

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It is 60 years since the infamous Beeching report was published on 27 March 1963 – but thanks to campaigns led by Rf and its predecessor organisations, and the persistence of individual members and affiliated groups, scores of stations and hundreds of miles of track have since been re-opened, along with many new stations. Keep up the good work!

Roger Smith

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

Lakes Line Rail User Group

On 1 April Westmorland and Furness Council, a unitary authority, replaced Cumbria County and South Lakeland District Councils. LLRUG looks forward to working with the new councillors, and with Community Rail Cumbria, which represents all three community rail lines in Cumbria, and will be hosted by the new council.

Before it was abolished, Cumbria CC submitted the Strategic Outline Business Case for a passing loop on the Lakes Line that would enable two tph, far better than simply lengthening the trains. LLRUG pays tribute to those who completed the job in good time despite the extra work involved in preparing to split the county.

Northern has developed modular toilet pods that do not need mains water or drainage. LLRUG will ask Northern and Avanti to co-operate and install one or two on Platforms 2/3 at Oxenholme. Northern has added a video helpline to some of its ticket machines (TVM), including the one at Kendal. A 'button' on the screen opens a video link to Northern's customer assistance staff.

Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester lines

With less commuting as more people work from home, peak evening fares should be scrapped. Abolishing the afternoon cut-off to off-peak would encourage more leisure travel. And why is it easier to get to Manchester Airport from Saltburn than from Rochdale? People from North Manchester have to change trains/trams, while Yorkshire and the North East have a direct route into the Airport!

Calderdale Council has granted planning approval for a new station at Elland. The project will now go out to tender for construction to start in 2024, with a target opening date of late 2025.

East Suffolk Travel Association

Some 50 members and friends attended ESTA's March meeting. Alan Neville, Greater Anglia's Stakeholder, Customer and Community Engagement Manager began by saying that they were now "almost completely a new-trains railway." The bimodal trains on lines including the East Suffolk were highly praised. Leisure travel across the region continues to grow, while 2023 was seeing a perceptible return of commuters. The opening of the Beccles loop in 2012 has been "absolutely transformational", with a 100% increase in passenger numbers. "We have a lot to celebrate, but a lot of work still to do."

ESTA commends East Suffolk Council and Coastal Accessible Transport Services for relaunching the demand-responsive [Katch minibus service](#) from Framlingham to Snape via Parham, Hacheston, Wickham Market, Wickham Market station in Campsea Ashe, and Tunstall.

ESTA has updated three of its tourist leaflets: "Discover the Deben and Alde Valleys", with fresh promotion to "Katch"; "Saxmundham to the Coast", focusing on Leiston and Aldeburgh, and "Discover Lowestoft and Oulton Broad", its most popular leaflet in 2022. The "Blyth Valley" and "Waveney Valley" leaflets are also still in stock.

Chesham & District Transport Users' Group

In a Meet the Managers meeting at Chesham, TfL gave an overview of Metropolitan Line operations. The majority of delays and cancellations were due to life-expired infrastructure assets. The programme to install new points and signals is progressing, but won't reach the Moor Park to Watford, Chesham and Amersham sections until 2025. Staff absences were also an issue.

Since Saba took over operation of the station car parks from NCP, users were having difficulty in paying. The machines no longer accept debit and credit cards, but signs on them indicate the ability to pay by phone. However, on dialling the number shown, a recorded message advised you to download an app! This left users without a mobile phone in difficulty: with no attendant on duty, they could be fined for non-payment through no fault of their own.

TfL has confirmed that from 0930 to 2300 Greater London residents with a Freedom Pass can travel out to Zone 9, and the whole length of the Elizabeth Line from Reading to Shenfield.

Oxford and Bucks Rail Action Committee

The Budget allocated £1.5m to build the economic case for East West Rail, although funding for the Aylesbury section has yet to be identified; NR is examining if low cost improvements could create enough capacity to extend the Chiltern Railways service to Milton Keynes. HS2 will commission NR to re-instate Claydon Junction to Quainton Road, with room for a second line. An OBRAC report on the potential of a line from South Bucks to Milton Keynes emphasises its connectivity value; the East West Main Line Partnership will develop the case. Meanwhile, work to rebuild the Bicester - Bletchley section is over 50% complete, and Winslow station is well in hand.

Oxford City Council has developed an innovative scheme to fund the business case to re-open the line to Cowley with two new stations, and by extending two existing services an hour. Landowners and businesses have committed Community Infrastructure Levy payments, with the City and County Councils providing additional funds.

Tunbridge Wells & District Rail Travellers' Association

Around 100 people attended Southeastern's Stakeholder Forum at London Bridge on 10 March including a south London MP, local authorities and councils from across the SE region, and both mainline and metroliner commuter groups. Steve White, MD of Southeastern, spoke on 'Building a Sustainable Future', and there were also presentations from various members of his management team, Ellie Burrows, Head of NR Southern Region, the CRP and the GBR Transition Team.

A common theme in the forty minutes of questions was around providing additional peak capacity as more people return to work, though not on a five-day basis. Key points included:

- SE currently receives a subsidy of around £1m/day from the DfT
- Off-peak leisure travel is good, but peak hour commuting is still only around 60-70% of normal, with Tuesday to Thursday the busiest days
- The May timetable should see some uplift in services
- A major upgrade is planned for the Class 375 mainline rolling stock
- The procurement process to replace Networkers on metro routes is at early stage
- Southeastern plans to upgrade ticket vending machines and its online offering, and is looking to extend the Pay As You Go boundaries further into Kent.

Tarka Rail Association

In rural areas, the hardship caused by rail closures results not only in a change of travel method, but also in a change of lifestyle. Both young people seeking education, employment and a social life, and older people suffering physical isolation move away to be replaced by car-owning families and second-home owners, undermining the stability and continuity of rural life (*it follows that rail re-openings will reverse this hardship – Ed*).

On 24 January, North Devon MP Selaine Saxby delivered an ACE (Atlantic Coast to Exeter) Rail Campaign briefing to a Restoring Your Railway debate in Parliament. The following day, GWR MD Mark Hopwood gave evidence on rural connectivity to the Transport Select Committee. He drew attention to the Victorian signalling system on the Tarka line, including the exchange of tokens, and the fact that train staff had to operate the level crossing barriers. Regarding capacity, the Devon Metro around Exeter that was a two-car network is now generally a four-car network.

A draft of the Initial Business Case for the restoration of a rail service to Bideford has been circulated to stakeholders.

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

In an article on the back page of [Railwatch](#), Rf Director Roger Blake reviews the evolution of the rail network in the post-Beeching era. After a lean spell, the tide has turned, with no fewer than 361 stations and 100 lines or chords reopened up to 2020. And in an article in the [Oxford Mail](#), Dave Richardson of Rf Thames Valley hails the regrowth of rail through Oxford, with the Chiltern line to High Wycombe and Marylebone in 2016, and the prospect of East West Rail and the Cowley line, as well as a new line to [Witney](#) to relieve the A40, and a new station at Grove for Wantage,

RAILFUTURE SCOTLAND

The St Andrews Rail Link (STAR) is now Rf Scotland’s lead campaign, with the aim of getting a line in place before the Open Championship returns to the home of golf, thought to be in 2030. However, the project is currently in limbo, along with those for new stations at Newburgh in Fife and at Beattock. Transport Scotland takes months to respond to a report; then projects are faced with deafening silence as they await the go-ahead to proceed to the next stage.

RAILFUTURE NORTH EAST

Carlisle - Newcastle - Morpeth line passengers can change at Manors for Metro services to North Shields, Tynemouth, Whitley Bay and elsewhere on the north bank of the Tyne.

On the Durham Coast line, Grand Central's direct route to London, Sunderland station needs expanding to cope with more Metro services, but Coastliners RUG wonders what an extra platform at Hartlepool will deliver once the Tall Ships event in July is over. The overdue lifts and footbridge at Billingham, and the upgraded facilities at Middlesbrough are welcome, but nothing is planned for Stockton, despite its place in rail history. RfNE would like more InterCity services on the line, while Coastliners wants CrossCountry to restore its Newcastle - Reading - Southampton services, with some running via Sunderland, Hartlepool and Stockton. Adding the "missing" services to the Darlington/Durham route would usefully link the coast to Sheffield, Derby and Birmingham.

RAILFUTURE EAST MIDLANDS

North-West Leicestershire DC is identifying possible sites for stations on the Ivanhoe line from Leicester to Burton Upon Trent if this reopens to passengers. Two sites have been found close to Coalville town centre, but Ashby-de-la-Zouche is more problematic as the former station building is now in private hands. Other potential sites include Leicester South, a park-and-ride at Meynell's Gorse, Kirby Muxloe, Desford, Ellistown/Bardon, Moira, Castle Gresley and Drakelow/Staplehill. NR needs to include every viable site in the business case that it is developing.

RAILFUTURE WESSEX

Rf has been critical of GTR's use of 50-year-old Class 313 units on some longer-distance services along the south coast due to their lack of toilets and other facilities passenger now take for granted, so it welcomes their replacement from May with more modern and spacious Class 377 and 387 Electrostar units on services such as Portsmouth to Littlehampton and to Brighton.

And later this year, South Western Railway (SWR) will replace the many different classes of trains used on its metro services around London, and from Waterloo to Reading, Windsor and Alton, with the 60 new ten-carriage and 30 new five-carriage Class 701 Arterio trains that should have entered service in 2020. They replace rolling stock that SWR is giving up, so the ongoing delay is causing overcrowding on short-formed trains.

In partnership with SWR, Swanage Railway is trialling a heritage diesel service from the main line at Wareham on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays from 4 April to 10 September. Passengers can book through to Corfe Castle and Swanage with their SWR tickets. The first train from Wareham departs at 1119, and the last train for Wareham leaves Swanage at 1620, subject to change on special event days.

COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

Passenger journey numbers on lines with a CRP have recovered from the Covid-19 pandemic somewhat faster than the average. For every quarter since the start of 2020-21 up to the end of December, the ORR figure for the whole network stood at 79% of pre-Covid levels, compared to 82% on lines with a CRP.

TRANSPORT FOCUS

TF was at Worcester for the launch of West Midlands Railway's new Class 196s. Demolition work in central Birmingham will make way for a new Pineapple Road station, which is key to reintroducing services on the Camp Hill Line. Existing stations are also being enhanced. Platform changes for work on the ceilings at New Street will start soon and continue for most of the year.

CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT

The cut in tax on domestic flights from 1 April will cost £130m in lost revenue and result in 410,000 more domestic air passenger journeys a year, roughly half of which will be as a result of people switching from trains or cars. This sends the wrong signal about how we should travel during a climate crisis. CBT urges the Government to reverse this cut and use the money to extend the £2 cap on bus fares until the end of the year.

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

At an [Accelerate Rail event](#) in London on 21 March, ORR CEO, John Larkinson discussed its role in rail reform. As well as focusing on its benefit to passengers, freight users and funders, and on ensuring a safe, high performing railway, ORR will have oversight of train performance and overall rail efficiency. John details how it will rise to this challenge by collaborating with Government, industry and operators on policy changes.

In a [Financial Times](#) article, Jennifer Williams laments the lack of rail investment in the north. The March Budget promised new investment zones: “12 potential Canary Wharfs” outside London. The dockland development benefited from the £3bn Jubilee line extension but, though earmarked for one of the new zones, Leeds remains the biggest city in Europe without a mass transit system. A plan is being worked on, but a funding mechanism with which to deliver it remains elusive. The Northern Powerhouse Partnership has suggested dedicating 1p of national insurance towards local mega-projects, while the Mayors of Greater Manchester and the West Midlands have argued to retain business rates for “levelling-up zones” over 25 years.

Home to the UK's largest train factory, Derby has finally been named as the national GBR HQ, with the former Railway Technical Centre earmarked as a potential site. Other towns and cities across Britain will become regional GBR hubs with local decision-making and investment powers.

From April 22 to June 4, during the final phase of work to remodel Carstairs Junction on the West Coast main line, most weekday services will return to normal, but the junction will close each weekend, with no direct services between Glasgow Central or Edinburgh and Carlisle.

Work on the metal sections of the Barmouth Viaduct to complete its refurbishment will close the Cambrian Coast line and footpath from 2 September to 24 November. Transport for Wales expects to operate a combination of bus replacements and train services during this period.

A NR feasibility study into a new station serving Devizes found that the cost of an extra stop for London - South West services would outweigh its benefit, as it would impact far more people over a wide area than were likely to join at Devizes. The London - Bedwyn stopping service could be extended to Westbury with a call at Devizes, but would require more trains and a new turn-round platform at Westbury. However, the region would benefit from increased connectivity to local stations across Wiltshire, and on the high-speed network.

With the help of stakeholders, GTR has wholly recast its East Coastway timetable between Brighton and Ashford. From May, there will be four departures from Brighton to Eastbourne every hour, and two to Hastings, with reduced journey times and improved connections at Ashford.

...and finally

24 February marked the centenary of the entry into service of A3 Pacific loco 4472, later 60103, better known as ‘Flying Scotsman’. The foresight of Alan Pegler, her first private owner, in writing a right of access to the main line railway into the purchase contract showed that steam need not be confined to preserved lines, thus paving the way for the present day steam specials.

CONSULTATIONS

- Transport for West Midlands: [West Midlands Local Transport Plan](#), closes **17 April**
- DfT: [Minimum Service Levels for Passenger Rail During Strike Action](#), closes **15 May**

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. 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.

April

- Saturday 15. Rf London & South East, Herts & Beds Division, **St Albans?** 1100 (Also 9 May).
- Saturday 22. Rf Wales AGM, **Shrewsbury** station, 1330.
- Saturday 22. Rf London & South East Branch, Wesley's Chapel, 49 City Road, **London** EC1Y 1AU.
- Tuesday 25. Ribble Valley Rail AGM, The Trinity Hub, Trinity Church Hall, Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, 1400
- Tuesday 25. Levenmouth Rail Campaign, Fife Renewables Innovation Centre, Ajax Way, **Methil**, Leven, KY8 3RS and **Online**, 1830 (Also the last Tuesday of **every other** month).
- Friday 28. Friends of the West Highland Lines AGM, Great Western Hotel, **Oban**, 1200.

May

- Thursday 4. Rf London & South East, Sussex & Coastway division, **Online**, 1800. (Then the first Thursday of every month).
- Monday 8. Ribble Valley Rail, New Inn, Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, BB7 2JN, 1900 (Also the second Monday of every month).
- Tuesday 9. STORM AGM, **Littleborough** station, 1900 (Also the second Tuesday of each month at Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, **Castleton**, OL11 2SP, 1400.)
- Tuesday 9. Chesham & District Transport Users' Group, Town Hall, Parsonage Lane, **Chesham**, Bucks, HP5 1EP, 1930.
- Wednesday 10. Rf London & South East, Eastern Division, **Online**, 1900.
- Saturday 13. Cotswold Line Promotion Group AGM, WI Hall, New Road, **Moreton-in-Marsh**, 1030.
- Saturday 20. Ontrack - Tendring Transport Users AGM, Gospel Chapel, 62 Old Road, **Frinton-on-Sea**, Essex, CO13 9BY, 1030.
- Saturday 20. East Suffolk Travel Association AGM, St Marks Church Hall, **Oulton Broad South**, 1400.

Further Ahead

- 2-3 June [European Passengers' Federation](#), **Barcelona**.
- 17 June. Rf East Anglia, St Mary's at Stoke, Stoke Street, **Ipswich**, IP2 8BX (Also 23 September, Norwich).
- 23 June. Friends of the Far North Line AGM, Timespan, **Helmsdale**, 1030.
- 15 July. Rf AGM, University of London, Malet Street, **London**, WC1E 7HU.

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

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