



August 2023

Welcome to the Rail User Express

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So the consultation on ticket office closures has been extended to 1 September. We can but hope that the Government will use the extra time to rationalise the multitude of different proposals from the various train operating companies. However, that would require a 'guiding mind', which is conspicuous by its absence!

Roger Smith

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

Rail Action Group East of Scotland

The platforms at the new East Linton station appear to be complete, but work on the car park seems to have made little progress. Although the BAM Nuttall and NR websites state that the station would be finished in 2023, RAGES has since heard that it will open by March 2024 to coincide with the Markle level crossing replacement project, though that could take 10 months to complete. Transport Scotland is considering various options to mitigate any delays to East Linton becoming operational.

RAGES continues to press for reinstatement of the Haddington branch with two stations: a terminus on the original site, as close as possible to the town centre, and a park and ride facility 1.5 miles out of town. All trains would run to or via Edinburgh Waverley. Given the dearth of train paths east of Edinburgh, Dunbar and North Berwick services would initially be formed of two sets and split/combine in a reinstated bi-directional loop at Longniddry station (its former Platform 3). In the medium term, however, quadruple tracking is required between Waverley and Portobello Junction, and between Drem and just east of Wallyford. The strip of land required for the latter needs to be protected from further housing developments.

RAGES is enraged by CrossCountry (XC) plans to withdraw many of its Dunbar services. The cuts are totally unjustified, and would have a devastating effect on Dunbar and East Lothian, not just for the Edinburgh commute but also for travel to the south and southwest. XC claim that a consultation found that there had been no complaints/feedback from their proposals, but RAGES insist that this is invalid, as it was not distributed to them or to politicians, who would have had the withdrawals kicked into the long grass.

RAGES has joined Transform Scotland, which campaigns for all modes of sustainable travel. The diverse membership brings together passengers, local authorities, communities, environmental charities, universities and transport operators.

CKP Railways

For the Keswick and Penrith Railway project to proceed, Cumberland UA and Westmorland & Furness UA that have taken over from the County and District Councils need to coordinate their Transport and Land Use Planning responsibilities. And an extended Westmorland and Lonsdale Parliamentary constituency will include part of the route, alongside Copeland, Workington and Penrith & the Border. CKP has advised on the plans and policies necessary to support the return of the Railway, and they all seem to have people who understand its benefits. Money is not currently the most important factor - permission to rebuild the line requires solid local political support.

A number of road bridges over the old Keswick to Penrith line have been packed with stone and concrete to support structures that had weakened over time. Such infilling has been successfully challenged for contravening Lake District National Park Authority core policies. CKP has always argued that the applicants did not demonstrate that infilling was the most cost-effective solution or most appropriate for local circumstances, or that it took into account of possible re-use of the railway route requiring later removal of the obstruction.

Lakes Line Rail User Group

On 30 June and 1 July, LLRUG carried out a joint head count and interview survey. There were 2,200+ passengers on the Friday, and 1800+ using the trains on the Saturday, when the first four return services between Oxenholme and Windermere were cancelled, so around 2,000 in total with the bus replacement services. The interviewing team on Friday had good coverage, helped by three undergraduates from Northern's 'Year in Industry' programme. Saturday was more difficult, but around 700 interviews over the two days represented the journeys of over 1300 passengers. Altogether, counters and interviewers put in 85 hours or so over the two days.

Burneside in Westmorland has three syllables, but is often confused with Burnside in Scotland. In World War 1, to avoid war material being wrongly delivered, the London and North Western Railway suggested calling the Lakes station 'Burneshead', as the name Burneside is derived from *Brunolvishhefd*, noted in records of 1255, meaning the headland or hill belonging to Brunwulf.

Furness Line Action Group

Dr Neil Hudson, MP for Penrith and the Borders, has called for action on reopening the Penrith to Keswick line, extending the Borders Railway to Carlisle, and re-opening Gilsland Station on Hadrian's Wall. So will Cumberland UA and Westmorland & Furness UA add more positive support to local councils, MPs and the National Park Authority than did the outgoing Cumbria CC?

A new train fuelling and servicing facility in Barrow carriage sidings to support six-car Class 195 trains between Cumbria and Manchester Airport can service and refuel three carriages at a time rather than just one. The work was carried out in partnership with RTS Infrastructure Services.

Northern's excellent "Coast, Lakes, Dales & Fells" guide to train services from May to December is available from staffed stations, or can be downloaded or ordered [online](#).

Ribble Valley Rail

Northern took off the DalesRail service this year as it often suffered late cancellation due to a lack of volunteer train crew with necessary route-knowledge of the Clitheroe - Hellifield - Settle & Carlisle (S&C) section, and training more drivers would have disrupted their regular route(s). After much lobbying, it now appears to have enough drivers to run the service in 2024, but maybe from a different origin, not over the full length of the route, or even on a different day of the week. An announcement is awaited.

Freight trains help to sustain the Ribble Valley Line. Cement trains from Clitheroe run north to Carlisle and Scotland, and south to Gloucester and Avonmouth. Log trains from Carlisle to the Kronospan factory in Shropshire have returned after their diversion when the WCML was less busy during and after the COVID crisis. There are regular flows of limestone from Ribblehead to Tuebrook (Liverpool) and Ashton-in-Makerfield, and from Rylstone Quarry via Skipton to new sidings in the former railway yard of Leyland Motors at Leyland, as well as an NR engineers' train. The kaolin (china clay) train runs from Antwerp to Irvine paper mill as required, while special excursion and dining trains often operate via the S&C.

Northern Weekly Salvo – Paul Salveson

Last month's RUX included Paul Salveson's suggestion that Transport for the North (TfN) be given responsibility for the Northern and TransPennine Express (TPE) franchises that are currently under state control. In fact, TfN is already involved in their management through the Rail North Partnership, a joint vehicle with the DfT, which also provides ministerial oversight.

Chesham & District Transport Users' Group

Issues on the London Underground (LU) Metropolitan Line regarding train indicators showing incorrect information, particularly at Harrow on the Hill, Moor Park and Chalfont & Latimer, are unlikely to be resolved until the new signalling is installed at the northern end of the Line.

Barking-Gospel Oak Rail User Group

BGORUG has discussed the disruption caused by late-running freight trains with TfL and Arriva Rail London, who raise these concerns regularly with freight operators. They also share the Group's aspiration for a crossover at Blackhorse Road to enable trains from either direction to reverse there during disruptions or engineering works. It is at the midpoint of the line, and a major interchange with the Victoria Line. A case has been prepared for NR and/or DfT to consider.

The Group has expressed its concern to C2C about poor signage throughout Barking station, particularly to the solitary lift which is tucked away out of sight at the end of Platform 1. A ramped subway links it to other platforms, but the lack of signage means that most passengers are unaware of the fact - or even that there is a lift. The current refurbishment of the station should have included provision of a new footbridge at the entrance with lifts to all platforms, but this much-needed enhancement was sadly not included in the final scheme.

Junction Road station closed in 1943 as a wartime economy measure. The Group has urged Islington Council to reinstate it into the Borough's transport policy plan. As well as a valuable cross-town link, it would provide a useful new interchange with Tufnell Park on the Northern Line.

Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group

In early July, GWR responded to BTPG as follows: "Currently we are seeing too many short notice short forms (eg five car IETs instead of ten). We have a train plan that allows for 13 IET sets to be out at any one time for maintenance, repair and regular required examinations. At the moment there are 19 sets out. This is a combination of higher than expected sets needing repair due to damage and vandalism, and too many sets being out for heavy maintenance at the same time. We have spoken to Hitachi about this and the need for better planning."

On 26 July, BTPG and NR considered stakeholder aspirations and possible timetable and infrastructure interventions in the 'Wiltshire Strategic Study'. NR would like an hourly Paddington to Westbury service, calling at Reading, Newbury, Kintbury, Hungerford, Bedwyn, Pewsey and possibly Devizes Gateway, which would give BTPG the westbound service for which it has long campaigned. However, it is at least six years away, as it would need more IETs or electrification, a new platform at Westbury, and double-heading the stone trains to speed them up.

Cotswold Line Promotion Group

The Worcester – Bristol service is now hourly throughout most of the day, though as GWR MD Mark Hopwood admitted at the AGM, this was at the expense of most Great Malvern services. There are also serious issues with through Hereford – London services via Malvern, with the loss of two of the three in the morning peak, including the former Cathedrals Express, and one in the evening peak that now terminates at Malvern.

The Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline first set out in 2019 should have annual updates, but none has been forthcoming. One rail investment project hit by their absence has been the improvement to services between Oxford, Worcester and Hereford. The North Cotswold Line Task Force has submitted a Strategic Outline Business Case, but in March 2022 the DfT said that it could not engage further with the Task Force until the RNEP was announced.

The landslip near Hanborough and the restoration of Nuneham Bridge highlighted the vital importance of maintaining experienced and knowledgeable staff at stations. Rail operators worked together on alternative services, but booking office and platform staff were inundated by customers, particularly the less able, anxious to find the option that worked best for them.

Pilning Station Group

Users of Pilning Station are at their wits end. It only has two trains a week in one direction only, yet they can't even rely on those. The May timetable had to be hastily revised when GWR discovered that new electric trains couldn't call at Pilning due to a technical oversight, so alternative diesel trains call at different times from those published. Then it had no trains at all for several weeks due to a combination of strikes and engineering works.

On 1 July, the guard of the afternoon train from Cardiff announced at departure time that it would not be calling at Pilning. After furious protests, GWR Control agreed to stop the following train, or people would have been left stranded, including those waiting at Pilning, which has no alternative transport nearby. The last straw came on 15 July when the Cardiff train that should have stopped there just flew past; a passenger for Pilning had to use the emergency alarm to stop the train before it reached the next signal, so the driver could get permission to reverse into the station.

Avocet Line Rail Users Group

On Mondays through Saturdays, the seven Avocet Line diagrams are operated by four 3-car Turbos and three pairs of Class 150s. ALRUG hopes that this fairly consistent picture will continue. When the Class 165 Turbo refresh program ends, Bristol is expected to be allocated one additional Turbo, which will doubtless help when the Class 166 Turbo refresh program starts.

The peak summer season needs full-length trains. Local fleets are well over 30 years old and cannot go on forever, so with passenger numbers rising, what will be the situation in five or ten years time? It would be reassuring to know that, someone (GWR, DfT, the Treasury?) has a plan in the pipeline for fully-formed replacement rolling stock, however it will be powered.

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](#).



Following the AGM in central London on 15 July, Rf Hon President Christian Wolmar presented a total of 10 RUG Awards and 4 Commendations. Gold Awards went to:

- Best Campaign: the Rail Action Group, East of Scotland
- Best Campaigner, the Clara Zilahi Award: jointly to Barbara Mine, Chair of Friends of Bishopstone Station, and Tim Steer, campaign lead for ACE Rail.
- Best Newsletter, the Paul Abell Award: the Stourbridge Line User Group
- Best Website, the inaugural Adrian Shooter Award: jointly to the Dartmoor Railway Association, and the Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group, which also won Silver for Best Campaign
- Best Social Media: Tarka Rail Association's Facebook and Twitter, together with its ACE Rail campaign's Facebook

The Judges made their Special Award to Devon County Council, the first local authority to receive a Rf Award, for all that it does to support rail developments across the county, together with its leadership role in the sub-national transport body Peninsula Transport.

NEWS

Following its consultation on a proposal to change the requirement for NR to provide train operators with new timetables 12 weeks in advance, ORR has decided [not to proceed](#) with the licence modifications at this time. [Evidence](#) provided by Rf contributed to this decision.

The various train operator consultations on ticket office closures had a morass of inconsistency and no clear evidence that their proposals would benefit passengers or taxpayers. Rf poses [101 questions](#), but it could have been many more. Rf Director and VP Stewart Palmer commented: "This is yet another example of the need to restructure responsibilities in the English Railway – the consultation is being fronted by the train operators but is really being made by the Government, which is...split between revenue and cost control (HM Treasury and the DfT). And GBR is nowhere to be seen. The current arrangement where no one is seemingly in charge and the Government hides behind the train operators simply doesn't work".

RAILFUTURE DEVON AND CORNWALL

Correction: Exeter's new station at Marsh Barton did not open in May as reported last month but on 4 July.

COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

[A CRN briefing paper](#) on NR's draft strategic business plans for Control Period 7 (2024-29) aims to help members seek opportunities to engage with NR in line with the goals of community rail locally, and strategic rail industry priorities.

A Rail Delivery Group [report](#) on community rail and inclusive, accessible travel highlights the role of railways and stations in fostering cohesion and empowering those with diverse life experience, and how CRPs and station groups can break down barriers for those who might otherwise feel excluded or marginalised from rail.

At Heysham Port on 28 June, Alice Rice, Terminal Manager for the Isle of Man Steam Packet Company, welcomed representatives of the Leeds-Morecambe CRP, the rail industry, Lancashire CC and Lancaster City Council, and staff and Year 5 pupils from St Peter's C of E Primary School, Heysham. The Mayor of Lancaster, Cllr Roger Dennison, unveiled an artwork in the passenger lounge showing the new ferry 'Manxman, Setting Sail' following the arrival of the connecting rail service. The children then unveiled two further large pieces of 'Rail to Sail' artwork on the station concourse. Local artist Alastair Nicholson supported the pupils during the project.

Hampshire CRP now embraces the Three Rivers CRP (Salisbury and Micheldever to Southampton and along the coast to Bursledon); Hills to Harbour CRP (Guildford to Portsmouth); Reading Basingstoke CRP, and Wey Valley CRP (Guildford and Ash Vale to Alton). Its Community Interest Company acts as their legal umbrella, and can employ staff and lease redundant station buildings.

Last year, with funding from the DfT's Sustainable Transport Fund, the Three Rivers CRP designed and implemented the Waterside Wanderer, a joint rail, bus and ferry ticket. It showed how public transport modes in the Southampton, New Forest and Waterside area could work together, and spearhead efforts to reopen the Fawley line to rail passengers. With funding from XC, the South Downs Rambler bus links Winchester and Petersfield stations, and the Test Valley bus links Andover and Romsey. Between Easter and September, Marwell Zoo also runs one from Southampton Airport Parkway and Eastleigh stations.

CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT

A CBT report, [Plane speaking: Moving journeys from air to rail](#), proves that travelling by rail within the UK and to the near continent is not only more environmentally friendly, but often cheaper, faster and more productive. Yet cutting Air Passenger Duty on domestic flights, tax-free aviation fuel and VAT-free private jet flights all incentivise air travel at the expense of rail. CBT is therefore urging people to [lobby the Government](#) for policy that seeks to reduce emissions from aviation, and ensure that rail is always the easier and cheaper option for domestic journeys. (*I am indebted to Countdown that the anagram Airtoland translates as Trainload!* – Ed.)

TRANSPORT FOCUS

TF has already heard from over 100,000 passengers regarding the proposed closure of ticket offices in England. It will respond on line to each train company's proposal, together with the number of responses received, and the main issues raised.

TF is a key partner in the Transpennine Route Upgrade (TRU) project team. Changes requested so far have included the location of passenger signage in stations, and ensuring clear communications and better briefings for staff so that they can provide accurate information to passengers. It has also provided feedback on improving rail replacement bus services, with clear and accessible information on rail websites and journey planners.

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

In its [Annual Assessment](#) of NR, ORR reports that it has continued to keep the railway running safely, and exceeded its annual efficiency target, but missed many others. It is particularly concerned about the sustained decline in both passenger and freight performance, and has required NR to produce comprehensive regional performance improvement plans covering both.

Over the next 12 months NR and Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) will work with key stakeholders and future partners on future regeneration opportunities across six stations: Manchester Piccadilly, Victoria and Oxford Road, Deansgate, Salford Central and Salford Crescent.

The Mayor of London has given TfL six month's notice to stop selling the Day Travelcard in January unless alternative funding can be found. Of the 15 million or so sold last year, some 70% were sold outside London, so the main impact of scrapping them is likely to fall on people who add it to their NR ticket, as they will have to pay for their journey to London, and then make PAYG contactless payments or buy paper tickets to travel on TfL services.

England's Economic Heartland, the sub-national transport body for the Oxford - Cambridge arc, has published its [Annual Report for 2022/23](#). It focuses in particular on the support EEH provides to its local authority partners.

West Coast Railways had to suspend its Fort William - Mallaig services on The Jacobite, aka the Hogwarts Express when ORR inspectors found that passengers were operating the door locks or being allowed to hang out of open windows while the train was moving. WCR hoped to resolve these issues and resume the service on 9 August.

Two new railway stations opened on 31 July. Thanet Parkway has hourly high-speed services to London St Pancras International and Margate throughout the day, with extra trains at peak times. Weekday peak services also run to and from Charing Cross or Cannon Street. Portway Park & Ride station has a half-hourly service between Bristol Temple Meads and Avonmouth, with alternate services running from Weston-super-Mare to Severn Beach.

...and finally

On Saturday 15 July, passengers at Reading station were treated to a free live concert. As part of 'Beethoven on the Bridge', the Aldworth Philharmonic Orchestra performed his Symphony No 5 and three marches. It was an informal staging on the transfer deck without seats, so the audience could come and go as it pleased. Listeners were invited to take part in a 'conducting relay', and to donate to APO's educational work and commissioning of new pieces.

Four rare K8 phone boxes, at Chalfont and Latimer, Chorleywood, Northwick Park and High Street Kensington stations, have been given Grade II-listed status. Architect Bruce Martin designed the K8 in 1965-66, and most were removed after BT was privatised in 1984. However, those at Tube stations survived as they were owned by London Underground and used for internal communication by station staff.

Birmingham New Street has seen 52% more visitors since Ozzy the bull's official homecoming. Over his first seven days towering above passengers and making his hourly roars, 915,145 people were recorded in the station compared to 602,512 in the same period the week before.

CONSULTATIONS

- Transport for the North: [Strategic Transport Plan](#), closes 17 August
- ORR: [Periodic Review 2023: Draft Determination](#), closes 31 August
- West Yorkshire CA: [Rail Strategy](#), closes 3 September
- Southern Railway: [West Coastway Proposals](#), closes 27 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. 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.

August

- Wednesday 16. East Norfolk Transport Users Association AGM and Open meeting, Christchurch, Deneside, **Great Yarmouth**, 1330/1415.
- Saturday 19. Rf London & South East, Kent division. 14.00.
- Saturday 19. English Regional Transport Association, The Post and Telegraph, 155–158 North Street, **Brighton**, East Sussex, BN1 1EA, 1400.
- Tuesday 29. Levenmouth Rail Campaign, Fife Renewables Innovation Centre, Ajax Way, **Methil**, Leven, KY8 3RS and **Online**, 1830 (Also the last Tuesday of every other month).

September

- Thursday 7. Rf London & South East, Sussex & Coastway division, Bighthelm Centre, North Road, **Brighton** BN1 1YD, 1600. (And on the first Thursday of every month).
- Monday 11. Ribble Valley Rail, The New Inn, Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, 1900 (And on the second Monday of alternate months).
- Tuesday 12. STORM Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, **Castleton**, OL11 2SP, 1400. (Also the second Tuesday of every month).
- Tuesday 12. Rf London & South East, Herts & Beds division, **Online**, 1930 (Also 14 October, London).
- Wednesday 13. Rf London & South East, Eastern division, **Online**, 1900.
- Tuesday 19. Chesham & District Transport Users' Group: Town Hall, Parsonage Lane, **Chesham**, Bucks, HP5 1EP, 1930.
- Thursday 21. Rail Action Group East of Scotland AGM, Village Hall, **East Linton**, 1900.
- Thursday 21. Friends of the Barton Line No 1 Inn, **Cleethorpes**, 1900, (Also 15 November at the White Swan, Barton).
- Saturday 23. Rf East Anglia, Friends' Meeting House, 5 Upper Goat Lane, **Norwich**, NR2 1EW, 1400 (Also 2 December in Cambridge).
- Saturday 30. English Regional Transport Association, Quaker House, Wellington Street, **Northampton** NN1 3AS, 1400.

Further Ahead

- 14 October. East Suffolk Travel Association, **Saxmundham**.
- 1 November. England's Economic Heartland, Guildhall, **Cambridge**.

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

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