

southeast railaction

London and South East Branch - Campaign Newsletter March 2026

railfuture



Battery-electric trains are now in regular service on the Greenford Branch. Class 230 unit number 230001 is seen here at West Ealing Station having just arrived from Greenford.

MEETING REMINDERS

Branch Annual General Meeting

Date: Saturday 18 April 2026

Venue: Wesley Chapel, 49 City Road, London, EC1Y 1AU

Herts and Beds Division

Date: Saturday 7 March 2026

Venue: St Paul's Church, Hatfield Road, St Albans, 11am

Date: Thursday 9 April 2026

Type: Business meeting, on-line starts 7.30pm

Metro Division

Date: Thursday 12 March and 21 May 2026

Type: Alan Baxter Gallery, Farringdon, starts 7pm

Surrey Division

Date: Thursday 19 March 2026

Type: Business meeting, on-line, starts 7.30pm

Sussex & Coastway Division

Date: Thursday 26 March and 7 May 2026

Type: Business meeting, on-line, starts 6pm

Contents

- Campaign on Contactless
- Railfuture Seeking Improvements To Contactless
- Eurostar Passenger 'CIV Tickets' to London
- Railfuture on Inspiration Train
- Let's Get Social
- Reminder of Branch AGM

- Branch Division Reports
 - London Metro
 - Herts & Beds
 - Surrey
 - Sussex & Coastway
- Division and Territory Details
- National and Local Campaign Group

CAMPAIGN ON CONTACTLESS

Our lead article in this issue of South East Rail Action relates to the problems experienced by passengers following the expansion of London's contactless ticketing system out of the capital to its surrounding areas.

In essence, contactless ticketing allows passengers to pay for travel by just tapping a bank card or mobile device (phone, watch, etc.) directly on card readers, eliminating the need to buy paper tickets or to top up a pre-paid card. In many ways it could not be simpler.

There are numerous benefits of the system including:

- the ease of use and less queuing
- the capability of ensuring lowest price paid
- the capability of applying capped fares
- the ability to use on multiple transport systems (Underground, Overground, buses, trams, national rail services within London, etc.).

There are limitations to contactless such as the inability to recognise certain characteristics of the user. These are addressed in London by pre-paid Oyster cards, separate categories of which can be bought, for example, for children, youths, the over-60s and seniors.

Those within London are very familiar with contactless and Oyster as they have been around in various guises for a considerable number of years, and there lies an issue. The contactless system as being introduced outside London is basically a London designed system. It works well in the capital for London's circumstances if used in conjunction with Oyster cards but may not be ideal outside London unless adaptations are made.

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RAILFUTURE SEEKING IMPROVEMENTS TO CONTACTLESS SYSTEM (by Neil Middleton)

The regions surrounding London have seen something of a ticketing revolution with the extension of contactless payment to many stations beyond the capital's boundaries. The project to expand contactless payment beyond London is led by the Department for Transport (DfT) under the title 'Project Oval'. Phase 1 of the project was initiated in July 2023 when the DfT announced that phase would encompass 53 stations. By February 2025, 47 of those stations had begun accepting contactless payment. In January 2025, the DfT announced a phase 2, when a further 49 stations (later 50 stations) would be integrated into the contactless system by the end of 2025. In part that expansion took effect on 14 December 2025 however technical issues resulted in the implementation being delayed in respect of the relevant stations on the Greater Anglia network.

There are potential advantages of contactless, however there are many potential pitfalls, some of which are inherent in any form of contactless system, and some of which may arise through poor technology or operational choices.

Whilst contactless is a welcome addition to the various means of buying tickets, the manner in which the rollout has been undertaken has meant that this has come with multiple stings in the tail. These include:

- Railcard discounts not being available when using bankcards / mobile phones;
- Extensions in the hours when peak fares apply - at the end of the morning peak, and for some stations the introduction of an evening peak for travel from London;
- Withdrawal of cheaper weekend fares at stations which previously offered them;
- Some cross London fares are now treated as peak, even with departures as early as 14:40;
- Contactless only being suitable for adults travelling alone - it's not useful for children, and thus not for families either.

Officially it is claimed that contactless make fares simpler, however we do not think this is true when it comes to passenger decision making. In fact, detailed knowledge is often needed to pay the lowest fare. For instance:

- Travelling between Bletchley and London on a weekday afternoon: The cheapest option, even for railcard holders, may be a split contactless fare (by changing cards in central London);
- Travelling between Reigate and central London around 9am: Buying split paper / QR code tickets can be cheaper;
- From many stations it can be cheaper to get a Travelcard for travel in the run up to 9:30am, even if your travel is only to a central London national rail station.

All the above undermines the fundamental idea - that you can just tap and go and be sure you are getting the lowest price. Personally, I am confident of that when travelling within London, but otherwise feel the need to check when on National Rail. Much of the above is due to the use of TfL's contactless payment infrastructure. This is based on only offering two fares (peak and off-peak) and a choice of two peak times for a journey (Monday to Friday) of 06:30/09:30 and 16:00/19:00 or 06:30/09:30 only. For journeys within London this makes sense - but as distances increase, this limited choice becomes a real issue. For Londoners, the main downside in contactless use is that it doesn't offer railcard discounts, but this can be solved by using an Oyster Card.

Railfuture is campaigning for improvement in contactless to address these issues. We have already highlighted the problems to officials and the public, and have published suggestions to passengers how to minimise their fares. We are seeking changes to TfL's systems to offer better choice and we are examining specific journeys (often brought to our attention by local campaigners) where changes could be made to the fares. We will reach out to those with influence who can apply pressure (such as MP's) and encourage the travelling public to do likewise.

This campaign has been prompted by numerous expressions of passenger dissatisfaction. Some of that dissatisfaction has come directly to us by concerned passengers and rail user groups. Some is apparent from the many press and media stories on this issue, as well as from a growing chorus on social media where many posts complain about the implementation of contactless and increases in the cost of travel that seems to have come with it. If you have issues on this subject and would like to voice your concerns, please be part of our campaign and contact the editor on lseeditor@railfuture.org.uk

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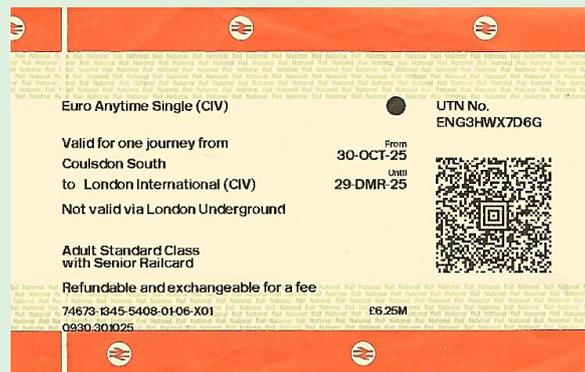
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EUROSTAR PASSENGER 'CIV TICKETS' TO LONDON INTERNATIONAL (by Charlie King)

If you are traveling to Europe on Eurostar you may be able to purchase a Eurostar ticket that includes the journey from your local home station as a through ticket (for example, Newcastle to Paris, via London) and if you do so you will be protected by CIV rules. This means that if your journey is disrupted and you miss a connection, you should be allowed to travel on the next available service.

Eurostar do not book from every UK station. If you have not, or cannot, include the UK element of your journey, you can still buy a special CIV ticket from your local station to London St Pancras International. This is only available from a booking office, not on-line or from an Automatic Ticket Vending Machine. You must have proof of a Eurostar journey to purchase the ticket and the ticket must have CIV printed on it.

If you have this ticket it will ensure that if you miss your connection at St Pancras **you will be put on the next available train at no extra cost** (*the caveat is next available*). The same rules apply to your return trip back in the UK.



If your national rail service is not to or from St Pancras or Kings Cross you can include a London Underground journey as London Underground are included in the Convention Internationale pour le transport des Voyageurs (CIV).

The CIV ticket to London International is available as a single or return and is valid for one journey in 3 months. It is often cheaper than a standard return ticket, but dearer than an advance ticket but it includes the insurance of the next available train at no cost.

If the CIV ticket you buy is the credit card magnetic ticket type you should not put it in the barrier, but exit the London terminal via a staffed gate.

If you would like to know more about London International CIV tickets and how else they can be used, there is an excellent article on the Railfuture web site. <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/CIV-tickets>

RAILFUTURE ON RAIL 200 INSPIRATION TRAIN

From Monday 9 to Wednesday 11 March, Rail 200's 'Inspiration Train' will be at Tattenham Corner Station. Railfuture intend to be there on the afternoon of each day as an Inspiration Partner, occupying part of the train. If you have not managed to get on Inspiration we recommend you try to do so, as more dates are being announced in 2026. Curated in partnership with the National Railway Museum, Inspiration's exhibition carriages comprise:

- Railway Firsts: Showcasing groundbreaking innovations in railway history;
- Wonderlab on Wheels: Offering engaging hands-on activities to explore the science and engineering behind railways;
- Your Railway Future: Uncovering some of the more hidden roles in rail and encouraging people to consider a career in rail to shape the next 200 years.

The event is a good opportunity to showcase Railfuture to an audience it may not ordinarily reach and we'd like to thank GTR for the invitation to the event.

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LET'S GET SOCIAL

Railfuture (Metro Division) and the Railway & Canal Historical Society (London Group) are collaborating in a series of walks led by RCHS under the title 'London Railways Termini Walks'. The series comprises ten walks (five in 2026 and five in 2027), each revolving around a London station and will delve into the past, present and future of the station and associated railway companies/ train operating companies, over time.

The first walk is 'Waterloo and all things LSWR' and will take place on Wednesday 15 April 2026 starting 11am and will last about 5 hours. Members of Railfuture are invited to participate in all walks in the series (places permitting). Anyone with an interest in the walk on Wednesday 15 April should email richard.bowry@railfuture.org.uk for further details.

London Metro and Eastern Division (prepared by Richard Bowry)

Metro Division has issued its own dedicated 'Campaign Newsletter' every two months since June 2024.

The December 2025 issue (which can be found at <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/display4225>) contained news items on the following:

- Transport for London (TfL) proposals to take over Great Northern Inner Services to Moorgate.

We reported on TfL's recent proposal to take over the Great Northern Inner Services to Moorgate. We expressed our thoughts on this together with a list of ten pertinent questions we put to TfL, and their subsequent replies.

- Delay to the intended December 2025 expansion of contactless payment.

14 December 2025 was the intended date for the latest roll-out of contactless, but it has been delayed on Greater Anglia routes such as Southend Victoria via Shenfield and along the Great Eastern Main Line to Witham due to technical issues.

- Rail Fares Rising in London

Regulated fares on the national rail network in England have been frozen, so will not be subject to the usual annual price rise this year. However the fare freeze does not apply to TfL services, including the Overground and Underground. This is because a condition was stipulated in the Government's recent £2.2 billion funding settlement with TfL to the effect that it must annually increase its fares by the RPI plus one per cent..

- London Overground to have a new operator, FirstGroup

TfL has awarded the new Overground contract to First Rail London Limited, a subsidiary of FirstGroup PLC and will take over on Sunday 3 May 2026. First Rail London is obligated to introduce a range of service and operational improvements, in particular extra peak-time trains on the Mildmay Line with shuttle services between Clapham Junction and Shepherd's Bush during peak hours, and more frequent trains on the Windrush Line from December 2026, as well as various safety and performance enhancements.

Battery-electric trains now in regular service on the West Ealing - Greenford branch

As from 31 January 2026, Class 230 unit battery-electric trains have been in regular service on the West Ealing - Greenford branch, although for the present they run on Saturday's only. We supported GWR in its application to the DfT for certain dispensations to enable these units to be run on the Greenford branch and we are happy to see them now in service.

Continuing Campaign

Metro Division continues its campaign to see a metro service of at least 4 trains per hour (tph) on all London's railways. In that regard, we have had recent meetings with South Western Railway, Southeastern Railway and Govia Thameslink Railway. Our good relations with these operators is very apparent, and we are expecting to hear some good news on reaching 4tph on a number of lines later this year.

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TfL seeking control of Moorgate services (the 'GN Inners')

In the preceding issue of SERA (December 2025) we referred to TfL's bid to take over GN Inner Services operating from Moorgate to Welwyn Garden City and to Stevenage via Hertford North. We wrote to TfL with 10 key questions on their proposals. In the subsequent issue of Metro Campaign Newsletter (December 2025) those 10 questions were listed alongside answers we had received from TfL.

Since receiving those answers we have had no further 'official' news to report, but two interesting themes have become apparent:

1. GTR's (the current operator's) preference seems to be:

- An increase in frequency for Hertford Loop services;

- For the ECML, to make Welwyn - Sevenoaks an all-day service (currently it is peak hours only). For larger stations between Finsbury Park and Welwyn Garden City this has the advantage of offering all day direct access to important interchange stations such as Farringdon and St Pancras (and also offers more access to the Thameslink core for other Kings Cross services). The downside is for smaller stations such as Hadley Wood where the frequency remains as is. This option also has the advantage of meeting a long standing aspiration for 4 trains per hour on the Catford Loop. We think this option will, overall, increase revenue for the railway as the increased services seem appealing and should lead to more passengers, although whether there will be a net increase after the higher costs is unclear.

2. Lord Hendy spoke at the Transport Select Committee on 7 January 2026 which focused on the Rail Reform Bill generally although Q.349 onwards dealt with devolution. The GN Inners were not discussed specifically, but we detected a general view of willing cooperation but a dislike of more devolved operators. There was also mention of a partnership advice guide being published 'within the coming weeks'. It is likely that no decision on the GN Inner Services will be forthcoming before this guide is released.

The Marston Vale Line and East West Rail

We have made our local wants clear, and indeed some have been promised (up fast platform on the Midland Main Line at Bedford) whilst others remain aspirations (e.g. full electrification). There appears to be no consensus from interested groups on the choice of Marston Vale stations, however broadly we support EWR's expressed preference being:

'new, larger, easy-to access stations at Woburn Sands, Ridgmont, Lidlington and Stewartby, along with the relocated Bedford St Johns station.'

From a big picture perspective this makes sense, in particular the challenges of changing many of the existing stations in a way that will increase passenger numbers, make them safe and accessible, and the wider capacity reductions resulting if trains call at all nine existing stations. The official 'You Said We Did Report' does highlight the goal of making the new stations easy to get to without using a car and we continue to champion the importance of this (including funding within the core programme). You can read the EWR plan by searching for 'EWR you said we did' (scroll down to / search for 4.6.1).

Reminder of Branch Annual Open Meeting and AGM

A reminder is given that the London & South East Branch of Railfuture will be holding its branch open meeting and AGM in April. Details are as follows:

Date: Saturday 18 April 2026, open meeting starts 11am and the AGM at 2pm.

Venue: Wesley Chapel, 49 City Road, London, EC1Y 1AU (a 5 minute walk from Old Street Underground Station).

Format: The format of the meeting will follow recent years, with guest speakers featured in the morning 'open meeting' session, followed after lunch by the members only AGM.

AGM materials are enclosed with the printed versions of this newsletter that are posted to members.

Surrey Division (prepared by Stephen Rolph)

A continuing concern for Surrey Division relates to whether the Brighton Main Line from London to Gatwick Airport has the track capacity, and whether the train operating companies have sufficient rolling stock, to handle additional passengers to and from the Airport arising from expansion, to meet minimum 'access by public transport' targets and to reduce private car use, road congestion, emissions from exhausts and tyres and road wear.

Those who followed the Gatwick Airport Development Control Order Planning Inquiry will know that Network Rail (NR) gave detailed evidence against the expansion application essentially on track capacity and rolling stock grounds. We gather a major cause of concern for NR is the continuing pinch point in the East Croydon/ Selhurst Triangle area and lack of government funding for the Croydon Area Remodelling Scheme (CARS) to rectify it by various means including replacing flat junctions, altering track and signalling to accommodate longer trains, and adding extra platforms and track at East Croydon Station. NR withdrew their objection when the Airport agreed to pay NR £20 million to fund further research into these capacity issues.

Another capacity concern is at Redhill Station where GWR services to and from Reading and the Airport have to reverse to join or leave the North Downs Line (NDL) to use the Brighton Main Line to or from the Airport. Currently the two trains per hour GWR service generates four reversals every hour. Should the aspiration for an hourly Tonbridge to Gatwick service be met then another two reversals every hour will be needed. There are also reports of Arriva wanting to run an hourly service from Brighton to Newcastle via the Airport, Redhill, the NDL to Reading and Oxford on its way to Newcastle. This would create 8 reversals an hour, and that is before considering GWR's hopes to run extra services along the NDL via Redhill, to the Airport leading to 10 or 12 reversals every hour. If a reversal takes around 5 - 8 minutes then over 60 minutes of platform capacity will be needed every hour, so we ask what negative effect on other services might follow?

Your Surrey and Sussex Division convenors recently attended a residents' surgery run by the Horley & Dorking MP Chris Coghlan following which I had a briefing with the MP's Chief of Staff on these concerns, also discussing information provided by GTR and Network Rail at a recent Railfuture meeting held in Salfords (Surrey) and discussions at a GTR stakeholders meeting held in December.

Another welcome development is a new All-Party Parliamentary Group entitled 'Southeast and Gatwick Diamond Growth Gateway APPG'. These are its stated objectives:

'To provide a strong voice to discuss, promote, and address issues related to economic regeneration, business growth, job creation, infrastructure, and connectivity, with a focus on revitalising the regional economy and supporting sustainable employment opportunities for the people and businesses of the wider Southeast of England.'

The reference to infrastructure and connectivity is of interest as both could refer to railway capacity issues and their resolution. Perhaps we should all lobby our local MPs to get them involved in this matter.

Sussex and Coastway Division (prepared by John Black)

What a start to 2026 with several named storms bringing wild weather including heavier than usual rain causing localised flooding, and rail disruption.

A landslide on an embankment south of Ockley has meant the closure of the line between Dorking and Horsham, a situation that could last two to three weeks. Work continues to reinstate the collapsed embankment and re-open the line.

The weather impacted Sussex Division's 'Late New Year face to face social' but those who managed to get through the heavy rain participated in a discussion about campaigning for improvements and which matters we should prioritise to support. We held a subsequent meeting on 12 February, and have scheduled our next meetings to take place on 26 March and 7 May (both on Zoom) and on 4 June in person in Brighton.

I have been working with Stephen Rolph of the Surrey Division in respect of the proposed expansion at Gatwick Airport. I will not repeat his thoughts in his own 'Surrey Division' entry above, but emphasize that my concerns are centered on maintaining services on the whole of the Brighton Main Line including stations served en-route, and destinations all along the Sussex Coast.

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Herts and Beds Division

Convenor: Neil Middleton

Meetings: We hold meetings monthly, some on-line and some in person. **Our next meeting is on Saturday 7 March 2026 at St Paul's Church, Hatfield Road, St Albans, starting 11am. The next following is a 'business' meeting on Zoom on Thursday 9 April 2026, starting 7.30pm.**

Principal Campaigns: Our current campaigns include but are not limited to the following:

- East - West Rail as it effects Bedfordshire
- New station at Wixams between Bedford and Flitwick
- Contactless fares
- TfL's bid to run Great Northern Inner Services
- Performance issues

Contact Email: neil.middleton@railfuture.org.uk

Kent Division

Convenor: Chris Fribbins

Meetings: We hold periodic meetings, primarily on-line. We also have an informal meeting in Faversham in May and a summer social event.

Principal Campaigns: Our current campaigns include but are not limited to the following:

- Cross Channel trains stopping at Ebbsfleet International and Ashford International
- Hoo Peninsula: Upgrading the freight-only branch line to restore passenger services to Hoo St. Werburgh
- Kent and Gatwick: Improving connections from Kent to Gatwick Airport via Tonbridge
- Kenex tram and Lower Thames Crossing, rail Dartford to Thurrock

Contact Email: chris.fribbins@railfuture.org.uk

London Metro and Eastern Division

Chair: Richard Bowry. Vice-Chair: Charlie King. Committee member: Howard Thomas

Meetings: We hold six meetings per year on alternate months, usually at Basement Room, Alan Baxter Gallery, 75 Cowcross St, London EC1M 6EL .
Our next meetings are on Thursday 12 March and Thursday 21 May 2026, at Alan Baxter Gallery starting at 7pm.

Principal Campaigns: Our current campaigns include but are not limited to the following:

- Docklands Light Railway extension to Thamesmead
- West Orbital Route, south west to north west London
- Bakerloo Line extension to Lewisham
- Crossrail 2

Contact Email: richard.bowry@railfuture.org.uk

Surrey Division

Convenor: Stephen Rolph

Meetings: We are planning to hold four meetings per year, two in person and two on-line. **Our next meeting is a 'business' meeting on Zoom on Thursday 19 March 2026, starting 7.30pm.**

Principal Campaigns: Our current campaigns include but are not limited to the following:

- Gatwick Airport - London services: Capacity issues due to expanding airport and anticipated need for additional train services
- North Downs Line: Improving the service between Reading, Guildford and Gatwick Airport
- Southern rail link to Heathrow airport

Contact Email: snrolph@googlemail.com

Sussex & Coastway Division

Convenor: John Black. Secretary: Robert Cheesman

Meetings: We hold six or so meetings per year usually on alternate months, at a number of locations, such as Brighton, with some on-line. **Next meetings are on-line on Thursday 26 March 2026 and Thursday 7 May 2026, starting 6pm.**

Principal Campaigns: Our current campaigns include but are not limited to the following:

- Uckfield - Lewes: Reinstating a rail link to bridge the gap between Uckfield and Lewes
- More and faster West Coastway services
- Improvements to Marshlink Line, Ashford to Hastings

Contact Email: jcbblack@yahoo.co.uk

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We are a national campaign group And a local campaign group too!



Our Branches

Railfuture has 14 branches: so there's one near you!

Devon and Cornwall
East Anglia
East Midlands
Lincolnshire
London and South East
North East
North West
Severnside
Thames Valley
Wessex
West Midlands
Yorkshire
Scotland
Wales

London & South East Branch comprises five Divisions:

- Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire
- Kent
- London Metro & Eastern
- Surrey
- Sussex & Coastway

We campaign for a bigger, better railway.

A Better Railway is a railway which:

- Is fully accessible for all people, from street to platform and platform to train
- Is reliable, with fewer delays and cancellations, and has frequent services
- Is affordable, with ticket prices not rising above inflation
- Is clean, safe and comfortable without overcrowding
- Is welcoming with modern facilities and good customer service
- Is transparent and understandable in terms of ticketing, with comprehensive and appropriate use of technology, enabling passengers to always buy the ticket that is most suitable for them

A Bigger Railway is a railway which:

- Opens new lines, such as the Elizabeth Line and extensions such as to Barking Riverside
- Opens new stations, such as Lea Bridge and Beaulieu Park, Chelmsford

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Membership from just £10

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