



April 2026

### Welcome to the Rail User Express

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The opening of the [King Charles III coastal path](#) offers a myriad of walks between railway stations. A challenging but most rewarding one for serious walkers would be from Weymouth to Lulworth before turning inland to Wool. Another would be from Scarborough to Filey.

Roger Smith

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

### South East Northumberland Rail Users Group

With every station on the Northumberland Line now open and passenger numbers doubling predictions, SENRUG Chair Dennis Fancett believes the next step is to extend it along the existing freight tracks to a new station at Woodhorn and from there to Newbiggin-by-the-Sea. The County Council is examining this [possibility](#). There is also a case to extend the Newcastle to Morpeth local service along existing freight tracks to Bedlington with a new station at Choppington, and also for a link between Ashington and Alnmouth with a new station at Seghill.

### Furness Line Action Group

As previously reported, voids below Bransty tunnel at Whitehaven caused by old mining activity stretch over a third of its length. Rory Kingdon of NR has said that funding for the major repair was there, but “the more they look at it, the greater the complexity of the engineering challenges. The work involves filling the voids with specialist grout, installing a pressure-relief system to manage groundwater, and then undertaking a full track renewal”. In February, it seemed that work costing £40m - £60m would start in March with a possible finish date of September, but other sources gave it as late as December.

Local MP Josh MacAlister said “The Cumbrian Coast Line is not just a way of getting from A to B; it is a lifeline for communities, workers, students and visitors, and a strategic asset for our country. The most urgent step is reopening Bransty tunnel. The next big prize is a full signalling upgrade that would deliver significant improvements to reliability and journey times, making daily travel easier for passengers and giving freight and strategic users the capacity they need. I will keep fighting to make sure the line gets the investment it deserves”.

Half of the FLAG Committee are now octogenarians while others are of retiring age, so it needs young blood quickly to ensure it can continue. The Cumbrian Coast RUG sadly folded in 2022 due to shortage of volunteers, and it is a situation many groups and societies are finding.

### **Skipton East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership**

Reopening the 12-mile Skipton - Colne Line through the Pennines would be a major boost to the North's tourism and hospitality sector by giving quicker, more direct and more environmentally sustainable access to its attractions from coast to coast. It aligns with the Yorkshire Dales National Park Management Plan 2025-2030 that aims to improve access for visitors by public transport; according to the All Park Visitor Survey, only 2% currently arrive by train.

### **Slaithwaite & Marsden Action on Rail Transport**

SMART met with the TransPennine Route Upgrade (TRU) project team ahead of the public consultation on proposals for Standedge Tunnel to Gledholt Tunnel (Huddersfield). The current plan is for a third track between Huddersfield and Marsden, and rebuilding Slaithwaite and Marsden stations with three fully accessible platforms. However, there is still no clear commitment to increasing the inadequate hourly stopping service (with extras at peak times) to the same half-hourly frequency that most routes in the Leeds and Manchester city regions enjoy. It seems the TRU project team sees its role as delivering the infrastructure without getting into discussions about what outcomes the project will deliver for our communities.

### **Hope Valley Rail Users Group**

Since Covid, passenger numbers on the Hope Valley Line have been soaring at stations from Dore to Edale, with record numbers between April 2024 and March 2025. However, it still has only two thirds of what should be hourly stoppers on Sundays, potentially the busiest day for leisure users. Reduced Sunday services are as frustrating for Northern as they are for their passengers.

### **Friends of the Barton Line**

Melanie Onn MP and EMR Operations Director Paul Barnfield told FoBL that there is no business case for installing Customer Information Systems (CIS) at stations along the Barton Line; such facilities should be provided by local councils, friends groups or the community in general.

Following a fund raising event at The White Swan (next to the Barton Rail and Bus interchange), FoBL members voted to purchase a 'Live Departure Board' visible from both inside and outside the premises. Martin Vickers, MP for most of the stations on the line, has accepted FOBL's invitation to officially unveil it on 17 April at 1330, with full media coverage of the launch event.

### **Peterborough-Ely-Norwich Rail Users Group**

PENRUG welcomes improvements to Greater Anglia (GA) services from 17 May. An extra morning peak train will run Monday - Friday from Norwich to Cambridge at 0808, and an extra return service at 1710 that will relieve the overcrowded 1730. Monday - Saturday, there will be an extra train from Norwich to Ely at 2140 with a return service at 2243. The 0633 and the 0726 Norwich to Cambridge services will originate at Lowestoft at 0538 and 0634, while the 2126 Cambridge departure will run through to Lowestoft.

Although Cambridge South station has not yet opened, announcements on the Class 755s prior to departure from Norwich list Cambridge South among the scheduled stops! This is then corrected, but that seems to trigger a message at every stop informing passengers that a revised service is in operation. XC's timetable is showing 28 June as the opening date.

### **Mid Anglia Rail Passengers Association**

Last July, MARPA complained to Transport Focus regarding the closure of the ticket office at Bury St Edmunds without prior consultation. It is unlikely to return, but GA will:

- Train all of its staff to use the existing ticket machine for the full range of ticketing
- Extend the hours that staff are in attendance, and ensure there are sufficient to assist every customer.

GA believes that, while all westbound services could stop at Kennett without causing any serious scheduling issues, the eastbound position is more complicated. The introduction of half-hourly stops on mainline services at Stowmarket from May could enable more Mid Anglia services to include a Kennett stop, but more work from its timetablers was required.

While an eastern entrance and a second footbridge at Cambridge station (for which Rf has campaigned for over a decade) will ease overcrowding in the longer term, MARPA believes that peak-time improvements could be achieved sooner through intelligent platform utilisation, especially at Platform 4, with closer liaison between NR and GA station management.

### **East Suffolk Travel Association**

Jess Asato MP told ESTA's Spring meeting in Beccles on 7 March that when public transport works well it can open up opportunities, but that investment was needed to benefit both local people and visitors to the region. She welcomed the recent announcement of improved rail services on both lines to Lowestoft from mid May, but added that all concerned should "explore the possibility of some London through trains on the East Suffolk Line, perhaps initially on a seasonal basis". GA Community & Stakeholder Engagement Manager Alan Neville reported that rail usage in East Anglia had increased by 8% in 2025, and that under GBR train operators and infrastructure managers were now working more closely together for the benefit of passengers. He also answered questions about the timetable changes.

ESTA leaflets Discover the Blyth Valley and Discover Beccles, Bungay and the Waveney Valley, updated by Alison Britton and John Thompson, will encourage people to explore by train and bus.

### **Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group**

TransWilts is supportive of extending Bedwyn services to Westbury, a new station for Devizes, and the reinstatement of direct off-peak services to Paddington. It proposed setting up a committee chaired by the local MPs to push further for last of these.

GWR MD Mark Hopwood: "We remain committed to restoring the direct off-peak services for Hungerford, Kintbury and Bedwyn. We are in the process of introducing Class 175 trains in Devon & Cornwall, [but they] are taking longer than anticipated to bring into passenger service following two years in cold storage [and there will be competing demand for them] so I cannot for now confirm the timescale for when these services will return to the timetable."

## **RAILFUTURE**

*Rf welcomes new members and groups to add weight to its campaigns. Join [here](#) by selecting the appropriate category from the "Membership Types" menu. Read the latest from Rf on [News and views](#), [Press releases](#), [Railfuture in the news](#), and [Consultation responses](#).*

## **RAILFUTURE NORTH EAST**

RfNE believes the success of the Northumberland Line strengthens the case for reopening other lines or creating new ones. The Transport Secretary has signed an agreement to reopen the Leamside Line from Pelaw in Gateshead to Tursdale in County Durham, subject to the assurance that it delivers good value for money. Then there is the 10 mile Stillington freight route from north of Stockton station to Ferryhill South junction on the ECML.

However Tony Miles from Modern Railways magazine says the real challenge for most schemes was financial. "You've really got to prove it's going to work, and that's hard. Even when the tracks are still there, the stations are horrendously expensive. Added to that is the cost of buying the new trains and getting slots into some of the busier stations." The DfT said it was committed to support any scheme where there is a proven value for money and the community.

## RAILFUTURE YORKSHIRE

Last September, a partnership of Yorkshire councils launched a study to produce a case for improving the rail service between Leeds, Knottingley and Goole – and potentially Hull. The leader of East Riding of Yorkshire Council described the current service of one train eastbound and two trains returning as “criminal”.

This is going to be a difficult year, but we need public transport more than ever. Firstly, we need a significant shift towards railway and tram investment. One three-carriage commuter train carries as many people as, say, 200 cars. One freight train can take 76 lorry loads off the road. Overcrowding must be addressed to reduce cancellations and delays. But Northern, TPE and Cross Country simply don't have enough trains. The only short term fix will be to reallocate serviceable units being released by other TOCs. Transport for Wales is expected to relinquish 27 Class 158 Super Sprinter units next year, while Cross Country would like the remaining Voyagers being released by Avanti.

But strengthening existing services is not enough. Too many people have limited access to the railway, or none at all. So the next campaigning priority should be to provide regular and frequent passenger services on all lines that are of passenger train standard, so would need no infrastructure work.

The Treasury has revised its Green Book. It now states that civil servants should take into account a wider range of factors than economic benefit-cost ratios (BCRs) when appraising schemes, specifically those valuing wider social and regional productivity impacts, relating to social value. This should give a much better chance of rail projects being approved – provided the Government is prepared to fund them, and that's a big if.

## RAILFUTURE EAST MIDLANDS

Rf and [Friends of the Derwent Valley Line](#) (Derby - Matlock) both responded to the consultation on the local plan for the Peak District national park. Rf criticised the lack of ambition to combat its increasing road traffic, and how it could be reduced by improved rail services, including reinstating the Peaks and Dales line (Derby - Manchester), along with better rail-bus connectivity.

## RAILFUTURE WALES

On a 90-mile stretch of the Heart of Wales line there are 126 level crossings where users must phone to obtain permission to cross, but they may have to wait up to 40mins because the signaller does not know where in the block an approaching train is. Universal Signalling's U-Cross system being trialled on the 11-mile section between Llandovery and Llandeilo will show its location and thus the time to a given crossing, so users should rarely have to wait more for than three minutes.

But the Rail Quantum Inertial Navigation System being developed for the national rail network can provide highly resilient positioning with no need for any track infrastructure or satellite signals. On 3 March, it was trialled on a Great Northern train between London and Welwyn Garden City to show how the technology performs in an operational environment.

## RAILFUTURE THAMES VALLEY

RfTV strongly supports [OxRAIL2040: Plan for Rail](#) adopted by Oxfordshire CC, who allocated up to £10m to deliver its priorities. Phase 1 to 2030 includes Platform 5 at Oxford, the Cowley line and a regular Bristol service. Phase 2 to 2037 includes improvements to Oxford station, four-tracking Radley - Oxford, Wantage/Grove station and Chiltern main line electrification. Phase 3 to 2040 involves the complete electrification of East West Rail (EWR), as well as to Banbury and beyond, plus a new station at Ardley and a West Oxfordshire mass transit system.

## CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT

CBT welcomes the Government's [Integrated Transport Strategy for England](#). It promises "simpler, more affordable and more joined-up journeys", and does indeed include a lot of good things. But there are things missing. For instance, it does not set a goal for shifting journeys from private cars to more sustainable modes.

CBT's Better Transport Week 2026 from 15-21 June will celebrate how better transport connects people and places. Over 260 organisations supported last year's, including 30 local authorities, with 42 events in England and Wales attended by over 1,000 people. And over 300,000 sustainable transport journeys were made saving 115 tons of CO2.

## COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

At CRN's 21st anniversary Awards event on 19 March at Derby Arena, 600 guests celebrated the achievements and passion of the community rail movement. They are a wonderful reminder of the difference it makes, helping to build more inclusive, sustainable and resilient communities, and getting maximum benefit from the rail network.

CRN has worked closely with its members and rail sector partners on the difference social value makes in people's lives and communities, opening up opportunity and helping to create stronger, more inclusive and sustainable places.

The Ipswich - Cambridge line will be called the St Edmund's Line, after the King of the East Angles. Tracey Harding of its CRP said: "We were really pleased with the high level of interest and participation in our competition to find a promotional name for the line and the attractive locations it serves".

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

The Government will confirm the final locations of seven areas for housing development later this year. They include sites in the centre of Leeds and Manchester, Brabazon outside Bristol, new developments in Greenwich and Enfield in London, a "renewed town" in Milton Keynes, and Tempsford where EWR will cross the ECML; close to the A1 and the new A428, the station should be built as a Parkway.

Help points are often the only way for passengers to speak to someone on unstaffed stations, making it essential that they are working and that calls are answered. After assessing data from operators responsible for help points at more than 2,500 stations across Britain, ORR found that not all operators had reliable systems in place, and raised concerns about connectivity at remote stations. Accordingly, 21 station operators reviewed their monitoring and maintenance arrangements. Nearly half have introduced, or are introducing, newer help point models with better functionality, enabling quicker fault identification and faster repairs.

Completed in 1875, freight trains ran on the Settle to Carlisle line for a year before it saw its first passenger train. Several events are planned to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this on 1 May. Northern recorded 995,000 journeys in 2025; Its Commercial and Customer Director Alex Hornby is confident passenger numbers would hit a million this year.

Since last September, drones have saved NR about £100,000 on the East Midlands route, improved productivity, and cut the need for line closures by checking the temperature of overhead line equipment after lineside fires, monitoring trespass and animal incursions, and providing rapid situational awareness after flooding events. It also plans to use them to monitor the roof of London St Pancras International and the surrounding railway infrastructure.

The Light Rail Transit Association's bid to the East Midlands Combined County Authority for a tramway system for Derby would connect its major traffic generators with the major suburbs, and also the [Nottingham NET system](#), to form the basis of an East Midlands Metro. Public transport would have a much higher share of journeys, up from the present 5% to over 20%.

Independent Lincolnshire CC councillor Richard Cleaver wants to enhance the Stamford service by:

- Adding another Leicester – Peterborough service, extended to Lincoln via Spalding and Sleaford
- Extending the Ipswich – Peterborough service to via Oakham to East Midlands Airport and Derby
- Adding a late evening departure from Stansted Airport at 2125.

He has discussed these proposals with the Greater Lincolnshire Combined Mayoral Authority officer who is drafting its rail strategy. However, David Harby believes that providing 2 tph by extending the Birmingham - Leicester stopping service through to Peterborough would be less ambitious and much more achievable.

NR Wales and Borders has made a full business case to upgrade the relief lines between Cardiff Central and Severn Tunnel Junction by refurbishing and renewing 27 miles of track, increasing the line speed from 40mph to up to 100mph, to speed up freight and enable passenger services, paving the way for [six new stations](#): Cardiff East, Cardiff Parkway, Newport West, Somerton, Llanwern, and Magor & Undy.

Three new Birmingham stations on the Camp Hill Line have opened as part of a £185m project to reinstate links to the city centre. Moseley Village, Kings Heath and Pineapple Road saw their first trains since WWII. The new stations followed the reopening on 19 March of new stations for Willenhall and Darlaston, which closed in 1965.

EMR has begun the £27m refurbishment of its Class 360 trains used on its Connect route from London to Corby. They will have a new 2+2 seating arrangement with tables, brighter LED lighting, upgraded passenger information screens, and enhanced safety capabilities through new CCTV.

The Environment Agency has been selected to serve EWR as a single point of coordination for environmental advice and approvals. Its CEO said: "We warmly welcome the appointment [which] will ensure that key decisions can be made efficiently and effectively. Crucially, this will deliver momentum for the construction of the railway, helping us deliver the economic and social benefits of EWR far sooner than would otherwise have been the case."

The latest consultation on EWR runs until 9 June 2026, prior to its application for a Development Consent Order. It will share updated designs and information, including new station visualisations, fly-through animations of the route, plans for phased construction, and updates on key areas such as stations, services, level crossings and environmental commitments.

GWR has closed down a glitch that allowed ticket barriers to accept its free seat reservations. A Telegraph journalist was able to travel first class from Tiverton Parkway in Devon to Wigan North Western on several different firms' trains. The reporter had valid tickets for the whole journey, but could have travelled the 537 miles without paying a penny.

A new European Sleeper route from Brussels and Cologne to Zürich and Milan will launch on 9 September. Take the Eurostar to Brussels, then catch the night train and wake up in the Alps or beside an Italian lake. A stop at Göschenen gives easy access to nearby ski resorts. Budget seats start at just €29.99 one-way, with couchette beds in a shared compartment from €49.99. Comfort Standard starts at €99.99, and Comfort Plus including breakfast from €129.99. From Milan, high-speed services head south to Florence and Rome.

*...and finally*

After being removed in 2020 for restoration, the original Carnforth Station clock made famous by the 1945 film *Brief Encounter* has returned 80 years after its release. And a Railway Heritage Trust grant of £203,000 has enabled restoration of the clocktower at Grade II-listed Scarborough station to be completed alongside a £14m project for a new roof, drainage and restored stonework. The waiting room and ticket office have also been revamped.

Driven to extinction by hunting and the loss of their wetland habitats, the Common Crane is now making a comeback with the RSPB reporting three breeding pairs at Lakenheath Fen, next to the railway. The RSPB have co-opted colleagues from the British Trust for Ornithology who monitor the scene from the train windows on their commute to the organisation's headquarters at Thetford. For access to the reserve, some trains call at the adjacent Lakenheath station on Sundays, with one return journey from Norwich possible on Saturdays.

## CONSULTATIONS

- NR: [Transpennine Route Upgrade: Standedge to Gledholt \(Huddersfield\)](#), closes 24 April.
- Medway Council: [Developer Contributions and Obligations Guide](#), closes 5 May.
- DfT: [Proposed Closure of Bordesley Station](#), closes 15 May.
- East West Rail: [Public Consultation on updated proposals](#), closes 9 June.

Please advise [Roger Blake](#) of any other consultations.

## 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 events
- Local Group events.

### April

- Saturday 18. Rf West Midlands Branch AGM, Birmingham Midland Institute, 9 Margaret Street, **Birmingham**, B3 3BS, 1030.
- Saturday 18. Rf London and South East Branch AGM, Wesley's Chapel, 49 City Road, Farringdon, **London**, EC1M 6EL, 1100.

### May

- Thursday 7. Rf London & South East, Sussex & Coastway division, **Online**, 1800 (Also 4 June).
- Saturday 9. Rf North East Branch AGM, Newcastle Arts Centre, 67 Westgate Road, **Newcastle upon Tyne**, NE1 1SG, 1400.
- Monday 11. Ribble Valley Rail, New Inn, Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, Lancs, BB7 2JN, 1900 (Also 13 July).
- Tuesday 12. Rf Thames Valley AGM, West Oxford Community Centre, Botley Road, **Oxford**, OX2 0BT, 1900.
- Tuesday 12. Chesham & District Transport Users' Group, Town Hall, Parsonage Lane, **Chesham**, Bucks, HP5 1EP, 1930 (Also 16 June).
- Wednesday 13. Rf West Midlands, Moor Street station, **Birmingham**, 1745 (Also 8 July).
- Thursday 14. Rf London & South East, Herts & Beds division, **Zoom**, 1930
- Saturday 16. Rf London & South East, Kent division, 1400.
- Saturday 16. East Suffolk Transport Association AGM, URC Church, Quay Street, **Halesworth**, 1400.

- Thursday 21. Rf London & South East, Metro & Eastern division, Alan Baxter Gallery, 75 Cowcross St, **London**, EC1M 6EL, 1900 (Also 23 July).
- Saturday 23. Rf Yorkshire, Friends Meeting House, **York**, 1300.
- Saturday 30. Peterborough-Ely-Norwich RUG AGM, Methodist Church, Tanner Street, **Thetford** IP24 2BQ, 1030.

#### Further Ahead

- 5-6 June. European Passengers' Federation, Gouvernement aan de Maas, **Maastricht**, Holland.
- 9 June. Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester RUG, The Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, Castleton, **Rochdale**, OL11 2SP, 1400.
- 10 June. Friends of the Barton Line AGM, **Cleethorpes**.
- 19 June. Friends of the Far North Line AGM, Lovat Arms Hotel, **Beaulieu**, 1045.
- 4 July. Rf AGM, Quaker Meeting House, 40 Bull Street, **Birmingham**, B4 6AF.

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