



August 2026

Welcome to the Rail User Express

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The Campaign to Reopen the Ivanhoe Line between Burton-on-Trent and Leicester believes that, stretching across four counties, the scheme has suffered from a lack of local support. But with transport being devolved to combined authorities headed by a Mayor, only South Staffordshire and the two Leicestershire CAs would need to come together, and they could see the line as a strategic aim. However, providing for areas without a Mayor could still be a problem.

Roger Smith

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

Levenmouth Rail Campaign

The final LMRC newsletter records Fife Council and the Levenmouth Connectivity Project opening the bridge between Kirkland and Mountfleurie on 27 February. The £5,800,000 active travel crossing is a fully-accessible route for walking, wheeling and cycling.

LMRC's final wish was granted in May when Sunday services started on the Dunfermline half of the Fife Circle, so Leven now has two Edinburgh tph seven days/week.

Lakes Line Rail User Group

Despite a severe heat warning and a recommendation not to travel, teams from LLRUG and the CRP spent much of the last Friday and Saturday of June counting the number of train passengers and asking many where they were travelling from, to and why. The initial stats are:

- Friday 26 June: 2442 passengers (2025: 2214), 390 interviews
- Saturday 27 June: 2211 passengers (2025: 2414), 301 interviews

Saturday's lower figures suggest that the disruption to the WCML and the Lakes Line was significant. LLRUG would like to thank the Northern train crews who put up with the survey in such a friendly manner. LLRUG was expecting six-car workings to resume on the Branch in July.

Each year, the Bowness and Windermere Community Care Trust invites schools to help plant bulbs and flowers. In June, volunteers from 1264 Squadron, the Windermere Air Cadets planted 42 red begonias and 72 white and blue lobelia in the four baskets donated by Windermere Town Council, and a 1m² tub at the front of the station. Children from Windermere School also planted up the six hanging baskets in the office.

Furness Line Action Group

FLAG Newsletter 125 is dedicated to the memory of Alan Johnstone, who produced the previous 124 over exactly 40 years but sadly passed away on 5 May aged 79 after a sudden heart attack.

At the 2026 AGM, Owain Roberts, Northern's NW Regional Stakeholder Manager reiterated its aspiration of 90% punctuality and 2% cancellations. Punctuality is currently 81%, the main challenge being the Manchester corridor. A Rest Day Working deal with the RMT remains a key obstacle to improving weekend performance. Northern has offered extra pay, but the RMT still has concerns about certain conditions. The contractual difficulties stem from First North Western's failure to formally address these. Then, staff were happy to work Sundays, but that has changed since the Covid impact on work/life balance.

Owain also detailed the replacement of its 967 ageing DMUs and EMUs (ten different types) that are highly complex to manage: 550 by 2032, and 83% of the fleet by 2040;. There will still be DMUs but also an increasing need for a hybrid battery arrangement. Detailed design will proceed over 2027/2028, with Classes 150, 155, 156 and 769 replaced from 2028 to 2033, and Classes 158, 323 and 333 from 2032 to 2033. The first new EMU is planned to enter service on the Leeds - Huddersfield line in late 2030, and the multi-mode multiple unit on the Manchester - Buxton line in 2031/2032. Jack Smith asked if there is a national, rather than just Northern, strategy of fleet replacement. Owain recognised the efficiencies of one standard exercise, but currently individual operators are progressing their own programmes.

Tim Farron, MP for Westmorland and Lonsdale, has asked Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander to consider re-opening Shap and Tebay stations on the WCML.

Selby and District Rail Action Group

SADRAG is pleased that work to improve accessibility at Selby station has started, with new lifts enabling access between platforms across the refurbished footbridge. The first stage of the £32m scheme involves demolishing the former Railway Club building to improve the bus station area. The frontage of the station building will be refurbished, and there will be a new car park as well as new access to the eastern side of the station. But the Group continues to push for an action plan on rebuilding the canopies and upgrading the station buildings.

Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association

Although Northern is seeing fewer cancellations and delays, the Mid-Cheshire line is suffering from problems with its Class 195 and 331 units, so older classes are cascaded with fewer 4-coach trains. It needs to advertise that the fourth coach of these is locked due to short platforms as they lack selective door opening, but note that passengers for Ashley, Plumley and Mouldsworth must travel in the front coach on CIS screens at stations. There is no money to lengthen platforms, and new trains are not due for around five years. The heatwave at the end of June again saw P-coding (removal from the timetable) affect some of the Stockport starters.

MCRUA has been monitoring the appointment of candidates to the inaugural Cheshire & Warrington Mayoral election in 2027. It has offered each of them a briefing on Cheshire's railways and transport matters.

Stockport MPs and councillors want a new station at Cheadle on the Mid Cheshire Line, but that could entail reduced services to Ashley, Mobberley and/or Plumley.

The Friends of Altrincham Interchange have installed a heritage sign at the Manchester end of Platform 4, and plans are advanced to install a raised bed near the rear entrance where there were once waste skips. Hopefully, the Bins to Bloom project will be ready by the autumn. And new poems by a local poet Dylan Miller are on display in the booking hall.

Campaign to Reopen the Ivanhoe Line

The long-running campaign to reinstate the Ivanhoe Line between Burton-on-Trent and Leicester with stops at Coalville and Ashby could face fresh challenges under the new Prime Minister. Douglas McLay, a CRIL Board member said the railway's geography has long worked against it: "The Ivanhoe Line has failed to get funding on multiple occasions because the local authority voices weren't strong enough. The line passes through four counties, so it's not top of the list of any one authority. While Andy Burnham has built a reputation for backing public transport investment during his time as Mayor of Manchester, his promise for devolved funding could make it harder for schemes that span several local authority areas to compete for investment".

Peterborough – Ely – Norwich Rail Users Group

At a PENRUG meeting with the Norfolk Rail Group, GA said it was working with NR on step-free access for the westbound platform at Wymondham. And EMR passengers at Norwich are inconvenienced by its long established practice not to unlock the doors until shortly before departure, but no-one from EMR was available to respond. The feasibility of new stations at Broadland Business Park in Norwich, and at West Winch south of King's Lynn was also discussed.

PENRUG is hoping for noticeboards at Norwich and Ely stations and then, if those are successful, at Wymondham and Thetford; members have volunteered to keep them all updated. GA does not currently have a timeline for their installation.

Early in May, GA quietly began another trial of refreshment facilities on some Norwich - Stansted Airport trains, hoping to tap into the summer holiday market. This follows a three month trial up to Christmas 2025 which was a bold move, but lacked publicity at stations and on trains.

Hereward CRP has produced [fliers](#) to inspire day trips on the Peterborough – Ely line. On 3 June, as part of Community Rail Week 2026, it organised a 'Try a Train' heritage visit for schoolchildren between March and Ely.

Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group

The BTPG [report](#) presented to GWR seeking to alleviate the problems caused by the shuttle between Newbury and Bedwyn was copied to the DfT and local MPs. Following a spate of recent missed connections and delays, MPs Danny Kruger and Lee Dillon have asked GWR for a full response. Meanwhile, the Newbury station manager has reported an increase in customer abuse towards colleagues during times of disruption, including missed connections. Such behaviour cannot be tolerated.

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 YORKSHIRE

A NR report "East of Leeds Corridor – Strategic Advice" asks: "What is the optimum service pattern for local services?" and "What service improvements are required to accommodate forecast passenger and freight growth?" based on different growth forecasts. Much thought has gone into developing these scenarios, and the report needs serious consideration. Good news includes:

- Assumptions that some routes will need longer trains
- The TPE Manchester – Wakefield - York service should continue, and call at Sherburn-in-Elmet
- There should be an hourly service between Sheffield and York via Pontefract.

However, the report does not appear to have modelled the impact of resolving the bottleneck east of Leeds station, whether by four-tracking, which would involve expensive land purchase and property demolition, or by shortening headways with digital signalling. Nor does it consider an expanded railway, eg reopening the York - Beverley line.

The Derbyshire Rail Industry Innovation Vehicle (DRIVE) that has opened at Barrow Hill near Chesterfield aims to be a flagship training centre offering modern classrooms and training areas, specialist research and development facilities including a digital laboratory, and high quality commercial workshop space. However, getting there involves driving or a taxi from Chesterfield, adding to the case for restoring passenger services on the freight-only line to Rotherham, perhaps with tram trains. This was progressing well through the Restoring Our Railways scheme until Rachel Reeves pulled the plug.

Northern's passenger assist boarding points aim to make it clear where customers can wait to meet with the conductor on the train. Following successful installations on the Leeds - Harrogate line, the next spots are at Woodhouse, Kiveton Bridge, Kiveton Park, Shireoaks and Retford, and then Gainsbrough Lea Road and Saxilby, all on the Sheffield - Lincoln route.

RAILFUTURE DEVON AND CORNWALL

With its ever-increasing footfall, transforming the North Devon Line and its services is long overdue. But bidding for the capital investment required to deliver such a programme is a competitive process. The 'application for funding' takes the form of a three-stage business case for approval by the DfT and HM Treasury starting with a Strategic Outline Case.

The Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance published a [Preliminary Strategic Business Case](#) in April, but the final SOC could need £150k, and in an Exeter workshop 16 delegates from 12 stakeholder organisations worked on a funding package. The potential target for its completion is the NDRDA's 4th annual Convention next March, when the Government is expected to open calls for schemes to be included in the 2028-32 Comprehensive Spending Review.

Success for the Alliance would be for Government to fund the 2nd-stage Outline Business Case costing several millions. Exeter MP Steve Race sent a letter of support commending the ongoing commitment, and both NR and GWR Strategy Director [Jo Grew](#) and [GWR MD Mark Hopwood](#) have produced supporting videos.

The branch applauds the opening of Okehampton Interchange on 31 July, and to passengers on 1 August. It will connect communities in West Devon, Torridge and North Cornwall with Exeter and the wider rail network, and builds on the case for reopening the Dartmoor Line, which has seen over half a million journeys within its first two years of operation, far exceeding projections.

Chair Tim Steer commented: "This station opening is a tribute to the dogged persistence of key individuals in a wide range of organisations. Four years ago, West Devon BC collaborated with the County Council to apply to the second round of the previous Government's Levelling Up Fund. It turned out to be a winning formula as, though supported by match funding from the county and district councils, the lion's share of the project's funding came not from the DfT, as would usually be expected, but instead from the former Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities; funding for transport schemes can come from non-transport sources."

CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT

CBT thinks GBR should be tasked with more than simply managing the network as it currently exists. It should have a clear mission to:

- Help more people travel by rail
- Connect more places to the railway network
- Make rail travel more affordable.

Every MP should be encouraged to support a railway that works better for people and places, and has the ambition and responsibility to grow, reconnect communities, and make journeys more affordable.

COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

Andy Burnham has long supported community rail, and as Mayor of Greater Manchester he championed the role that integrated public transport can play, with a clear commitment to making transport work better for people and places. And Heidi Alexander's continued leadership as Transport Secretary provides welcome certainty as we navigate rail reform. She has consistently demonstrated a belief in the importance of railways as a public good, which aligns strongly with CRN's values and ambitions.

NR's New Stations Industry Partnership conference brought together rail industry partners, Mayoral Strategic Authorities, train operators and community rail to explore how new stations can deliver greater value for passengers and places. As proposals continue to emerge, CRN will work closely with the Partnership to ensure its members are involved from the earliest stages, and that community voices help shape design, delivery and long-term success.

CRN Director Chris Birks told GWR's Community Rail and Stakeholder conference that community rail cannot simply sit alongside the railway; it must be recognised as a strategic partner within it. The railway of the future won't be built through organisational change alone, but through stronger relationships with the communities it exists to serve. Along with three CRP representatives, Paul Webster reinforced that message at the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority's consultation on the future of rail and integrated transport.

Leeds-Morecambe CRP and NR have transformed the old railway signal box at Hest Bank into a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) classroom, with displays showing train movements that the pupils can follow live. Built by BR, it operated part of the WCML for 55 years from 1958 to 2013, when control passed to the Preston power box. CRP Chairman Gerald Townson expressed his thanks to Avanti West Coast, TransPennine Express, Northern and CrossCountry for creating a community funding pot and offering their support for the project.

...and now the rest of the news

King Charles praised British Transport Police for keeping rail and underground networks safe when he opened the force's new HQ in central London. He spoke to a range of BTP officers, including some who had dealt with the Bedford train crash. Among them was PC Dave Sheldrick, the first BTP officer on the scene after the collision.

On 15 July, a PlanBEE Rail ceremony at the National Railway Museum celebrated the graduation of its inaugural cohort, with seven apprentices moving into permanent roles. The two-year programme to train the next generation of multi-disciplinary project managers gives apprentices experience of different environments with four different employers.

[Rail Youth Promise](#) aims to help 16-24 year-olds access rewarding careers in the rail sector. NR, DFTO, supply chain businesses and youth organisations committed to address the under representation of young people in the rail workforce, some 6% compared to 12% of the UK population as a whole. Built around five commitments - Inspire, Hire, Learn, Grow and Connect - the Promise aims to raise awareness of railway careers, create accessible routes into employment, support skills development, encourage progression and reduce the barriers to opportunity.

With an excess capacity of 176%, the most overcrowded train service in England and Wales last autumn was a Thameslink service between Bedford and Three Bridges that arrives at St Pancras just after 0800. Second on the list was a West Midlands service from London Euston to Crewe departing at 1746. The [DfT figures](#) were based on passenger counts taken midweek between September and December 2025, and represent travel on a typical autumn weekday.

ORR's Year in Rail and Track Ahead event in July covered the growing pressures on infrastructure and resilience in the context of constrained funding, climate change, the transformative potential of AI and technology, the need to consider rail policy within the wider transport landscape, and its commitment to become a modern, enabling presence, providing independent evidence and robust challenge while collaborating with industry to support success.

At the event, Steve White spoke on the progress being made on integrating track and train operations as an encouraging signal of what GBR can deliver. Ruth Cadbury said that rail reform must not come at the expense of an independent regulator, and that transport systems designed for disabled passengers benefit all users. Non-GBR operators' licences need to be updated and ready for GBR and rail reform. Consumer standards and industry wide systems are the main areas where changes are most likely. It is planning a formal policy consultation in the autumn.

Rail passengers should benefit from new technology designed to deliver clearer, real-time information during disruption. The On-Train Passenger Announcements (OTPA) system is being piloted on 38 ScotRail Class 380 trains. Using the railway's own mobile telecoms system, GSM-R, Scotland's railway control centre will be able to send announcements directly to multiple trains at the same time, with timely, consistent updates when services are disrupted. It will also reduce the pressure on drivers to make additional announcements during disruption.

As part of the Glasgow City Region City Deal funded by the UK and Scottish Governments and East Renfrewshire Council, a new station at Balgray on the Neilston - Glasgow Central line south of Barrhead is set to open on 27 September, well ahead of the planned November date. It will make commuting, education and leisure travel easier, while attracting more visitors to local destinations such as Darnley Country Park.

To prepare the Fife Circle line for electrification, over 18 days in October, NR will demolish and rebuild bridges at Bennoch Road in Kirkcaldy, Muriespot near Coaltown of Balgonie and Main Street in Thornton, and upgrade Cardenden Road bridge as well as the signalling.

After a five-day closure for a £2m upgrade, the Wigan - Southport line reopened on 1 August, so trains can now run at full speed through this section, making for faster and more reliable journeys. It also protects the line from flooding, with tracks in this area becoming deluged in the past during heavy downpours.

In a visit to the National Railway Museum in York, The Duke of Gloucester was given an exclusive preview of its ambitious multi-million-pound overhaul. He was taken on a guided tour of the Our Transformation exhibition, which sets out proposals for Central Hall, a striking new entrance structure inspired by a working railway roundhouse. He was also briefed on the Futures Gallery, a permanent exhibition area that showcases rail innovation and invites visitors to contemplate what lies ahead for the industry.

As the Hull - Halifax service experiences regular delays, it is often terminated at Leeds or Bradford, so Northern has consulted the West Yorkshire Combined Authority on a proposal to make it a Hull - Leeds service, but with the Bradford – Halifax – Huddersfield service extended to Leeds.

Prior to applying for a TWAO, the Midlands Rail Hub Alliance has opened an initial consultation on proposals to enhance the line from Birmingham Moor Street to Bordesley (see below) to enable:

- Three additional tph to towns and cities South West of Birmingham
- The reinstatement of two Cross City line tph(making six tph in total)
- Four more tph towards the East Midlands, one of which will also serve the North East.

It will seek further feedback on more refined proposals in 2027.

NR has secured funding to progress the next phase of rail safety technology that will reduce waiting times at rural level crossings between Shrewsbury and Swansea. It is developing plans to install the 'U-Cross' signalling system along all 96 miles of the Heart of Wales line. Delivering precise train location data at a fraction of the cost, this will transform how trains are monitored.

Alicia Kearns, MP for Rutland and Stamford, wants improved London services as the 0827 from Oakham doesn't arrive until 1006, too late for commuters and business travellers. EMR is to look at the feasibility of an earlier train, but the soonest a change could be made is December 2027.

However, the service is one of a number of cancellations and short formed trains in the temporary timetable that EMR introduced on 20 July. A three-year delay in its Class 810 trains entering service together with reliability issues and maintenance of the Class 222 fleet has significantly impacted its ability to maintain the intercity service. EMR Connect services are unaffected. Its MD Will Rogers has stepped down, and [Neil Grabham](#), a former customer services director, has assumed the role of interim MD.

The problems with EMR's Class 810 bi-modes demonstrate that the cost savings claimed for discontinuous electrification can easily turn into a mirage – another strand in Rf's campaign for full electrification of East West Rail.

Cambridge South station saw over 110,000 journeys in the first month since it opened. It provides a greener option to access the Biomedical Campus by reducing vehicle use and carbon emissions while helping to ease levels of congestion in the city.

Overnight on 15/16 July, LNER, NR, Agility Trains, Hitachi Rail and RailAdventure UK collaborated to test track and train systems as an Azuma train operated at line speed under European Train Control System Level 2 on the ECML between Welwyn Garden City and Hitchin that includes the double-track section across the Welwyn viaduct and through the tunnels. Shorter headways could increase the capacity of this bottleneck.

Botley Road in Oxford should have reopened to traffic by the end of August, but drainage work revealed three minor leaks on SGN's gas network. Once the old, metal pipe has been replaced by a longer-lasting plastic one, it will now reopen on 20 September.

Eurostar has amended its £1.7bn contract with Alstom for 50 Celestia trains to those that will function in temperatures up to 55°C, up from 45°C. The upgraded package incorporates enhanced cooling systems and superior components and microprocessors. Due for delivery in 2031, they will be the first double-decker trains through the Channel Tunnel.

And work has begun to transform a 40-acre site in east London into an intermodal rail freight terminal. Able to handle containers and liftable lorry trailers, and with distribution and storage facilities, Barking Eurohub will facilitate freight traffic to and from major continental markets via the Channel Tunnel.

The blaze on 11 July near Winsford in Cheshire that closed the WCML in both directions is believed to have been sparked by 'Harry Potter' Black Five 44871, so NR has imposed a temporary ban on steam trains on its network amid heightened wildfire concerns.

...and finally

At a House of Commons Parliamentary Reception, the legacy of Railway 200 was passed to Rocket: All Aboard (RAA), a major cultural, heritage and community programme along the Liverpool and Manchester Railway that will herald its bicentenary celebrations in 2030.

On 9 October, 150 years since work on it began, local historian John Hillier will deliver an illustrated talk in the parish church on Harringworth Viaduct across the Welland, north of Corby. Much of his material is new, and will reveal the outcome of recent research with his colleague Nick Hill. Tickets cost £15.00 and will be on sale from late August.

CONSULTATIONS

- Midlands Rail Hub Alliance: [Upgrades between Bordesley and Birmingham Moor Street](#), closes 28 August.
- DfT: [Draft Heathrow Expansion National Policy Statement, proposed amendments](#), closes 1 September.
- Central Bedfordshire Council: [Local Transport Plan 4 2027 - 2040](#), closes 20 September.
- Mayor of London: [Draft London Plan 2050](#), closes 15 October.

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

EVENTS

Please keep your events coming, and update websites as soon as any changes 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.

August.

- Tuesday 11. STORM - Oldham Rochdale Manchester RUG, The Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, Castleton, **Rochdale**, OL11 2SP, 1400. (Also 13 October).
- Wednesday 12. Friends of the Barton Line, White Swan, **Barton on Humber**, 1815 (Also 14 October, No 1 Inn, Cleethorpes station and 9 December at the White Swan).
- Saturday 15. Rf London & South East, Kent division, 1400.
- Thursday 27. Rf London & South East, Herts & Beds division, **Online**, 1930 (Also 26 September in St Albans, 1100 and 27 October online at 1930).

September

- Thursday 3. Rf North West, Castlestead View, Castlestead Close, **Oxenholme**, LA9 7FY, 1300 (Also 12 November, venue TBC).
- Wednesday 9. Rf West Midlands, Platform 3, **Birmingham** Moor Street station, 1745 (Also 14 October).
- Monday 14 September. Skipton & East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership, Town Hall, High Street, **Skipton**, North Yorkshire, BD23 1AH, 1900.
- Monday 14. Ribble Valley Rail, New Inn, Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, Lancs, BB7 2JN, 1900
- Tuesday 15. Chesham & District Transport Users' Group, Town Hall, Parsonage Lane, **Chesham**, Bucks, HP5 1EP, 1930.
- Thursday 17. Rf London & South East, London Metro division, Alan Baxter Gallery, 75 Cowcross Street, **Farringdon**, EC1M 6EL, 1900.

Further Ahead

- 10 October. Rf Yorkshire, jointly with Rf Lincolnshire and Rf East Midlands, **Sheffield**.
- 12 October. Avocet Line RUG AGM, Manor Hotel, The Beacon, **Exmouth**, Devon, EX8 2AG.
- 24 October. East Suffolk Travel Association, Methodist Church, **Woodbridge**, 1400.

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