

# **railfuture** **Northeast**

## **BRANCH BULLETIN – SEPTEMBER 2014**

*Railfuture is a national, independent body that advocates a modern and effective passenger and freight railway in Great Britain.*

*The North East is one of twelve branches in England along with Railfuture Scotland and Railfuture Wales that make up the national organisation.*

**Web site:** [www.railfuture.co.uk](http://www.railfuture.co.uk) **Twitter:** [@Railfuture](https://twitter.com/Railfuture) and [@RailfutureNEast](https://twitter.com/RailfutureNEast).

### **1 Branch AGM, 2014**

Some thirty people attended the Branch AGM on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2014 at Newcastle Art Centre. They heard an excellent account of the Borders' Rail project which involves construction of 30 miles of new railway between the ECML near Edinburgh and Tweedmouth. The line opens in September 2015.

Branch reports and elections followed. With the exception of myself, Tony Walker, the officers agreed to continue serving and were duly elected. My role as Press Officer was taken on by Damian Bell.

### **2 Visit of Paul Salveson**

Guest speaker at the Branch Meeting on Saturday 14 June 2014 was (a real) railway expert, the ubiquitous Paul Salveson, founder of the Community Rail Partnership movement.

The timing of his talk was near perfect. Paul entitled it "Getting the North better connected: opportunities and threats with the new Northern franchise". The very short consultation process on the franchise had just started. Paul picked over the invitation to tender document and highlighted a raft of danger signs – including

likely reductions in some services, closure of booking offices, higher fares, continuing shortages of suitable rolling stock and cuts to through services so involving more changes for passengers. Any opportunities seemed to centre mainly around the apparent appetite of major local authorities across the north for a wholesale improvement in local (and regional) services.

Paul urged us to be ready to challenge any instances of “trade-offs”, a device invented by DfT to justify cuts. One ploy it seems is to assert that to pay for new trains it will be necessary to introduce service reductions, closure of booking offices etc. His message: tell DfT this is not acceptable, it’s bad for passengers and bad for the northern economy. So there, we have been warned!

By the way Paul has submitted his own very extensive proposals for the future of local and regional train services in the north. Details at:

<http://www.paulsalveson.org.uk/2014/08/15//for-a-better-northern-rail-network-response-to-government>



### **3 Another visit!**

Committee members welcomed Railfuture Board member Alison Cosgrove to their meeting in Durham on 9 July 2014. Alison, who is currently Chair of Railfuture Scotland, described her meetings with some of the bidders for the next East Coast franchise as well as setting out her hopes for future developments of the organisation. She wants more women to take lead roles and the Branches and the Board to develop a balanced relationship with one another.

### **4 Railfuture Northeast and New Rail at Newcastle University**

The links that our Chair, Trevor Watson, began to form with New Rail in 2013 have continued into 2014. Trevor himself made a presentation at the Gen Y Rail event in February 2014 when railway professionals gathered along with over 100 secondary school pupils.

During the same month five of our members held six separate face to face meetings with undergraduates who were preparing railway related academic assignments. Subjects ranged from analysis of delays, environmental factors, high speed and an imaginative baggage handling scheme. Members mostly listened and offered occasional pearls of wisdom, a wisdom rooted in their own knowledge of local railway organisation and practice. The New Rail Education Group Manager, Marin Marinov, hopes we can repeat in 2015.

In July 2014 Trevor and I participated in a two day assessment exercise when we watched a total of 12 presentations by students from the 21-day Newcastle summer school. All the students hailed from Continental Europe so the presentations (in English I hasten to say) had an international dimension – some included material about rail here in UK, in Newcastle even. Subjects included urban freight (involving use of city metro systems), high speed, rail economics, safety, maintenance, vehicle design, energy consumption and performance assessment.

## 5 **The next Northern and Trans-Pennine Franchises.**

Certainly the meeting with Paul Salveson in June (see above) provided stimulus to Branch thinking about the next Northern and TP Franchises. Among the happenings since then has been our detailed response to the DfT consultation which we prepared jointly with Yorkshire Branch of Railfuture. This was then sent to the national organisation for submission to DfT. Thanks to Chair Trevor Watson, and to his Yorkshire counter-part Nina Smith, for their work in collating our area submissions.

Some branch members also sent in their own individual consultation responses, so DfT have plenty of material to consider!

Representatives of Arriva, one of the short-listed bidders for the next Northern franchise, met, at their request, with Trevor Watson and Secretary Ian Walker in mid-August 2014 to quiz them about what the winning operator should try and deliver. Important we take these opportunities to influence!

As I write another meeting, this one requested by Tim Burleigh of Eversholt Train Leasing, is to take place in Newcastle with some six committee members on 5th

September when specifically future rolling stock requirements for Trans Pennine will be considered.

It is quite a 'feather in our cap' that rail professionals have sought Railfuture views about crucial service delivery issues.

## 6 Looking ahead

When I wrote the last Bulletin in February 2014 there was conjecture (not to mention uncertainty!) about the likely shape of train service organisation in the north from 2016 onwards. Now in September 2014 the situation seems to be this:-

- NE local services will **NOT** be incorporated in the next East Coast franchise.
- The Northern and TP franchises **will** remain separate.
- Overall responsibility for running the franchises will **NOT** be devolved to the new LA Combined Authorities as part of a 'Rail North' deal.
- DfT will continue to 'run the show', but with some sort of partnership deal between itself and the Combined Authorities.

## 7 Bad news

Two recent disturbing developments:-

- (i) Off-peak tickets will cease to be valid on Northern Trains from 8 September 2014 during evening 'rush hours'. Official rationale is that this will help 'cut losses'.
- (ii) Lead story in the Northern Echo, 25<sup>th</sup> August 2014, that Pacers are not to be scrapped after all but rather modified in line with disability legislation due to come in 2020. The Pacers are then expected to continue in service for another ten years. The Echo claims this represents a "U-Turn" following an assurance given by rail minister Stephen Hammond to the House of Commons that the new franchise bidders would be expected to put forward proposals for the removal of Pacers.

*Note: on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2014 the Northern Echo announced it was to start a campaign demanding much higher investment in NE local train services.*

## 8 Better news

- The new James Cook station near Nunthorpe opened in May 2014.
- Durham County Council confirms that plans for a new station at Horden on the Durham Coast Line are progressing.
- Northumberland County Council is financing a Network Rail assessment of the proposals to restore passenger services to the Ashington and Blyth freight only lines.
- *Modern Railways* (September edition at page 8) says proposals contained in the 'One North' plan drawn up by Leaders of the five Northern Combined Authorities talk of "a new stretch of railway line between Newcastle and Darlington". Anyone know anything about this?
- The mainstream media has picked up on the idea (to quote the Chancellor) of a "Northern powerhouse", a concept that includes £15b worth of transport investment. The '*Observer*', 31<sup>st</sup> August 2014 at page 26 printed a whole two page feature, which highlights the importance of high quality rail links between the major centres and for the need to redress the balance of economic investment as between London and the North.
- The alterations to the main portico at Newcastle Central are almost complete. The alterations don't seem to have won universal approval however, but at least the whole area is now a lot safer for pedestrians.
- Slightly off our 'patch' I know, but well done Network Rail, Esk Valley Rail Partnership and North Yorkshire Moors Railway and others for getting the second platform at Whitby built.

## 9 And finally.....

*Some sad news I am afraid. Our good friend and railway stalwart Bob Mains passed away in late May at age 85.*

*Bob had been a familiar figure at almost all the Branch meetings over the past thirty years. His late brother was also a regular attender.*

*Besides railways, Bob was a keen cricket fan and a staunch supporter of the 'real ale' movement. May he rest in peace.*

**Tony Walker**

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