

railfuture

Northeast

BRANCH BULLETIN – MAY 2016

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 Twitter: [@Railfuture](https://twitter.com/Railfuture) and [@RailfutureNEast](https://twitter.com/RailfutureNEast).

There is lots of rail news to report from the north east of England.

North East News – February to May 2016

Stagecoach bus survey : 23 February 2016

Stagecoach survey for Tyneside finds that commuting by bus comes in at £1,150 a year less than using a car.

Free Wi-Fi: 23 February 2016

Customers at 30 railway stations are to benefit from free Wi-Fi as part of a new Northern Rail initiative. The Company has signed up to roll out the CROWD smart Wi-Fi platform at thirty stations including Haltwhistle, Prudoe, Riding Mill, Stocksfield, Haydon Bridge, Bardon Mill and Hexham.

Private Meeting between Railfuture North East Branch Committee and Tim Burleigh of Eversholt Rail (in Durham): 23 February 2016

Seven Railfuture North East committee members were present. Matters discussed included:

- New trains for Northern: 271 carriages made up of three-car EMUs and three-car DMUs. Ordered from CAF of Spain.
- Problems for train lease companies caused by delayed electrification programmes.
- Tim applauded the quality of the Arriva Northern franchise bid – company had offered to do more than the Department for Transport (DfT) had originally stipulated.
- Need for Network Rail to improve its operations (and its attitudes).
- Confirmed that stock for the proposed ‘Connect’ service between Middlesbrough and Carlisle will comprise refurbished Class 158 trains. Believed Arriva want the service to operate via Stillington (freight only) line and Durham. But co-operation of Network Rail necessary for this to happen.
- Arriva plans to establish a North East business unit.
- Trans-Pennine: new five-car EMUs are to be ordered. Unclear about future of the Class 185s trains. Believed some 22 of the present 51 Class 185 units will be handed back to lessee by 2020 – remainder will be refurbished and retained.
- Role of Rail North will be to run the day-to-day Northern and TPE operations with oversight from DfT. The Management Board of Rail North includes Metro boss Tobby Hughes.
- Transport for the North (TfN) will be the “big beast” in terms of financing major new connectivity projects. It will have a multi-mode role similar to Transport for Scotland.
- In concluding discussion we decided that the ORR was largely ineffective!

North business reps demand improved cross-Pennine rail links: 26 February 2016

Research among over 1,100 north of England business people in connection with the Northern Powerhouse concept, revealed that 83% of those questioned wanted a 125mph trans-Pennine rail link on the basis that it would “have a tangible impact on business and access to customers”: 96% supported improvements to the East Coast Main Line: and 98% wanted improved road links into Port of Liverpool. Research findings incorporated into an 11-page report sent to Chancellor George Osborne. Incidentally, the report noted that the 283-mile train journey between London and Paris was quicker than that between Liverpool and Hull, even though the latter was only half the distance!

Meeting hosted by Northern TOC in Newcastle: 1 March 2016

The meeting was attended by about 50 people, including seven members of Railfuture North East Branch. It was intended as a final review of Northern’s ten-year

“stewardship” of the franchise with a brief look forward to life under the new Arriva North company after 1 April. Chief Executive Alex Hynes gave a fairly glowing report of Northern’s progress, especially over last two years. In particular he flagged up introduction of the new Liverpool to Manchester electric service – already passenger numbers had increased. Manchester to Bolton, Preston and Blackpool electrification schemes were being progressed.

Under Arriva new and faster “Connect” services would be phased in over some of the key routes including Middlesbrough to Carlisle via Newcastle. Mr Hynes thought the Carlisle trains would be routed via the Stillington line and Ferryhill, though he couldn’t be absolutely certain. On a less positive note we learned that plans for a new Coastline station at Horden had run into difficulty. Previously scheduled for opening in March 2017, no revised opening date has been disclosed.

Private meeting with Phil Wilson MP at Newton Aycliffe: 4 March 2016

Tony Walker, Editor of this Bulletin, was invited to meet with Sedgefield MP Phil Wilson and his Research Assistant Paul Trippett to review the situation with regard to the Leamside route. Mr Wilson disclosed that during the course of his constituency business he receives a surprising number of queries and suggestions about the line’s reinstatement, something he himself supports. We considered various future scenarios for the line ranging from a fast by-pass route of Durham, introduction of a local passenger service, and even its incorporation into Tyne and Wear Metro. We both recognised that the Leamside “project” was long-term, nevertheless we agreed some avenues to pursue that might help progress matters in the next couple of years.

We also considered merits of having a new station established at Ferryhill, especially relevant if Arriva were serious about its new Middlesbrough – Carlisle ‘connect’ service being routed over the Stillington (currently freight-only) branch. The station possibility needs pushing hard over the coming months and so we set down some action points for the MP to chase up. We agreed to keep in touch and I will seek a further meeting later in the year.

Incidentally, as a result of this meeting I came across a Facebook group simply called “the Leamside Line” (<https://www.facebook.com/TheLeamsideLine/>). It has over 100 members and though it looks mainly to the past glories of Leamside I think there may well be some amongst its membership who would gladly become involved in any future reinstatement campaign. Both Phil Wilson and I have signed up! Other colleagues in the Branch might wish to take a look?

Publication of Northern Transport Strategy Spring 2016 - Report by TfN and DfT: 7 March 2016

This report confirms that the Exchequer will allocate £1b for rail enhancements in the North between now and 2020 and £2.5b for road projects as part of the “Northern Powerhouse” project. The rail element apparently includes provision for a Northern Smart Card allowing passengers to transfer easily across the various modes of public transport. It is believed that the Government have now committed to establishing a new fast rail route between Manchester and Leeds.

Lobby group “Business North” have welcomed the report, but are calling for faster delivery of key infrastructure schemes. It cautions against a piecemeal approach to transport developments strongly advocating a strategic approach believing this to be essential if the Northern economy is to blossom.

Railfuture North East - Branch AGM held on Saturday 12 March 2016 at the Newcastle Art Centre

Twenty-four members attended. Guest speaker was Tobyn Hughes, Managing Director of Transport Operations, North East Combined Authority (NECA) and effectively the “boss” of Tyne & Wear Metro.

Tobyn entitled his address “Metro – past, present and future”. He first outlined the various stepping stones in the development of Metro before sharing some bare statistics. For example, there are 60 stations, 214 bridges, the system carried 40 million passengers in 2015 and there are 90 Metro cars. It is estimated Metro takes 15 million cars off the road each year. The assets are in process of being revitalised and Tobyn described some aspects of the massive make-over now occurring.

He set out the roles of the new bodies recently set up and which will have responsibilities for transport in the North of England. These include NECA which effectively replaces the former Integrated Transport Authority, Transport for the North (TfN) which will be responsible for overall strategy and for planning and delivering major infrastructure projects; and Rail North which will (eventually) have day to day responsibility for managing delivery of the TPE and Northern Franchises. A North East Rail Management Unit is to be created with a remit to “drive” rail in the region. Tobyn referred to the intention of creating a smart card system that would enable Metro ticketing to interchange with Northern and TPE as well as with the buses.

Metro will need to renew its fleet as soon as possible after 2020. New lines and destinations are planned and these may require different sorts of route-specific trains. Metro would hope to expand down the Durham Coast, to utilise some of the Leamside route and to go to Team Valley. For future-proofing it would be advisable to have 25kV electrification on the Durham Coast, which would require dual-voltage trains to enable journeys such as from the Airport to Hartlepool.

Tobyn was questioned about better integration between buses and trains and the possibility of introducing some selected “fast” bus services instead of expanding Metro itself. Operationally bus/train integration is difficult (although the Swiss seem to manage it!) so “don’t hold your breath on this” seemed to be the message.

Dennis Fancett of SENRUG, which campaigns to reopen the *Ashington Blyth & Tyne* (AB&T) line, sought, and received, clarification from Tobyn that Metro would not go to Ashington. It was agreed best that the AB&T passenger train project be developed using the heavy rail option.

Railfuture North East branch Chair, Trevor Watson, thanked Tobyn for a very upbeat presentation which was clearly appreciated by the audience.

In the Business section of the meeting, the Chairman’s report was received, as was the annual financial statement.

In the Election of Railfuture North East branch Officers for 2015/16 the following were returned unopposed:

- Chair: Trevor Watson
- Vice-Chair: Keith Simpson
- Secretary: Ian Walker
- Treasurer: Gordon Barclay
- Press Officer: Damian Bell
- *Railwatch* Correspondent: Peter Kenyon (to be succeeded at the end of 2016 by Peter Walker).
- Our Honorary president, Martin Murphy, continues in this role.

DB Regio Contract with Metro to be terminated: 14 March 2016

DB Regio’s contract with Nexus to operate the Tyne & Wear Metro is to be terminated on 31 March 2017. It is intended that operations will be brought “in house” for the two years until 2019.

Showpiece launch of the new “Azuma” train at Kings Cross: 17 March 2016

Virgin East Coast staged a showpiece launch of its new IEP train at King’s Cross in the presence of Richard Branson. To be known as the “Virgin Azuma” (from the Japanese word meaning “East”) the trains are expected to enter service in 2018. Though initially the Azumas will operate at a maximum speed of 125mph, Virgin says that along with Network Rail it is examining the feasibility of realising the train’s actual maximum capability of 140mph.

Network Rail to remain in public sector – 19 March 2016

The Shaw Report recommends changes to the way in which Network Rail is organised. It proposed more initiative to rest with area route managers, for instance, but privatisation is not suggested.

Newcastle Central to be “at heart of HS2”: 22 March 2016

According to “The Journal” Newcastle City Council Leader, Nick Forbes, has stated that Newcastle Central is to be “at the heart of HS2” when it reaches the North East! (Presumably he means that HS2 trains will use Central as opposed to an out-of-town parkway station? – Ed)

Bishop Auckland rail excursion to London: 26 March 2016

It has been announced that an organisation known as “Bishop Trains” will run an excursion direct from Bishop Auckland to London in November 2016. It would be the first such direct train for fifty years!

Witton-le-Wear (Co Durham) Station opens: 26 March 2016

The reconstructed station at Witton-le-Wear opened on 26 March 2016 providing a welcome extension to the Stanhope to Frosterly (Weardale) Heritage service.

TPE announce new train order: 1 April 2016

Trans-Pennine Express announced that it had placed an order for 19 bi-mode AT300 (125mph) trains with Hitachi (Aycliffe) worth £82m.

Railfuture North East Branch Committee Meeting: 5 April 2016

Eight Railfuture North East branch committee members were in attendance plus two invited 'observers'. Business included:

Membership review – currently sixty registered people in the Branch – agreed that we should explore ways of trying to increase this number, for example by having a Railfuture information/recruiting stand at a couple of the North East's model rail exhibitions this year; and also by asking existing members to be more pro-active in encouraging others to join.

Branch programme – secretary reported that railway expert (and Railfuture's Honorary President) Christian Wolmar and *Rail* magazine editor Nigel Harris had agreed to speak at the Railfuture North East Branch meeting in Newcastle on Tuesday 11 October 2016 and more immediately Peter Myers of *Arriva Trains North* will be guest speaker at the Railfuture North East Branch Meeting on Thursday 23 June. (*Interesting date to choose!! - Ed*) Venue is Brunswick Methodist Church, Brunswick Place, Newcastle (a few yards from Monument Metro Station); start time is 7pm. Obviously Peter will be talking about the new Northern franchise and no doubt we will have plenty of questions to put to him about Arriva's proposals for services in the North East.

Attendance at recent company presentations. Some half dozen Railfuture North East branch committee members had attended a special Virgin East Coast gathering in York (9 February 2016) and a Northern one in Newcastle (1 March 2016). In discussion the committee identified some of the salient points from both presentations. Railfuture's attendance had been helpful at both and we had been able to pose several important questions.

Media guidelines. Railfuture's national media officer, Bruce Williamson, had recently issued suggested guidelines in an effort to assist local branch media reps (in our case Damian Bell). In discussion we agreed some markers we thought should be adhered to both at branch and national level. These communicated to Bruce Williamson.

NECA Transport Manifesto –“Our Journey”

The North East Combined Authority (NECA) had recently published a Manifesto setting out some guiding principles about tackling transport issues across the region. This had been put out for consultation and Peter Walker, on behalf of our sister organisation NECTAR, had submitted a written response. Later in the year NECA will issue a transport plan embracing all modes (road, rail, tram etc). Doubtless Railfuture will be responding to that with some vigour!

The Railfuture North East branch committee thought the Manifesto was weak on freight and on-demand management in relation to car traffic. The issue of land planning was absent.

Rail Week 27 June – 3 July 2016

This is a national initiative primarily to make younger people aware of the many challenging career opportunities available in the rail industry. It is being pushed by Young Rail Professionals (YRP), which is concerned by a looming skills shortage on the railway. (Railfuture has signed a collaboration agreement with YRP.)

In our region Newcastle University, Hitachi, Metro and the North East Freight Partnership are among the official sponsors. Intended the programme will include talks to school students, visits to operational places of interest e.g. busy stations, control rooms, engineering and maintenance centres: plus utilisation of social media to answer queries. Railfuture North East's committee wants to encourage individual Railfuture members to engage in whatever way they can. There will be a short item about the week included at the Branch meeting on 23 June 2016. Further details available on the Rail Week website at: <http://www.railweek.com/>.

Leamside/station at Ferryhill – see page 3 of this Bulletin for details of Editor's meeting with Sedgefield MP Phil Wilson.

Arriva Northern Trains – could new franchise provide a catalyst for better arrangements for bus/train inter-connecting at stations in the North East? There was a productive discussion within the Railfuture North East branch committee. Hopefully there will be opportunity to consider further with Peter Myers at the branch meeting on the 23rd June 2016.

Abuse incident on Cross Country train - Allison Cosgrove, Chair of Railfuture Scotland, often attends our Committee meetings. She advised she had witnessed an unpleasant incident on a Cross Country train recently when a group of six men, clearly very drunk, had abused a young woman. Allison thought the men had been to a football match. There had been great difficulty in locating the train guard and passengers were left to try and calm the situation themselves. Allison wondered if Railfuture might support a campaign to have trains run "dry" on football days or at other times when there were going to be large spectator gatherings. *(Any thoughts? – Ed)*

Metro bike experiment: 7 April 2016

Railfuture North East branch member Peter Kenyon (who is also our current *Railwatch* reporter) elicited from Metro Customer Services that a limited (six-month) experiment had been introduced by Metro on 4 April 2016 whereby fold-up cycles could be carried on trains between Callerton Park and Jesmond, 10am to 3pm only.

Virgin East Coast cuts Alnmouth and Morpeth calls: 5 May 2016

Virgin EC announced that henceforward the 1830 hrs train ex-Edinburgh for London KX would depart instead at 1842 hrs, but cease to call at Alnmouth and Morpeth. Dennis Fancett of SENRUG was intending to make representations to Virgin about this decision on grounds of the inconvenience it would cause to travellers in Northumberland.

Virgin East Coast threat to travel centres: 5 May 2016

It was reported in the Journal that Virgin EC is considering staff reductions at travel centres on the ECML including Newcastle, Durham and Berwick. Forty-five jobs are at risk. According to a TSSA spokesperson the idea is that staff will be transferred to the platform where they will issue tickets to customers from mobile machines.

German owners of Arriva want to float the company: 5 May 2016

The Journal reported that the German owners of Arriva are looking to float 45% of the business on the Stock Exchange in a bid to raise an estimated £3.6bn. RMT General Secretary Mick Cash issued a warning about future security of jobs in the company. He lambasted what he called a “fire sale” of Deutsche Bahn’s UK rail assets with no control over who might end up running services.

Rail regulator approves new East Coast services: 12 May 2016

The Office of Rail and Road (ORR) has approved five new daily services (each way) between Edinburgh and King’s Cross (all calling at Morpeth) from 2021. These ‘Open Access’ services will be provided by First Group which promises fares way below those charged by Virgin EC. For their part Virgin has apparently “warned” the DfT of the (financial) dangers for Virgin that may follow from this decision.

In another announcement ORR confirmed approval for new Virgin EC services to Middlesbrough, Harrogate and Lincoln (from 2019) and additional Virgin services between Edinburgh and London (from 2021).

And finally..... A reminder about the Branch Meeting on Thursday, 23 June, 2016 at Brunswick Methodist Church, Brunswick Place, Newcastle (very close to Metro Monument station). Guest speaker is Peter Myers of Arriva Northern who will address us about the new franchise.

Tony Walker

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