



October 2016

## Welcome to the Rail User Express.

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Last month, I remarked on the woeful inability to forecast the economic benefit of new or reopened lines, or improvements to the rail infrastructure. Schemes are sold on their political impact, so grandiose ones push the less glamorous to the back of the queue. Both the Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership (HITRANS) Transport Strategy Refresh paper and Network Rail's (NR) Scotland Route Study 2016 (SRS) refer to the Far North Line (FNL) as a "Lifeline" service, so its resilience is not just a matter of convenience; it's absolutely vital. An Appendix to the SRS then lists two Conditional Outputs for the FNL: 1 - 2 trains/hour to Invergordon, and one every two hours between Inverness and Wick/Thurso. But these aims are unachievable without more passing loops, and Kinbrace (see below) doesn't even get a mention! The Scottish Government will set out its spending priorities for rail in a High Level Output Specification next June. Perhaps this one could focus on more mundane but arguably more vital requirements?

*Roger Smith*

*We continue with the usual roundup of news items from groups around the UK. Please keep your contributions coming: they are all gratefully received.*

## Friends of the Far North Line

Right-time arrivals on Borders Rail may have dipped below 30%, but at Wick, on the FNL, the figure is currently down to 25.9%, despite trains regularly bypassing Thurso. Beauly and Conon Bridge were each also missed on over 70 occasions in the year to May 2016. There is an urgent need for passing loops at Lentrán, between Inverness and Beauly, and at Kinbrace, to break up the 24 miles of single track between Helmsdale and Forsinard, the longest stretch in the country. On three days in August, the 1038 service from Inverness was held at Helmsdale for 50 minutes, waiting for a southbound service to pass.

## Levenmouth Rail Campaign

The LMRC Conference in September attracted key stakeholders from local councils, transport authorities, business networks, education and health institutions, and local groups. The case for reopening was overwhelming, and political parties and business were united in their support. Excellent press, radio and social media coverage ensued. The technical presentation by rail expert David Shirres was revelatory. The STAG 2 Report for Levenmouth had severely overinflated the cost of reinstating the branch, which would require no major engineering work, land purchase or road diversion, as the line itself was intact. Moreover, whereas the Borders Rail STAG Report had added over £21 million of 'Wider Economic Benefits' to its calculation, a similar consideration for Levenmouth could raise its BCR (benefit/cost ratio) to over 2, which almost demands reopening. LMRC would suggest to Humza Yousaf, Minister for Transport & the Islands, that reopening the Leven line would be an 'open goal' for the Government. With the UK Chancellor also amenable to investment in transport to drive the economy, it would tick so many boxes as to present an opportunity that simply must not be missed.

## **Campaign for Borders Rail**

The Campaign appreciates that there are many and varied transport needs in the Scottish Borders, but wants the Borders Transport Study to focus on rail potential. Road improvements should not inhibit the Scottish Government's clear commitment to examine the feasibility of extending the line, and capitalise on its resounding success by creating new demand. On a visit to Hawick, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said it made sense, and politicians from many political parties have backed the concept of such a study.

## **South East Northumberland Rail User Group**

SENUG has welcomed the announcement that, from December 2017, the number of CrossCountry trains calling at Morpeth each weekday would increase from three each way to five, although it is not yet clear which services these would be. Morpeth was the only station across the whole of England and Scotland to get more services under the new contract. Chairman Dennis Fancett expressed delight that its arguments had been listened to: "It makes belonging to a voluntary campaign group such as ours worthwhile".

## **CKP Railways – *Getting Together to Pick up the Pieces***

CKP is seeking to reopen the Keswick–Penrith section of the line that once ran to Cockermouth, Workington and Whitehaven. As described in the January issue, the storms on 5-6 December wrought havoc in the section between Keswick and Threlkeld. A section of the embankment was washed away where the River Greta was particularly constricted and fast flowing. A project to clear, repair and reinstate the foot and cycle path is expected to start this Autumn under the guidance of the Lake District National Park Authority. CKP has proposed that a new embankment be built on the north side of the gorge. The extra width would reduce the power of the floodwater, making the route more resilient to any future storms.

## **Lakes Line Rail User Group**

Lakes Line is the RUG for Oxenholme on the West Coast Main Line and the branch line to Windermere. The line is suffering the knock-on effect of Porterbrook transferring five Class 170 units to Chiltern Railways. Transpennine Express (TPE) chose to move most of its 100mph Class 185 units to trans-Pennine routes, leaving the Windermere branch with Class 150, 153 and 156 units, which are limited to 75mph - and because these are incompatible with high-speed trains on the WCML, the branch has lost most of its direct trains to Manchester Airport. The only saving grace is that the 15x sets have 60 more seats than the 185s, but less luggage space, and narrow doors at the ends of each carriage. This is leading to severe congestion at Windermere, and also at Oxenholme, where some passengers are missing their connection as a result.

The Group regrets the withdrawal of the 'Scholars Ticket' that allowed pupils over 16 who attend schools in Kendal to travel at the child fare. Northern say that they cannot give the Lake District preferential treatment, and cannot afford to introduce the fare throughout their franchise area.

## **Lancaster and Skipton Rail User Group**

LASRUG is one of three within the Leeds-Lancaster-Morecombe Community Rail Partnership (LLMCRP), which markets the route as The Bentham Line. In 2012, it was designated a Community Rail Service, which allows the CRP to engage with the train operator, and to contribute to county and local transport development plans. As a result, the service on the line will greatly improve from December 2017.

Northern have introduced Off-Peak Day Return Tickets, priced 15% below the Anytime fare, and amenable to a further one-third reduction with a railcard. And until 20 May 2017, the cost of a Dales Railcard, which is available to any local resident aged 16 and over, is halved from £13.00 to £6.50.

## **Support the Oldham Rochdale Manchester Lines (STORM)**

Northern Rail is concerned that an upcoming Panorama programme may set out to show the industry in a poor light. For Northern, it could focus on overcrowding (Bolton and Altrincham), quality of rolling stock (Pacers), and how it will struggle until the franchise improvements are delivered. Whilst these topic areas are pertinent to the current business, the format may fail to articulate the significant improvements that the £1billion investment will bring. However, even massive investment will not address complaints about fares, lack of seating and ticket vending machines.

Investment in new trains is all very well, but Northern will still not be able to provide the seating that its passengers require. Whilst well refurbished stock scores as highly as new stock with the commuters and leisure travellers, Northern's much trumpeted refurbishment of its existing fleet is likely to feature hard seats, spaced with a view to capacity rather than legroom.

### **North Cheshire Rail Users' Group**

The Halton Curve project is on target for a direct service between Liverpool and Chester to start in December 2018, with stops at Helsby and Frodsham, and cutting out the change at Warrington. The access to main line services from Runcorn will also be a great advantage. Work to increase capacity at Liverpool Lime Street will add another platform, and improve the layout to improve flexibility, maximise train access to the station, and cater for longer trains.

The main buildings at Helsby and Frodsham stations have been refurbished as befits their grade 2 status, and work on the island platform at Helsby should start soon. Railway Heritage Trust is contributing to this project and would like to see the small buildings put into community use. To maintain the present standard of its stations, more volunteers are needed.

NCRUG will work in partnership with the proposed North Cheshire Community Partnership, which is supported by Cheshire West & Chester Council. There has also been a meeting of all the User Groups/Associations whose areas impinge upon Merseyside and Deeside, to present a united front to the Liverpool City Region transport authorities. Other Groups represented were the Mid Cheshire, Shrewsbury, Chester, and Wrexham Bidston RUAs, Wirral TUA and Ormskirk Preston & Southport TA.

### **Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association**

MCRUA welcomes the devolved Northern organisation, which should permit more focussed management. A meeting in July with the Liam Sumpter, the new Regional Director, proved very useful. Topics included station groups/volunteering, customer information system displays, ticketing, train service performance and the forthcoming enhancement to 2 trains/hour. Potential rail services over the Mid Cheshire (Middlewich) rail link and the Manchester airport western link were also discussed. The revised Business Proposal for a rail link between Northwich and Sandbach is very good indeed; the direct access from Knutsford, Northwich and Middlewich to the main line at Crewe will help drive the local economy.

Both Arriva Trains Wales (ATW) and Northern have restarted their Club 55 for those aged 55 and over, but with various conditions. Of more general use are the Advance single fares for Chester line journeys to and from Manchester that Northern introduced on 4 September. They can be booked until 2359 on the day before travel, but are valid only for the journey and the train stated on the ticket.

### **Gobowen Area Improvement Project**

GAIP is a community scheme to buy and restore the Italianate buildings at Gobowen, the station for Oswestry on the Shrewsbury-Chester line. To foster interest in the project and promote a prospectus, there is a drop-in event in the station waiting room from 0800 to 1900 on Wednesday 19 October.

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

A recent report by East Midlands Trains (link below under RF EAST MIDLANDS) recognizes the overcrowding on Grimsby-Lincoln services, and on other local routes. New carriages are needed as 'a key priority'. Meanwhile, the Transpennine Express franchise will bring the following benefits to the Barton Line:

- New heating units at Cleethorpes station that use 32% less electricity
- 1000m<sup>2</sup> of solar panels at Cleethorpes and Grimsby Town
- Platform extensions at Habrough to accommodate at least 6x23m vehicles
- Completion of a Route Strategy Study between Sheffield and Cleethorpes
- Refurbishment of redundant spaces at Grimsby Town station.
- New help points at every station, and additional ones on every platform and in the car park at Grimsby Town
- Passenger awareness monitors at Cleethorpes station, to provide a real-time view of CCTV.

### **East Suffolk Travellers' Association**

ESTA is looking forward to the Stadler hybrid trains that from 2019 could provide through services to Liverpool St, and to the hourly Ipswich-Peterborough service. Gating the foot crossing at Halesworth rather than closing it will facilitate access both to the opposite platform and to bus passengers for Southwold. Lowestoft station now has a CRP office and Visitor Information Point in the former Shopmobility room. Regarding the swing bridges at Somerleyton and Reedham, ESTA would support any scheme that reduced journey times between Norwich and Lowestoft, provided that disruption was kept to a minimum.

In Trevor Garrod's view, passengers should be able to change easily from train to bus and vice versa. Outside the large conurbations, however, such integration often results from the efforts of enlightened local authorities or local campaigning by the voluntary sector, including Railfuture. For example, in 2015 the East Norfolk Transport Users' Association persuaded First Eastern Counties to divert its summer only service 3 to call at Great Yarmouth station. This summer, it has run hourly, 7 days a week, on a circular route linking the station to the seafront, shopping centre and major tourist attractions. At Lowestoft, although a Local Sustainable Transport grant improved bus interchange facilities at the station, there is no real-time information about any of its bus services. And rather than the promised bus shelter, Suffolk County Council contractors removed the bus stop sign and timetable. These have since been replaced, but there is still no shelter. In the meantime, ESTA had placed its own notice on the platform for passengers wishing to continue their journey by bus.

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

Treating every passenger as a wannabe fare-dodger is making train travel less welcoming. It should be possible to buy a virtual ticket for any journey on smart phones and tablet computers, print Advance purchase tickets at home, and have any such tickets checked rapidly. Where there is a barrier, tickets should be available from a human being before reaching it. Travelling from an unstaffed station, it should be possible to buy the full range of tickets, including railcard discounts, from a conductor or assistant on the train without incurring a penalty fare. Ticket vending machines do not cater for those with vision, language or confidence problems, and should never be the only unassisted way to pay for a journey. No-one should have to queue on arrival to pay for their journey.

PENRUG welcomes the proposal for an underpass at Werrington, north of Peterborough, to take Doncaster bound freight trains from the down Stamford line across the East Coast Main Line and via Spalding, Lincoln and Gainsborough. However, any such train unable to proceed must not delay passenger trains from Norwich to Liverpool, and from Stansted Airport to Birmingham. Another concern is that vital services may be severely disrupted on Sundays during the construction period; any closure of the Stamford lines on Sundays after 1500 should be restricted to Bank Holiday weekends and university vacations.

### **Stourbridge Line User Group**

Long-term improvements in services from south of Kidderminster, outlined in NR's West Midlands and Chiltern Route Study, would require a number of new crossovers, a bay platform at Rowley Regis and the reopening of platform 4 at Birmingham Snow Hill. The extra flexibility would deliver on the SLUG campaign for Stourbridge line trains to operate Droitwich Spa – Worcester Foregate Street – Shrub Hill – Cheltenham/Worcestershire Parkway and beyond.

The ITT for the new West Midlands franchise (link in the September edition) promises major improvements for the Stourbridge line: more trains on Monday – Saturday evenings from December 2018; six trains/hour from Birmingham on Sundays from December 2021, four of which will serve Kidderminster with two continuing to Worcester, and better connections at Worcester for onward services to Gloucester. However, the line will not see the earlier Sunday morning services that several other lines will enjoy.

### **Barking-Gospel Oak Rail User Group**

BGORUG highlights the full closure of the line until next February for platform lengthening and overhead electrification that will permit much needed four-car electric trains, as well as electric-hauled freight trains. Its latest Press Release is available on the Group's website: <http://www.barking-gospeloak.org.uk>

### **Bedford to Bletchley Rail Users' Association**

#### **Marston Vale Community Rail Partnership**

The Bedford River Festival in July was served by the first through trains from Milton Keynes for 19 years, dispelling the myth that it wasn't operationally possible. However, although that BBRUA aspiration isn't in the new West Midlands franchise, their other will be met by a Bank Holiday service from December 2018, and an hourly Sunday service from December 2021, with 14 services to and from Bletchley. The franchise also offers more funding for the MVCRP, a Service Quality Regime, and refurbishment of the existing trains, if the winning bidder chooses to retain them.

From Saturday 29 October until May 2017, the 170th Anniversary of the Marston Vale Line will be celebrated in a special exhibition at Ridgmont Station Heritage Centre, the MVCRP flagship project that returned the derelict Grade II listed Station House to community use after five years of extensive restoration. The project was runner up in both the Railway Heritage Awards and National Community Rail Awards. A special train to Kidderminster is also promised, enabling passengers to enjoy a ride on the Severn Valley Railway. The Heritage Centre opening hours are as follows:

- Tea Room: daily all year except Mondays & Bank Holidays, 0900 – 1600 (last orders 1530). Booking recommended – call 01525 287120.
- Gift Shop, Restored Booking Office & Tourist Information Point: Tuesday – Saturday, 1000 – 1600, until 30 October; 1100 – 1500 from 1 November until 17 December; January – March by prior appointment only; Tuesday – Saturday 1000 – 1600 from 1 April.

Adult and school groups are welcome all year round by prior arrangement including, with NR's permission, a tour of the Marston Vale Signalling Centre at Ridgmont Station. For further information, visit <http://www.marstonvalecommunityrail.org.uk/category/ridgmont>, call Stephen Sleight on 01234 832645, or email [stephens@bedsrcc.org.uk](mailto:stephens@bedsrcc.org.uk).

### **Windsor Lines Passengers Association**

Work has started on platform extensions at Martins Heron, Sunningdale and Wokingham, for when 10-car Class 458/5s return to the Reading services, having been replaced on the Windsor services by the new Siemens Class 707s. Feltham, Egham, Virginia Water, Ascot, and Bracknell will also get extended platforms, but Selective Door Opening will be used at Earley, Winnersh Triangle, Winnersh and Longcross. The 707's aluminium body shell is much lighter than the 450's (28 tonnes v 38 tonnes for a non-driving trailer coach). Pocket sliding doors meet the 2020 accessibility regulations. Each 5-car unit can hold 808 passengers, but has only 275 cramped seats, including four tip-up seats sideways in the wheelchair area. WLPA is unhappy with this arrangement, as it will entail longer periods of standing, when the limit is supposed to be 20 mins. The trains will enter service next spring, and all 30 units will be in use by the end of 2017.

Extending platforms 1-4 at Waterloo to take 10-car suburban trains will mean moving some points, so from 5 - 28 August 2017 platforms 1-9 will close, with platforms 20-24 used temporarily via a new ramp. With just two lines available instead of four, only 80% of mainline services and 70% of suburban services can run, although with four trains an hour from Kingston via Twickenham, the Windsor line will actually see an increase. There will be no Chessington branch trains, and Queenstown Road station will not be open. Once Platforms 1-4 are complete in Dec 2017, platforms 20-24 will gain a new concourse. All work should be complete by December 2018 for the start of a new timetable, with another due in 2020.

## Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group

The Group has passed on early notice from GWR of its planned works over Christmas. The key message is that London Paddington will close to all rail services from Saturday 24 December to Thursday 29 December. Services will start and finish at Ealing Broadway, for a connection to the underground, or scheduled buses into London. No trains will call at Acton Main Line or Hanwell from 24 December to 1 January, or the Greenford branch from 24 December to 2 January. Buses will replace trains on the Marlow line from 24 December to 2 January, and will also serve Burnham and Taplow. Full details, with information on specific lines, are on its website: <https://www.gwr.com/travel-updates/christmas-2016>.

## Avocet Line Rail User Group

With 1.75 million journeys in 2015, the Avocet line from Exeter to Exmouth suffers from over-crowding all the time, although it will see more carriages under the new GWR franchise. A half-hourly Sunday service started in May. One unsettling development has been the blitz on passengers at Exmouth, who may not have had an opportunity to buy a ticket. Guards often can't patrol their train, so more TVMs are required. Polsloe Bridge and St James' Park stations benefited from the Customer and Communities Improvement Fund. This year's bid is for solar powered illuminated notice boards, which are manufactured locally.

Pupils and teachers from three local primary schools recently enjoyed a free trip on the Avocet line to visit the Exmouth Nature Reserve. The children are encouraged to discover how creatures adapt to the ever-changing conditions in the Exe Estuary. They returned muddier and wetter, but glowing with excitement.

## RAILFUTURE



## Rail User Group Awards 2016 - the entrants

The fifth Annual Awards event has attracted 17 nominations from 13 RUGs. RF President Christian Wolmar will announce the winners at the RF annual autumn conference in Birmingham on Saturday 12 November. A group of Vice-Presidents will form the judging panel, under his ever-watchful eye. At their absolute discretion, it is also their prerogative to make a Judges' Special Award. Last year this went to Railfuture Scotland for all those who had contributed over the years, even decades, to the campaign to reopen the former Waverley line - now Borders Railway - as far as Tweedbank, considered by many to be just the first step!

RUGs reflect the broad spectrum of local rail development, campaigning on behalf of passengers for such diverse interests as being Friends of a station and improving its services and facilities, lobbying for new services, or for opening or reopening a station or line. This year, the two most sought-after awards are for Best Newsletter with six nominations, and Best Website with five. Others available are for Best Campaign, Best Campaigner, Best Social Media, and Best New Group. Seven of the RUGs submitting entries are from the North West, with two from London and the South East, and one each from the North East, Wales, Wessex, and Yorkshire - a very clear leaning towards northern England!

As well as their certificate and a photograph of them receiving it from our President, each winner will also benefit from a year's free affiliated RF membership, with access to our Fighting Fund for rail development campaigns – see <http://www.railfuture.org.uk/Fighting+Fund>

Bookings for the conference - "*Heart of the railway - how West Midlands will lead the way to the future*" - are still being taken. See <http://www.railfuture.org.uk/conferences>. For five years of RUG Awards and their various winners, see also <http://www.railfuture.org.uk/RUG+Awards>.

## PASSENGER GROUP

The Passenger Group meeting on 24 September discussed a wide range of topics, including infrastructure and operational issues. Some key areas require the support and involvement of group members and branches, but response rates have generally been poor. In particular, there was very little to the proposal to add operational awards to the annual RUG awards. These could include individual members of railway staff who go above and beyond their 'day job', and TOCs who deliver best practice. The publicity is good for both RF and the industry. Suggestions and involvement are needed now if we are to run a competition in 2017.

The level of RF responses to franchise consultations continues to improve, although it does not help when ITTs drift into infrastructure issues that are not in the power of bidders to deliver. There is real evidence that DfT and Franchise bidders are taking notice of well-evidenced and argued comments. A draft checklist/template will be distributed soon, comments from ALL welcome.

Should our campaigning focus on resilience? Simply maintaining a service is becoming more of a problem, let alone raising performance. The growing number of infrastructure issues has seen lines closed down for limited or extended periods, and there have been issues of staff availability caused by a lack of trained drivers, high levels of sickness, and strike action.

The amount of rolling stock on order is good news, but there has been little prior opportunity to influence its design. The Rolling Stock Strategy group does engage with both train builders and ROSCOs. Norman Bradbury would welcome your ideas and support.

Finally, Chris Fribbins gave notice that he would be standing down as Head of Passenger Group, and asked the Board and Policy Directorate to appoint a replacement.

Meanwhile, the October edition of Rail Professional magazine includes an article by Jerry Alderson on the subject of digital ticketing: [https://issuu.com/railpro/docs/october\\_issue\\_v1/54](https://issuu.com/railpro/docs/october_issue_v1/54).

In the personal view of Don Payne, a member of both the Passenger and Infrastructure Groups, the West Midlands and Chilterns Route Study missed an opportunity by constraining itself to existing franchises, and overlooking other ideas such as a frequent electric service serving East Birmingham, with closely-spaced stations. Little thought seems to have been given to developing alternative routes, other than re-opening the Camp Hill line and constructing chords at Bordesley. Diverting the ATW service to Birmingham International via Soapworks Junction and Perry Bar would reduce New Street traffic; local stations between Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury would still have the London Midland service. Both ATW and the New Street - Rugeley line could serve a reopened station at Soho Road, Handsworth, whilst a chord at Winson Green linking the Soho – Perry Barr and Jewellery Lines would allow through running between Wolverhampton and Snow Hill.

## EAST MIDLANDS BRANCH

May saw an enhanced Saturday service on the Castle Line (Lincoln - Nottingham - Matlock), which should further improve in December. 2017 could also herald a much better Sunday service. A recent report from East Midlands Trains sets out the high-level priorities needed to continue improving rail services in the area. It reflects input from local authorities, major businesses, universities, tourism companies and a range of other key stakeholders across the East Midlands, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire and South Yorkshire. There is a link to the report at <http://www.arailwayforgrowth.co.uk/>

## TPE TOC LIAISON

The new TPE franchise includes the large order for new trains that should all enter service by 2019: Twelve 5-carriage CAF InterCity electric trains; 13 sets of 5-car CAF Inter-City carriages hauled by Class 68s; and 19 5-carriage bi-mode trains from Hitachi Rail Europe. TPE has teamed up with North Yorkshire's Moorsbus network to offer a car-free carefree Sunday, with rail and bus connections from Thirsk station into the heart of the North York Moors National Park. To encourage rail travel, TPE will make £50k/year of new funding available to CRPs, ie £350k over the lifetime of the franchise.

## NORTHERN TOC LIAISON

Under Arriva's ownership, Northern Rail is now branded as Northern. However, the franchise is severely under-resourced in terms of rolling stock; new trains due in 2018 cannot come soon enough. Overcrowding remains a serious problem, and punctuality and reliability are unsatisfactory. Arriva has devolved its franchise management into four regions: Central, East, North East and West, based respectively in Manchester, Leeds, Newcastle and Preston. Given that many services cross regional boundaries, and embrace important commuter routes at each end, it remains to be seen where the buck stops on, for example, the Calder Valley line services from Leeds to Manchester and from Blackpool to York.

## ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIPS

At the 2016 Community Rail Awards, the Overall Winners were GWR, their Community Rail Partnerships and ALL volunteers! As Rail Minister Paul Maynard MP said: "Across the country we have seen the positive benefits that an active CRP can deliver. Neglected, low usage lines and tired rural stations are being replaced with vibrant community centres [with] independent cafes, book clubs, safety programmes for children, fabulous station art, line guides, shelters, seating, tourist information and even, on some stations, a return to traditional heritage style livery and signs. I want to ensure that...CRPs...can plan effectively for the future, which is why we are making sure that Community Rail is getting a record level of funding, and the recognition it deserves in all future rail franchises." Full details of all winners and runners up can be seen in the Winners' booklet:

<http://acorp.us3.list-manage.com/track/click?u=022070f554c80046b4597d389&id=ab08383148&e=5362e72d76>

## LONDON TRAVELWATCH

On behalf of the Mayor, London TravelWatch is currently undertaking a review of ticket office closures on the London Underground network, and has produced a survey to assess customer service in stations since their closure. If you wish to participate in the survey, please follow the link [here](#).

## TRAVELWATCH NORTHWEST

TWNW highlights the benefits of electrification: better reliability, faster acceleration and shorter journey times, especially on stopping services; more diversionary routes instead of rail replacement buses; bi-mode trains to extend services to non-electrified lines. It regrets the delay to such schemes in the northwest, including Preston to Blackpool and Oxenholme to Windermere, the latter exacerbating the impact of losing its Class 170 stock, as reported above. During the extended closure of the Farnworth Tunnel between Manchester and Bolton, there were issues with the bus timetables and signage, as well as with the service itself.

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

The 32-mile route between Swindon and Westbury, including Chippenham and Melksham stations, has been designated the TransWilts CRP (Trowbridge is also on that line, but is already a Community Rail station on the Heart of Wessex line between Bristol and Weymouth). The TransWilts CRP will help GWR to shape the passenger train service to meet local needs: boosting the local economy by improving connectivity to key destinations, increasing passenger numbers, and securing better station facilities for customers. However, infrastructure such as track and signalling will remain under the authority of NR.



Arriva Cross Country has been awarded a new contract to operate the franchise until October 2019, with a new timetable starting in December 2017. The new deal will deliver:

- 39,000 more seats in the peak on the Edinburgh - Plymouth route; more services calling at Morpeth
- a cut of about 10 minutes in the journey time between Birmingham and Manchester
- challenging targets on punctuality and service reliability
- £20 million government investment in more modern trains
- free Wi-Fi by April 2018, with 4G for faster download speeds
- customer services open 24/7, and a new mobile app to buy tickets and check on live running
- the £10 'change of travel' fee for advance tickets waived from January 2017
- £340k/year of funding for [community rail partnerships](#) across the Cross Country network.

RF hopes that the transformation will address the persistent late running between Wolverhampton and Birmingham, where Cross Country trains compete for track access with local stopping services.

DfT has announced an extension to the Delay Repay compensation scheme. Passengers will be able to claim 25% of the cost of the single fare for delays between 15 and 29 minutes. The existing compensation thresholds will continue to apply:

- 50% of the single fare for delays of 30 to 59 minutes
- 100% of the single fare for delays of 60 minutes or more
- 100% of the return fare for delays of 2 hours or more

The introduction of the Consumer Rights Act on 1 October 2016 has also strengthened the right of passengers to claim compensation for poor service. 'Delay Repay 15' will be introduced within months on Govia Thameslink Railway services, including Southern, and then rolled out across the network starting with the new South Western, West Midlands and South Eastern franchises.

The DfT has published the data for 2015-16 to show the rail subsidy per passenger mile paid to franchised train operators. The Network Grant component was allocated according to the fixed track access charges paid by each operator. The total subsidy was 5.7 pence, up from 5.6 pence in 2014-15. Northern received the highest subsidy of 35.3 pence: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rail-subsidy-per-passenger-mile>

STOP PRESS! The House of Commons Transport Committee has just published HC64, "The future of rail: Improving the rail passenger experience". Its main points are as follows:

- The level of service on the TSGN franchise has been woeful, resulting from a combination of factors: its structure, inadequate planning, the handover process, infrastructure and rolling stock failures, mismanagement and poor industrial relations. DfT should consider how passengers could be appropriately compensated.
- Headline measures of passenger satisfaction and operator performance do not accurately reflect the real experience of passengers, particularly commuters. The National Rail Passenger Survey should be conducted quarterly; the Public Performance Measure produces perverse incentives; it should be replaced with an updated "right time" measure based on punctuality at every stop.
- The DfT must incentivise operators to tackle overcrowding.
- The DfT and ORR must work together to resolve issues with the rail ticketing system, which is complex, opaque and unfair. Changes to consumer protection in the rail sector may be required.
- The provision of real-time information via the Internet needs improvement. The rail sector urgently needs a clear plan for investment in Wi-Fi technology.

Chris Page <[chris.page@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:chris.page@railfuture.org.uk)> would welcome any comments, which could form part of a website article or a press release.

***...and finally***

Passengers were ordered off a Thameslink service from St Albans to Wimbledon, when station staff at Blackfriars spotted "sexually offensive" graffiti on the side of a carriage. A spokesman for the company said the train was terminated "so the words would not cause further offence". However, passengers begged to differ. As one put it: "Ridiculous! We've had the wrong kind of leaves on the line; now it seems we have the wrong kind of graffiti!"

## EVENTS (See also the [Events listing on the Railfuture website](#))

Blob colour indicates the various types of event:

- National & regional rail events.
- Railfuture events (rail user group representatives are cordially invited).
- Local Group events.

### October

- 15 Saturday. East Suffolk Travellers' Association, St Johns Church Hall, St Johns St, **Woodbridge**, 1400.
- 17 Monday. Avocet Line RUG AGM, The Malthouse, Globe Hotel, **Topsham**, EX3 0HR, 1900 for 1930.  
(Also 12 Dec (Christmas Social), 16 Jan, 17 Apr)
- 19 Wednesday. North Cheshire RUG AGM, Frodsham Community Centre, Fluin Lane, **Frodsham**. 1900.
- 26 Wednesday. Levenmouth Rail Campaign Action meeting, Fife Renewables Innovation Centre, Methil Docks, 1830
- 29 Saturday. Railfuture Branches and Groups Day, Quaker Meeting House, 40 Bull Street, **Birmingham**, 1000.
- 29 Saturday. West Sussex Rail Users, Association AGM. Capitol Theatre, North Road, **Horsham**, RH12 1RG, 1000.

### November

- 1 Tuesday. Shrewsbury and Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association, **Newtown**. (Also 10 December, **Aberystwyth**.)
- 2 Wednesday. Lakes Line AGM, South Lakes Foyer, Yard 95, Stricklandgate, **Kendal**, LA9 4RA, 1915.
- 3 Thursday. Capital Rail Action Group, Quaker Meeting House, 7 Victoria Terrace, **Edinburgh**, EH1 2JL, 1930.  
(Also 24 November, a special meeting with Christian Wolmar and Nigel Harris).
- 7 Monday. Ribble Valley Rail, New Inn, **Clitheroe**, 1930. (Also 5 Dec).
- 8 Tuesday. Stourbridge Line User Group, Severn Valley Railway station, **Kidderminster**, 1930.
- 12 Saturday. Rail User Conference, Quaker Meeting House, 40 Bull Street, **Birmingham**, B4 6AF, 1000 for 1045.  
<http://www.railfuture.org.uk/conferences/>
- 12 Saturday. Copeland RUG, **Seascale**, 1345 (Also 3 December).
- 16 Wednesday. Thames Valley Branch, Jericho Community Centre, 33a Canal Street, **Oxford**, OX2 6BQ, 1830.
- 16 Wednesday. Levenmouth Rail Campaign Public Talk, Fife Renewables Innovation Centre, **Methil Docks**, 1830.
- 16 Wednesday. Friends of the Barton line, No 1 Inn, Sloop, **Barton**, 2000).
- 19 Saturday. Huddersfield Penistone Sheffield RUA, Methodist Church Hall, Ben Bank Road, **Silkstone Common**, 1100.
- 19 Saturday. Severnside Branch, Pulteney Room, Manvers Street Baptist Church, **Bath**, BA1 1JW, 1400.
- 19 Saturday. North West Branch, (Venue TBC).
- 29 Tuesday. Campaign for Better Transport, Grove Inn, next to Bridgewater Place Tower, **Leeds**, 1930.
- 30 Wednesday. Hadley Wood RUG, Small Hall of the **Hadley Wood** Association Centre, EN4 0EL, 1900.

### Further Ahead

- 3 December. East Anglia Branch meeting, Friends Meeting House, **Cambridge**, CB5 8BA
- 3 December. Copeland RUG, **Seascale**, 1345.
- 10 December. Passenger Group Meeting, **London**, 1300.
- 24 January 2017. Railfuture North East, with Christian Wolmar and Nigel Harris, **Newcastle**.
- 18 February 2017. East Suffolk Travellers' Association, Beccles station, 1400.
- 25 February. East Anglia Branch AGM, **Bury St Edmunds**

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