

## Branch Bulletin – November 2016

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**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 and @RailfutureNEast

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Welcome to the November (2016) edition of our Branch Bulletin – the first on a new format. Since the last bulletin (in May) there have been lots of happenings in the railway world.

In this edition we will reflect on items of both national and NE news. We will also tell you what Railfuture has been up to.

As always, the bulletin editor, Tony Walker, would welcome any comments about content or format (or both). Happy reading!

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**railfuture** **Joint meeting with SLUG and Coastliners at St Mary's Centre, Middlesbrough: 7 June.** Six people from our branch joined members of Saltburn Line Users' Group (SLUG) and Coastliners at St Mary's Centre, Middlesbrough, on 7 June to listen to Derek Gittins, Head of Heavy Rail at NEXUS, describe the newly established NE Rail Management Unit (NERMU) based at Leeds.

Derek outlined the various roles of Transport for the North (TfN) and of Rail North and explained how they interface with NERMU in which fourteen Local Authorities have agreed to work together.

The new set-up is part of the Government's devolution policy. The (long term) hope is that these various new bodies can between them deliver train services to the North East that are better tailored to the area's needs than the present ones which are mainly directed from DfT in London.



**Branch Committee Meeting 14 June. Durham.** Eight members attended. Plans for forthcoming programme were discussed.

Next branch meeting to be on 7 July (see later). Chairman Trevor Watson had represented the Branch at the *Railfuture* national conference at Milton Keynes in May: keynote speakers had majored on the East-West rail link which would serve the Milton Keynes area. We noted that:

- ORR approval had been granted for First Group to start an open-access Edinburgh-London service from 2021. Virgin EC are known to be upset by this decision.
- Trans-Pennine Express (TPE) had placed order for 75 loco hauled carriages to be built in Spain. Will be hauled by DRS class 68 locos and will initially be used on Newcastle – Liverpool and Manchester Airport services. On completion of cross-Pennine electrification will be transferred to Middlesbrough services.
- Durham County Council investigating possibility of establishing a freight interchange depot at Forrest Gate near Newton Aycliffe.



**Branch Meeting: Brunswick Methodist Church, 7 July. “The new Northern franchise”.** Speaker: Peter Myers, Arriva Rail North.

Eighteen members attended. In a fast moving, fact-filled input, Peter Myers employed a ‘past’, ‘present’ and ‘future’ approach with his audience.

In the **‘past’** the DfT had framed the franchise on a no-growth basis. In fact when it ended in March 2016 passenger carryings had increased by 55%, a very high customer satisfaction level had been achieved and reliability vastly improved compared with the situation at the beginning of the franchise.

At **‘present’** Arriva Rail North employs 5200 people and this number is growing. Currently recruiting. From 1 April last the passenger, and the passenger ‘experience’ became the absolute priority for Arriva. Customer experience centre had recently opened at Sheffield with the number of contacts to date described as ‘massive’. Previous franchise controlled from Whitehall, new one controlled by Rail North in Leeds.

In the **‘future’** we would see a fleet transformation with more attractive services backed by £1b worth of investment. January 2020 is the “crunch” date. By then:

- all existing rolling stock has to be refurbished
- 141 new electric carriages and 140 new diesel ones have to be in service

- two thousand more trains a week must be running including the new styled “Northern Connect” services
- staff to be provided at 54 additional stations and
- LED lighting should have been installed at all Arriva controlled stations.

The subsidy from DfT will progressively reduce through the life of the franchise which means Arriva have to increase their passenger carryings significantly henceforward.

Peter explained that Arriva invented the new “Connect” services – there was no requirement in the original Invitation to Tender (ITT) for them. One such service is to operate between Carlisle and Middlesbrough via Newcastle. Whereas existing services go via the Durham Coast route (through Sunderland) there is an intention (or hope?) that the Connect trains will travel on the main line via Durham to Ferryhill, and thereafter traverse the Stillington (currently freight only) line to Stockton and Teesside. But in answer to questions Peter couldn’t be sure that the Stillington option would materialise – this was down to Network Rail. If not he was equally uncertain if the trains would go via Darlington or travel via the existing Coast route. (Evident a lot more planning is required if the desired full “Connect” service via Stillington is to actually happen – *Ed*).

Peter made the point that it was vital that Network Rail deliver timely completion of the Ordsall Curve (in Manchester) and the electrification to Bolton, Preston and Blackpool: Arriva putting great store on the NW electrification programme – encouraged by the Liverpool-Manchester wiring which has led to an 11% rise in carryings to date:

Having to deal with both London NE section of Network Rail AND London NW section causes complications. Noted that Arriva has created four separate business/management regions across the North of England: these are East, North East, Greater Manchester and West which includes Merseyside and Cumbria. The NE business director is Mike Paterson.

Unusually Peter had some station closures in mind. His list included Teesside Airport and Manors heavy rail.

Brexit might have an impact because the lower value of the pound could increase the cost of the new trains being built by CAF of Spain. There were some specific “goodies” promised for the NE including: the Carlisle-Middlesbrough “Connect” service, earlier and later trains, Pacer withdrawal and greater investment.

This was an energetic and informative presentation painting an optimistic picture for the future. But as *Railfuture* members will know of old, the talking is the easy bit: it is the actual implementation of promises (or otherwise) upon which passengers will, ultimately, base their assessment of Arriva Rail North.



**Branch Committee Meeting: 24 August.** Eight members attended to discuss the production of the November branch bulletin and guidelines for our press officer re comment on purely local

matters as opposed to ones with ‘national’ implications. The Committee noted that the next branch meeting would take the form of a discussion with Messrs Harris and Wolmar.

**Note:** this was scheduled for 11 October, but subsequently rearranged for 24 January 2017, venue Castle Gate, Newcastle. Information was given about plans for Metro expansion and the GRIP 3 that had been published for restoration of passenger services on Blyth and Tyne line – with detailed costing to follow. The committee noted the new Northern Community Rail Executive Group (ComREG), established by Arriva to help the company meet its commitments to local CR groups, included Malcolm Chainey as the NE rep.



**Meeting between Branch Committee and Tim Burleigh of Eversholt Rail: 1 September at Antioch House, Durham**

Tim had requested this session with us. Matters covered:

- Tyne & Wear Metro: NEXUS drawing up plans for replacement of the entire fleet post 2020. Tim wondered how the finance was going to be raised?
- The current extensive stock refurbishment being undertaken by Eversholt.
- Growing concern in the industry about delays to the Great Western electrification project: these are impacting on the planned rolling stock cascade programme – Tim gave some examples.
- He advised that work on the Arriva Rail North order for 281 vehicles from CAF Spain seemed to be progressing well.
- He thought Arriva were delivering satisfactorily on franchise commitments. The company has established four area management centres and has taken over some TPE services. Seems to be an emphasis on station investment and a desire to promote more station adoptions. Tim had heard Arriva wanted to set up an ‘innovation board’, but he had no details at this stage.
- The need for all the TOC’s to concentrate on the concept of the total journey experience for the passenger: essential they get this right!

- TPE: have ordered 60 new vehicles from CAF – believed to be 12x5 car 125mph inter-city emu's: 19 bi-mode units from Hitachi: plus the 75 loco hauled vehicles referred to earlier. Tim estimated that 29 of the present fifty-one 185 units would stay with TPE. Rail North could bid for the remaining 22 units and allocate them to Arriva but there will be competing bids from other operators.
- On the back of the new East Anglia franchise Eversholt will have to find new homes for the entire Anglian fleet. Problem for ROSCO's generally is that there are a lot of new trains coming along – what to do with existing fleets? Refurbish? Reallocate? Scrap? Or sell abroad?

We expressed doubt about the effectiveness of the so-called alliances with Network Rail and voiced anxieties about the concept of bi-mode trains – they were heavy, expensive to maintain and costly to operate. We agreed with Tim that a primary task for DfT was to ensure that Network Rail got itself into better shape.



**Branch Committee Meeting: 18 October at Durham.** Six

attended. The Committee noted that the Chair and Secretary had made presentation about *Railfuture* to Aln Valley Rail Group on 15 September and that the Chair had attended a Virgin EC 'summit' in York on 11 October. Details from Trevor on request [[trevor.watson3510@hotmail.com](mailto:trevor.watson3510@hotmail.com)]. After a discussion about the Branch programme for 2017 it was agreed that TransPennine Express and Tim Burleigh (of Eversholt) should be invited to come and make presentations.

Yorkshire Branch had produced paper entitled "Future Rail in the North", a sort of template of suggestions for railway development and had asked our Branch to comment and contribute.

The National Branches and Groups meeting was to be held in Birmingham on 29 October. Damian Bell and Tony Walker to represent NE Branch. Meeting will consider a new code of conduct for members as well as attempt to draw up outline (national) policy on some current key issues. The RailFuture Autumn Conference (2016) was to be in Birmingham on 12 November. Branch Chair hopes to attend.

Formal Consultation being undertaken by Durham County Council concerning proposed new station at Horden on the Durham Coast Line. Known that some members of Coastliners as well as Railfuture had responded. Noted that our sister organisation

NECTAR is recommending construction of a new station at Ferryhill on ECML. The MP for Sedgefield is supportive.

The National conference programme for 2017 was to be (i) AGM on 20 May in Peterborough (ii) Summer Conference on 17 June in Leeds and (iii) Autumn Conference on 4 November in Leicester.

**railfuture** **Branches and Groups Meeting, 29 October at Birmingham.** Our Branch reps were Damian Bell and Tony Walker. National Chairman Chris page hosted the event attended by some 45 reps from Railfuture Branches and the three main *Railfuture* national policy groups (passenger, freight and infrastructure and network). Delegates had received briefing papers in advance so were able to get down to work quickly on the day.

They first considered a members' code of conduct paper, which also included a detailed resolution of disputes section. There were helpful suggestions from delegates and these will be considered before final drafting. Likewise we speedily reviewed a proposed new recruitment leaflet and delegate inputs will be factored into the finished version.

But the greater part of this all-day gathering was devoted to group (focussed) discussions around 14 issues. Conference was divided into seven groups of six people: each group was pre-assigned two topics, one in the morning, one in the afternoon. In respect of each topic delegates were asked: "What is our (*Railfuture*) position on the issue?" and "how do we promote it?" Designated group "scribes" kept flipchart notes of their own group's deliberations and at the end of the discussion periods these notes were presented to the whole meeting in plenary session. Furthermore, in the days following, the scribes were required to write up their group's conclusions about each issue in the form of a policy statement. They were asked to circulate these statements to their fellow group colleagues and make adjustments as necessary. Intended that eventually the various (14) statements will be adopted as formal Railfuture policy and posted on the national web site.

The 14 issues examined included ticketing and fares, HS2, network resilience, freight v passenger, the Northern Powerhouse, disability and electrification. There were also three "in house" Railfuture related issues – about communication within Railfuture, about our relationships with other organisations with transport concerns and about our engagement with railway service providers. Details of the full fourteen topics can be found on the website.

Initial feedback indicates that the event was well received by delegates. Speaking personally (Ed) I thought it was well planned and executed and I learnt much from it. I would recommend that the *Railfuture* Board consider mounting a similar event twelve months hence.



**East Coast performance challenge:** Bob Poynter, a retired rail operations manager, has raised concerns about future overcrowding on the East Coast Main Line (ECML). Writing in the July (2016) edition of *Modern Railways* Poynter contends that the ECML has seen little real development since 1991 – in fact journey times are no better than they were then. The route is vulnerable to unplanned closures (we all know about overhead line issues!) and experiences serious congestion such as at Welwyn and Doncaster. Overall, he argues, it has fared badly in investment terms as compared with the West Coast Main Line in spite of its better passenger loading factors.

But his alarm bells ring loudest when it comes to 2018. For it is then that Thameslink services, eight every hour, will join the ECML having travelled long distances, including from Brighton. It is inconceivable, he says, that these will not have an impact on the reliability of inter-city trains to the North from Kings Cross. And the impact on the timekeeping of southbound long distance trains might be even more marked. Poynter doubts whether the discipline required to actually deliver the new Thameslink timetable and mesh it satisfactorily with ECML running south of Peterborough will materialise.

And that’s not all! From 2021 the five daily new open-access services from Edinburgh to Kings Cross (which Poynter describes as ‘Ryanair-style’) will have to be fitted into ECML slots putting even more pressure on to the southern end.

Poynter believes that the line badly needs a “controlling mind” to identify the most effective way of developing it and relieving pinch points. Clearing more of the route for 125mph running and providing additional electrified diversionary routes would help for a start. Interestingly Bob Poynter doesn’t mention possible (good) effects that the coming of HS2 might bring to the ECML.



**Revenue growth at Virgin East Coast below forecast.** In its latest set of results Stagecoach has reported revenue growth at Virgin Trains East Coast as 5.2% compared with the 8-9% expected. *(A reminder that the finances of long distance train travel is linked to the state of the national economy – Ed).*



**Cross-Country franchise extension.** DfT have awarded a new direct contract to Cross Country which will see their franchise extended from December 2017 to October 2019. Bombardier are to retain the maintenance contract based on Burton depot.



**Cross-Country – additional station calls.** We learn that from December 2017 the number of Cross Country trains calling at Morpeth will rise from three to five per day. News that will be welcome, in particular, to SENRUG who have campaigned to improve services from Morpeth



**Ups and downs for Metro.** In June Nexus announced a 2 million increase in the number of passengers carried on Metro in period April 2015 to March 2016, which represented a 5.7% rise over 2014-15. Total came in at just over 40 million. Salutary to recall that in its “heyday”, 1985-6 for example and before bus deregulation and loss of integration, Metro carryings reached 59 million! The revenue take for 2015/16 was £50.2 million, compared with £47.9 million the year before. Nexus suggested the rise in patronage last year was on the back of the new ‘pay as you go’ POP cards as well as the Rugby World Cup games which resulted in over 300,000 additional travellers in just two weeks.

But the news was tempered on 3 November when the *Newcastle Journal* announced that a Metro fare rise would kick in on 2 January 2017. Day Savers would rise by up to 20p and annual savers would go up by £50 to £625. Metro boss Tobyn Hughes said the rise was necessary in order to protect revenue, which had been hit by a drop in patronage in the first part of 2016-17. He anticipated the system would only carry 37.9 million people during the year, which would be 6% below the 2015-16 figures. Tobyn indicated that some new marketing measures were being introduced to counter the drop in passenger numbers. In particular he was anxious to attract more leisure travellers.

The fare news wasn’t all bad however: the price of weekly fares and all single fares will be frozen while the annual Zone 1 passes will actually be reduced by £10. Fares for children under 16 are unchanged whilst discounts offered to students and 16-18 year olds will remain in place.



**METRO FUTURES**

On 20 July the *Journal* published details of a £1 billion expansion plan for Metro including new trains

and some new routes. Toby Hughes had extensively trailed the Plan, entitled ‘Metro Futures’, when he addressed our Branch AGM last March. What is of special interest to transport watchers in the NE is that this latest Metro plan envisages upgrades to and some integration with local heavy rail routes as well. Thus we could have a Morpeth to Sunderland through service, or one from the Airport to Hartlepool.

This sort of visionary rail network for the NE pre-supposes electrification of the Durham Coast route, reconstruction of the Leamside line and the use of dual voltage Metro trains.

It goes without saying that *Railfuture North East* welcomes these far sighted proposals which we believe, if implemented, would give a significant boost to the area’s economy. Let us hope, therefore.....well, let us just hope!

The business E-journal, *Insider News* carried an item on 6 October reporting a statement issued by the ‘North East Rail Management Board’. Derek Gittins referred to this Board (then a unit) in his address to the joint SLUG/Coastliners/*Railfuture* meeting on 7 June. (*I am really quite confused by the numerous transport boards that have sprung up in the North over the past couple of years. Am I alone in my confusion? Ed.*)

Anyway, this NERM Board comprising reps from Local Authorities, says it will be ‘holding Arriva and TPE to account’ for the delivery of what both companies have promised in their new franchise commitments’. (*Good for them! But don’t hold your breath Ed.*) The Arriva ‘commitments’ comprise: the withdrawal of Pacers: the proposed Carlisle – Middlesbrough ‘connect’ service: increase of the Darlington to Bishop Auckland service to hourly: and some improvements at stations. (*This information already well known to Railfuture of course –Ed.*)



**New station for Cramlington?** The *Journal* of 27 September reported that Northumberland County Council together with ‘other stakeholders’ is investigating the feasibility of moving the existing Cramlington station to a site 300 metres south adjacent to the Western entrance to the Westmorland Retail Park. Footfall at Cramlington in 2014/15 was 89,000 compared with 316,000 at nearby Morpeth, even though Cramlington has a larger population. However, Morpeth is served by some Virgin and Cross Country services as well as Northern whereas Cramlington has only a handful of daily Northern trains calling.

County Councillor Alan Hepple believes a new station on a fresh site would greatly improve accessibility to local and regional centres. He hopes it would be possible to persuade Virgin and Cross Country to include some Cramlington stops in their timetables.

**And a new station –at Horden?** The long running planning process for opening a new station on the Durham Coast route at Horden to serve Peterlee (*pop. 29,000*) shows little sign of reaching a conclusion. Durham County Council set up an on-line public consultation, now closed, in September designed to test out the level of support for the plan and also to help in establishing some sort of guidance about likely usage. Members of Coastliners RUG, as well as *Railfuture North East*, were encouraged to respond to the consultation.

As recently as last year the *Hartlepool Mail* was predicting Spring 2017 for the opening at Horden. Meantime seems that the County Council has run into difficulty with Network Rail about payments for certain safety features and about the viability of the original chosen site. (*Perhaps our colleagues at Coastliners could persuade DCC and Network Rail to get things moving more speedily? Ed.*)



**TransPennine Express Caterers:** *Insider News* reports (26 September) that TransPennine Express Trains have switched their catering contract from Skytrac (Rail) Solutions to Rail Gourmet UK. The changeover, effective from 18 September, came about after Skytrac failed to win renewal of its contract with TPE and was about to be placed in receivership. With the assistance of TPE, Rail Gourmet, the successful bidder for the new contract, took Skytrac over along with 157 staff whose jobs were all saved.



The Highlands & Islands Transport Partnership is exploring the potential for an internal Scottish Sleeper service from Edinburgh to Thurso on the Far North Line. The route would be via Aberdeen and Inverness. Serco, operator of the Caledonian Sleeper, is involved in the study process. Mk 3 sleepers would be used.

The Welsh Government has confirmed that bidders for the next Welsh and Borders franchise will have to demonstrate how they will manage both the infrastructure (track and signals) as well as the trains.

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling has given the green light for a Manchester Metro-Link extension to the Trafford Centre out-of-town shopping mall.

DfT is reporting a drop in bus trips for 2015/16 in England of 119m as compared with the previous year. The total came in at 4.530 billion. Every area apart from the South West showed a drop. In the North East trips totalled 180.1 million as against 184.9 in 2014/15.

*Private Eye* (edition 1415 at page 16) reports that figures from the Office of Road and Rail (ORR) show that total government funding for the railways was 9% lower in 2014-15 than in 2013-14. Since 2010-11 government rail funding is shown to have dropped 24%.



**HS2 News.** Both the *Journal* and the *Northern Echo* went into overdrive on 31 October when they published front-page stories around a new report from HS2 Limited.

Entitled “The Changing Britain: HS2 Taking Root”, the report, prepared in collaboration with a number of Local Authorities, indicated the sort of economic advantages for the North that would result from HS2.

Nick Forbes, leader of Newcastle City Council, says he believes HS2 will help make Newcastle Central Station an “international gateway” and give a huge boost to the area’s economy.

The *Journal* take on the report seemed to imply that it was certain that a dedicated HS2 line would actually reach Newcastle – eventually. The *Echo* was more circumspect and talked of HS2 proper only getting as far as Leeds albeit that there would be improvements to the ECML north of York. Nevertheless, the paper was pretty euphoric about the economic spin-offs that HS2 would foster at Darlington, in the Tees Valley (3000 new jobs) and at York (7000 high value jobs plus supporting infrastructure).

The report is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/changing-britain-hs2-taking-root>



“If you want to work in the railway industry, you have a job for life”: so said Sir Peter Hendy, Chairman of Network Rail when addressing over 200 leading rail professionals at this year’s Annual Rail Lecture in London organised by the Chartered

Institute of Logistics and Transport (CILT).

He was actually aiming this particular bit of his speech at young people trying to impress on them just what a vast range of job opportunities existed in the rail industry. He told his audience that “we are a great industry to work in” and that this should be communicated with vigour to the next generation. Hendy, like other rail insiders, is acutely aware of the developing skills shortage across many of the disciplines essential for rail’s future, hence his wish to catch the attention of the young.

This same message was echoed at *Railfuture’s* recent Branch’s and Groups Day in Birmingham on 29 October when we flagged up the need for *Railfuture* people to try and make contact with schools, colleges and universities as part of its ‘mission’ to encourage students to explore the rail jobs market. Who knows, and perhaps even to explore what *Railfuture* has to offer?

**And finally.....**



Remember that Nigel Harris, Editor of *Rail* magazine and Christian Wolmar, the country’s premier railway journalist, are guest speakers at our North East Branch Meeting on Tuesday 24

January. Venue is Castle Gate, Newcastle. We begin at 7pm. Full details to follow. PLEASE do your best to attend! Nigel and Christian have designed the event to encourage lots of questions from their audience.

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Our websites: [www.railfuture.org.uk](http://www.railfuture.org.uk), [www.railfuturescotland.org.uk](http://www.railfuturescotland.org.uk), [www.railfuturewales.org.uk](http://www.railfuturewales.org.uk), and [www.railwatch.org.uk](http://www.railwatch.org.uk). Follow us on Twitter: @Railfuture@Railwatch

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