

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 and @RailfutureNEast

Welcome to the **May 2017** edition of the Branch Bulletin. The last one was published in November (2016). In this world of 24/7 news, blogging and social media, information on any subject, including railways, piles up quickly. So, all we can try to do is lay out those snippets of news from the last six months which your Editor (Tony Walker) thinks may be of interest to railway “watchers” in the NE.

Apologies for any significant omissions and apologies too that some of our reporting has to be extremely concise. Enjoy your read – remember – the Editor always welcomes feedback!

The logo for Railfuture, featuring the word "railfuture" in a bold, sans-serif font. "rail" is in black and "future" is in green.

NE Branch News

***Railwatch* correspondent retires:** Long standing member Peter Kenyon stood down as the NE correspondent for the national quarterly publication *Railwatch* at the end of December. He cannot recall for exactly how long he has fulfilled the role, though he knows that when he first

joined *Railfuture* it was still the Railway Development Society!

An appreciation of Peter’s work with *Railfuture*, together with a potted personal history, not to mention a splendid photo of him riding the Manx Narrow Gauge Railway, appeared on page 15 of the last edition of *Railwatch* (No 151 – April 2017). Peter was presented with a book token from NE colleagues by Christian Wolmar at a Branch meeting in Newcastle on 16th February.

He is succeeded as *Railwatch* reporter by Peter Walker, himself a veteran *Railfuture* man. Peter is also Chair of Coastliners RUG and of NECTAR, the regional organisation that advocates sustainable transport in all its forms. (*Talk about multi-tasking!* – Ed). Our thanks to Peter W for stepping into Peter K’s illustrious boots!



Branch meeting 16th February – Castle Gate, Newcastle

This was the heavily trailed (and twice postponed) meeting addressed by national rail commentator (and would-be MP) Christian Wolmar and the managing editor of *Rail* magazine Nigel Harris. Both speakers engaged in much personal reminiscing: Nigel has edited *Rail* since 1995: said he had come to recognise very forcibly the inter-face between the railway industry and politics. He tries to ensure that *Rail* embraces a wide range of opinions.



For Christian, breaking into journalism had been a tremendous experience. He joined the *Independent* in 1989 and only became seriously interested in railways when he was appointed the paper’s transport correspondent in 1992. He left the *Independent* in 1997 in order to freelance. Christian enjoyed the ability to influence matters: in particular, he recalled being instrumental in persuading the government to get rid of the dreaded “bull-bars” from the front of big cars. These were patently responsible for killing and seriously injuring pedestrians. Christian has written no fewer than fourteen books and is currently working on one about Indian railways.

The speakers were asked about Network Rail (NR): both recognised that NR’s project management record was poor, though Nigel felt there was evidence of some recent improvement. The post-privatisation break between train and track hadn’t helped. NR didn’t feel as committed to passengers as much as their BR engineer predecessors, and making out-sourcing work required good skills (especially financial) which currently seemed to be lacking within NR.

Other questions from the audience covered the financial contribution of the railway to the ‘community’ (the boost to tourism provided by rail was mentioned with the Settle and Carlisle line singled out as an example): rationalisation of fares – unlikely it seems: the phasing out of Pacers: the GWR electrification debacle and its likely ripple effects across the entire railway: 24/7 news media and how the railway might best deal with it: identifying profits within the railway system and how they were dispersed: and the lack of integrated information as between the various TOC’s.

On the whole Nigel was reasonably optimistic about rail believing that the system is now better than ever before: Christian was more circumspect and could see bumps in the track both ahead and behind.



Branch AGM - 25th March at Newcastle Art Centre

The Officer elections saw all existing post-holders returned unopposed. Thus, Trevor Watson retains the office of Chair, Keith Simpson that of vice-Chair, Ian Walker, secretary, Gordon Barclay, treasurer and Damian Bell, press officer. Our Hon. President, Martin Murphy, continues in that role.

Noted that Gordon wishes to relinquish his treasurer post at the end of this year and volunteers were sought to ‘shadow’ Gordon for the rest of the year with a view to standing for election in 2018. **Update:** *Following the AGM Damian Bell expressed an interest in shadowing Gordon and offering himself for nomination as treasurer at the 2018 AGM. The Branch Committee meeting on 16th May welcomed this development and decided to appoint Dennis Fancett to fill the vacancy, as our pro-tem press officer.*

The Chair and his officer colleagues were thanked from the floor for their sterling work through the past twelve months. Trevor was singled out for representing the Branch at some key TOC stakeholder and other important meetings, for his active work within SENRUG and for generally having his ‘finger’ on the NE railway pulse. Secretary Ian Walker was praised for his, largely, unseen work in making sure the Branch’s activities flowed smoothly.

Prior to the business/elections part of the meeting the audience was treated to four 25 minute illustrated inputs from local guest speakers.



Peter Myers from Tyne Valley Community Rail Partnership (TVCRP)

TVRCP is an official body sanctioned by Government and largely paid for by the TOC, Arriva Rail North (*Northern*). Has a part-time paid worker. The Partnership aims to keep *Northern* on its toes and, importantly, engage with the local community. There is also a Tyne Valley RUG committed to campaigning for improved services and facilities which works in close association with TVCRP.

To help promote the Tyne Valley Line, the Partnership circulates information – each village has copies of the timetable on prominent display: it has also opened a new coffee shop at Hexham station – a micro-brewery is to follow: there has been building regeneration at Haltwhistle station: improvements effected at Prudhoe station and links forged with the operator of the Hadrian’s Wall bus. *Northern* have committed to introducing a half hour frequency between Hexham and Carlisle (from December) and that, it is hoped, will provide a catalyst for a significant boost in the line’s fortunes.

Peter noted that Cross Country had now agreed to advertise TVCRP at some of the major stations, including Birmingham, so to get the Partnership known nationally. He emphasised the Community Rail Partnerships were not about lines in danger of declining, but about those with a clear potential for social and economic development.



Peter Walker, Chair of Coastliners (Durham coast) RUG

Coastliners had been formed fifteen years ago in an effort to redress the paucity of services, particularly after 2030 hours, on a route linking three large conurbations – Newcastle (Tyneside), Sunderland (Wearside) and Middlesbrough (Teesside). Attenders at extra-mural evening classes at Sunderland University, for example, were unable to return home by train when classes ended simply because the last train out of Sunderland departed prior to 9pm.

To an extent this situation had been modified, but Peter emphasised that still today there was only an hourly local (*Northern*) link between Middlesbrough and Sunderland (onward to Newcastle covered by a frequent T & W Metro service). Old rolling stock, low line speeds and lack of stations continued to handicap the Middlesbrough to Sunderland leg.

And the future? The Arriva Rail North TOC was promising a new, faster hourly “Northern Connect” service to link Carlisle, Newcastle and Middlesbrough as from 2019. The “hope” (*and it is still only a “hope”! –Ed*) is that this service will use the East Coast Main Line between Newcastle and Ferryhill, and thereon divert via the Stillington, currently freight only line, to Stockton and Middlesbrough. Peter noted that this route was shorter in mileage than the existing coast line and, if properly upgraded, could offer decent top speeds with a resultant reduction in overall journey time. But the TOC is, of course, in the hands of Network Rail as to whether this hope can be brought to fruition. Very much a matter of wait and see.

If Stillington does not materialise then either the “Connect” service will have to go via Darlington or, worse still, trundle along the existing Durham Coast route. Incidentally, Coastliners are demanding that the present coast line service be maintained (and improved!) with the “connect” project providing additional capacity and new travel opportunities. Area MP’s and LA’s really need to get active to help the TOC deliver on its proposals.

Peter distributed the RUG's campaign leaflet to his audience which listed a string of very sensible service aspirations for the near future. It can be downloaded from the web site at: www.necoastliners.co.uk



Keith Simpson Chair of Saltburn Line Users' (SLUG)

SLUG had been founded in 1995 due to concerns about the quality of local train services in the Tees Basin area. Keith outlined the main developments over the years and explained how SLUG was organised.



Dennis Fancett Chair of South East Northumberland RUG (SENRUG)

Founded in 2002 SENRUG concentrates on the future and is not concerned with railway nostalgia. Dennis was adamant that this was a basic tenet for any RUG, not just SENRUG. His group aim to represent the interests of passengers, and potential passengers, in SE Northumberland. Constructive relationships with all stakeholders –including MP's, the media, TOC's, the LA, the LEP, Network Rail – viewed as absolutely essential.

Though SENRUG is best known for its robust campaign to have a passenger service restored to the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne (currently freight only) line, Dennis explained that the group had many other concerns as well such as securing more station calls at Morpeth (recent successes noted!), improved north of Morpeth stopping services (to aid tourism), better bus/train liaison, simplification of local fares and upgrades to station buildings at Morpeth and Cramlington.

The proposed extension of the hourly Liverpool to Newcastle TPE service to Edinburgh from 2019 with a call at Morpeth, plus introduction of the open access Edinburgh to London service in 2021, also calling at Morpeth, promised a much brighter outlook for the railway in Northumberland.

Dennis and his colleagues deserve praise for their unstinting work in helping secure these various changes. But the SENRUG experience echoes that of other rail campaign groups, namely that progress often has to be measured in years rather than months. Whilst Dennis's address to the meeting was mostly 'upbeat', he lamented the lack of urgency in the approach of both Network Rail and Northumberland County Council to the Ashington line project. Already three months had been lost in securing the start of the GRIP3 process. Incidentally, Network Rail are quoting £191m for delivering the Ashington passenger service. SENRUG believe the work could be done for £50m!

Thanks to all four of our AGM guests for providing stimulating and informative inputs. We wish them luck in their future endeavours.

North East Branch Committee Meetings

The Branch Committee (comprising its Officers and five other members) met on 7th December (2016), 18th January and 14 March (2017). Alison Cosgrove, vice-Chair of national *Railfuture* and Chair of *Railfuture* Scotland, joined us at the March meeting.

Besides planning for future Branch activity and considering ways of heightening our profile, topics coming under the Committee microscope included:

- infrastructure improvements (see later at page 12)
- proposed changes to Cross Country services
- the Tees Valley “Connect 2026” strategic transport plan consultation
- follow-up to the National Committee and Branches Meeting in Birmingham last October,
- Horden Station (see later at page 13)
- style of press releases
- “Future Rail in the North (a joint enterprise between NE and Yorkshire branches),
- possible hosting of the *Railfuture* national summer conference in 2019
- freight issues including threats posed by longer HGV’s
- Tyne Valley Rail Partnership open day 24th November (see later at page 11)
- Ferryhill Station – meeting with MP
- TPE loco hauled services
- meeting with Tim Burleigh of Eversholt Rail on 14th March (see below)
- and reinstatement Durham - Bishop Auckland route.

Meeting between RFNE Committee and Tim Burleigh, Stakeholder Manager Eversholt Rail, 14th March 2017 at Antioch House, Durham

This was one of our twice yearly “private” meetings with Tim Burleigh. We use these occasions to exchange information. We tell Tim about the rail scene in NE England and Tim gives us an overview of the national rail situation. Seven Committee members in attendance including new colleague Dave Shaw.

Topics covered included:

- current new stock builds - 281 new vehicles for Arriva Rail North (*Northern*) by CAF of Spain and sixty new vehicles for TPE (12x5 car units – 125mph intercity emu's) also by CAF
- what to do with spare 185's when they come off lease from TPE – should they be retained in the north or shipped south? (RFNE favours a transfer to *Northern* TOC)
- lots of new trains coming into use over next two years, likely to mean some existing useable trains may have to be scrapped early
- the good reputation being acquired by Hitachi – the company is bound to bid for construction of the HS2 trains
- bi-mode versus pure-electric traction (pure electric superior!)
- Transport for the North (TfN) may be experiencing teething problems
- challenge of poor power supplies on both the ECML and MML
- problems caused by having to operate Voyagers on the WCML
- and, sadly, a bad outcome seems likely for the Welsh Valley Lines modernisation project

Tim gives us some helpful insights into railway politics “behind the scenes” which in turn assists us in anchoring our thinking into “reality”.

Around the TOCs



Virgin have created 45 new posts at its Customer Centre in Gosforth. Loco number 91130 was named ‘*The Lord Mayor of Newcastle*’ in a ceremony at Central Station on 7th December. The event was to celebrate the 800th anniversary of the city’s Mayoralty and Freeman, and was hosted by

Jonathan Edwards CBE, the Olympic gold medal triple-jump winner and world record holder who is himself an Honorary Freeman of the City.

In November (2016) Virgin reported a 26% rise in the number of journeys taken on its trains between Newcastle and Edinburgh over the previous twelve months as compared to the same period 2014-15. This was followed by figures released on 29th December showing that over one million passengers were carried between Edinburgh and London during 2016, first time the one million mark had been passed. In 2015 number carried was 976,000. Chief Executive David Horne believed the rise in numbers mostly because more people were choosing the train instead of the plane.

Virgin have also revealed that it was developing a staff recruitment strategy to ensure that suitable ex-prisoners were afforded the opportunity to enter its job application process.

The Northern Echo of 4th December reported that, though nationally the overall average rise in train fares from 1st January was 2.3%, some Virgin East Coast rises were in the order of 5%.

Virgin achieved 91% passenger satisfaction over previous quarter: this was the best return for any long-distance franchised operator. The £40m fleet upgrade now complete. And the six-month booking horizon to include weekend as well as weekday travel.

The current fleet comprises 45 train sets – 30 electric InterCity 225 sets and fifteen HST's; a new community room has been opened at Durham station; plans for the future include three services per hour between Newcastle and London; daily return services between Middlesbrough and London and an additional Sunderland to London service from 2020.



In January **Northern** announced that Alex Hynes, its Managing Director, would be leaving later in the year to become Managing Director of the ScotRail Alliance. Alan Chaplin, Programme Director of *Northern*, was appointed as interim MD from 21 February. Meantime Alex was expected to concentrate on advising about project developments before his actual departure.

On 10 February the RMT Union advised *Northern* that they intended balloting conductor staff about the calling of a strike in protest about Driver Controlled Operations (DCO). Conductors voted in favour of a strike which duly took place over twenty-four hours on 13th March. *Northern* say they were able to operate 40% of their services between 7am and 7pm on their busiest routes albeit with the assistance of some replacement buses. Extra station calls were made and Northern tickets were accepted by other TOC's. There was a second 24-hour strike on 8th April and another called for 28th April.

Looking ahead: Besides the new train order with CAF of Spain (referred to on Page 7), it is intended that all other trains currently being used by *Northern* will undergo a full 'as new' refurbishment, with new seats, floor coverings, toilets and exterior branding, and will also feature free customer Wi-Fi. By 2020 the investment in new trains and improvements to the infrastructure will enable *Northern* to increase overall capacity by 37%. In time the modernisation programme will introduce more than 2000 extra services

across the north each week, including an additional 400 on Sundays. Engineering depots are to be upgraded and there will be a significant investment in station improvements including safety enhancement, new and renovated buildings and state of the art ticket vending machines.



Part of the new **Transpennine Express** (TPE) train order is referred to on Page 7. Other proposals are that TPE will take over all services between Manchester and Leeds with a six trains per hour frequency: that in 2018 TPE will introduce a brand new direct service of three trains per day between Liverpool and Glasgow: and from late 2019, as previously noted, the Liverpool to Newcastle (hourly) service will be extended via Morpeth to Edinburgh thus creating a direct train link between Liverpool and Edinburgh. Like *Northern*, TPE are adopting an ‘as new’ style refurbishment for its existing fleet.

TPE have decided not to introduce loco hauled trains on the Liverpool-Newcastle route after all. Instead the loco resource will be used on the Liverpool- Scarborough and Manchester Airport – Middlesbrough services. More details awaited.



Grand Central (GC) has operated passenger services on the ECML from Sunderland to London Kings Cross since December 2007; and from Bradford Interchange to King’s Cross since May 2010. In August 2014, the company was granted an extension of its operating rights until December 2026. In May 2018 GC will commence operating services on the WCML from London Euston to Blackpool for which it has been granted access rights of 10 years.

In 2016 GC was revealed as Britain’s highest-rated long-distance train operator for customer satisfaction with a figure of 96% of passengers satisfied or very satisfied (compared to the national average of 80%).

From this year GC expects to receive five Class 180’s from Great Western Railway which will allow all its existing HST’s to be withdrawn. GC will purchase four Pendolino trains for its new West Coast service.

Tyne and Wear Metro (and some politics)..



Nexus have completed work on a £3m programme to replace tracks in the ***Tyne and Wear Metro*** tunnels that run beneath the streets between Jesmond and the QEII Metro bridge. It is the first time that the rails in the underground section have been entirely replaced since the system first opened in August 1980. The journal *Rail Professional* (March 2017) reports that Nexus will be investing £110 million more up to 2021 in projects including further track renewal and a complete overhaul of overhead power lines due to start early 2017. For infrastructure renewal beyond 2021 Nexus is submitting a business case to government for a further £518.5 million to take it through until 2030. This will be in addition to the £536 million now being sought to renew the train fleet.

Evening Chronicle (5 January) reported that DB Regio, the company responsible for running Metro services, had been fined for failing to meet agreed punctuality targets. From 1st April control of Metro services was returned from DB Regio (the German Rail subsidiary) to Nexus. The contract with DB was terminated two years early because of unsatisfactory performance. Nexus will now run services at least until March 2019.

From 5th February Metro introduced some timetable changes to cater for increased demand for early morning travel.

Transport Focus (22nd February) reported (with great enthusiasm!) that Metro had conducted face-to-face research to discover what passengers really wanted from the next generation of trains. Seems big ‘thumbs up’ given to seating along the inside wall: perception of space is a key issue, so while passengers are happy with the ease of getting on and off, trains can become congested and future designs should include features that encourage passengers to move down within the carriages: other issues identified were seating layout, seat availability, cleanliness, Wi-Fi and personal security. *Transport Focus* said: “There is no better way to ensure the design meets their needs than to ask the users themselves”. However, the big question that remains is how the new fleet will be funded. Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell, speaking at Labour’s Regional Economic Conference in Newcastle on 18th March said (according to the *Journal*) that a future Labour government would fund a new fleet of Metro trains at an estimated cost of £527m.

Mr McDonnell also indicated Labour support for reinstatement of the Leamside route (est. £300m) and for a passenger service on the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne Line (est. £110m). He also mentioned electrification from Northallerton to Tees Port and upgrades for Darlington and Middlesbrough stations. (*Railfuture is strictly non-party political of course, but it just might be we railway advocates would want to cry 'bring it on John!' - Ed*)

During his speech, he rehearsed the figures demonstrating the huge gap between transport investment per head of the population in London, namely £2000 as against £220 per head in the NE.



Tyne Valley Community Rail Partnership (TVCRP) held three 'at home' sessions at Hexham Station on 24 November 2016 timed for 1530, 1730 and 1900 hrs. Each session was in the main station waiting room crammed tight with seats (and people) 'theatre style'.

Peter Myers, of *Northern*, provided an illustrated potted history of the previous franchise and then detailed what was in store for Tyne Valley services. Thus: two trains per hour to Carlisle (from Hexham) commencing May 2018; the new '*Northern Connect*' Carlisle-Middlesbrough service calling Hexham and Metro-Centre only to Newcastle, commencing December 2019; upgrading of facilities at small stations; making use of redundant buildings at Haltwhistle; deployment of more safety staff; better connections at Newcastle and improvements to bus/train co-ordination.

Then followed an address by David Wilkinson, *Northern's* crime reduction manager. There are now 55 Rail Safety Officers in post with the company as compared with only 20 under the previous franchise. The Safety Officers are employed by a private London based company and work in conjunction with BTP officers. They are mostly deployed on trains but with some station duties as well. They wear stab vests when at work!

The third speaker was a project engineer from *Network Rail* who provided (*very effectively I thought – Ed*) an illustrated talk on the big landslide near Corbridge last winter which had blocked the line for several days. He described how the matter was rectified. The engineering skill (and time) which went into dealing with this landslide emphasised just how much disruption these sort of unexpected (and sudden) incidents can cause.

Fourth and final speaker was Ian Davies, operating officer with ACORP, who spoke briefly about other community rail projects. Ian, who was fairly new to this job, said he had been enormously impressed by the passion of people for their local rail services. He reminded his audience of the importance of stations being welcoming and making people feel safe.

Ed- I attended the 1530 hrs session. Audience 40 strong, room absolutely full. TVCRP are to be congratulated on putting together such a user-friendly event. The railway was portrayed as having a very human face and a strong impression conveyed that the passenger definitely did come first. Evident there was a lot of goodwill among the audience for their local railway. And by the way, attenders were provided with tea and coffee plus a wide selection of home-made cakes. Somebody, somewhere knew just how to get their audience 'on board'! I suspect our own (Railfuture man) Malcolm Chainey, had not a little to do with what proved to be an enjoyable and very informative occasion.



Railfuture North East submission to National Infrastructure Commission (NIC): The Branch Committee agreed in December to make a submission to the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) in response to a consultation document that organisation had circulated in Autumn (2016). Our submission was dispatched on 10th February last.

The NIC was set up by the government to advise it about major infrastructure requirements in England and Wales. The Chair is Lord Andrew Adonis, one time Secretary of State for Transport. Though NIC has concerns such as a third runway at Heathrow, Hinckley Point Nuclear Power Station, Crossrail 2, HS3 et al nevertheless, your Committee felt unless we were prepared to make our own NE requirements known to such as the NIC, nothing was likely to happen. So, taking the bull by the horns, we suggested the following rail infrastructure projects on the basis that the economic and social returns achieved would merit them:

- Reinstatement of the Leamside (Pelaw-Ferryhill) line

- Upgrading of the Stillington (Ferryhill-Stockton) freight line to passenger standard
- Construction of a station at Ferryhill
- Construction of a station at Team Valley
- Upgrading of the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne line to passenger standard, plus construction of new stations

Our submission also mentioned Metro modernisation and the need for a station at Horden, but since both these projects have their own publicity vehicles we didn't go into detail. (See Horden Station comments below).

We should note that our submission was actually co-ordinated by Jo Ellis of NECTAR who included our proposals within NECTAR's own document. Railfuture contributors, and the projects they wrote about, were: Trevor Watson (Ferryhill Station), Damian Bell (Team Valley Station), Peter Walker (Stillington upgrade), Dennis Fancett (Ashington, Blyth and Tyne upgrade) and myself (*Editor*) Leamside reinstatement.

Station News



Those familiar with the 'politics' of the Durham Coast Line will know that there has been a campaign for many years now to have a station built to serve the townships of **Horden** and Peterlee (population nearly 30,000). And besides, there is currently a long (10 mile) gap between Seaham and Hartlepool stations which a station at Horden would suitably break.

On 5th January last, at the invitation of Durham County Council's Horden station project manager, Ray Brewis, three nominated Branch Members (*including the Editor*) met with him at County Hall.

Ray not only shared with us some of the traumas of trying to deal with Network Rail in the early stages of his involvement, but also explained how even a seemingly, relatively straightforward project such as this two platform wayside station could take an eternity to bring to fruition.

Originally five possible sites were 'on the table', these now down to the definite preferred one. The process is at GRIP3 and ready to move into GRIP4, provided no major hiccups emerge. (The site is close to former mine workings so the possibility of gremlins appearing, even at this stage, can't be discounted). Ideally Ray is looking for completion and hand-over by September 2020.

Some 3000 people live in very close proximity to the station. Soundings among them indicate strong support for the project. Forecasts suggest that 71,000 passengers per annum will use the facility – this is described as the ‘validation’ figure which is sufficient to allow building to proceed. *(But, of course, Railfuture members will be overly familiar with how often these sorts of estimates prove to be way below the actuality, so there is reason to believe that 71,000 total will be exceeded).*

Finance – total cost currently estimated at £10.5m. An application had been made to the Regional Growth Fund for £3.3m (on 9 February announced that up to £3m would be made available from this provided that “continued progress” was made on the project). The government’s New Station Fund had also been approached, plus the County Council will be contributing.

Ray had previously worked in the construction industry before joining the County Council. He thought his knowledge of building techniques (and costs!) had enabled him to challenge some of the early responses he had received from Network Rail. Fortunately, he now felt that he had reached a good understanding with his counterparts in Network Rail and was finding them very helpful.

Incidentally, Ray explained to us that technically *Northern* could only commit to stopping at the new station once it was actually built, just one of the various railway idiosyncrasies he had encountered on his journey of discovery! Will Grand Central (Sunderland-Kings Cross) services call at Horden? Who knows? *(Perhaps this is a matter for Coastliners RUG to pursue? –Ed)*

Many thanks to Ray Brewis for putting aside an hour of his time to bring myself, Ian Walker (Secretary) and Peter Walker (Chair of Coastliners) up to speed with this important project. Ray has undertaken to meet with us again as the scheme, hopefully, progresses.

NB: The Spring (2017) edition of Durham County News carries an upbeat piece about Horden Station.



Tees Valley Combined Authority and Darlington Council are co-operating to deliver 'Darlington 2025'. This proposed scheme is intended to remodel **Darlington Bank Top** station by creating dedicated platforms for local connections and future high speed

services. The scheme includes plans for 1500 new homes and one million square foot of commercial space close to the station. Why 2025? This is the year that marks the 200th anniversary of the birth of the Stockton to Darlington passenger railway in the Tees Valley.



Newcastle City Council announced, in February, plans to improve the area around Central Station. In particular, it wants to upgrade walking links from the south at the back of the station with a new public square around the Stephenson Monument and enhancements to the Orchard Street tunnel.

The Council and local businesses have been encouraged by the previous upgrade (pedestrian priority and glazing of the station portico) carried out in partnership with the former train operator East Coast which had attracted additional investment from businesses in the area around the station.

High Speed News



Four members of the Branch were among a party of 16 people shown round the **Hitachi plant** at Newton Aycliffe on 15th November 2016. The visit was organised by the NE Freight Partnership. The factory is getting into its stride now and we saw trains under construction for

Great Western, East Coast, and for ScotRail. Cleanliness and tidiness were very evident. And so was the near silence in the place – very different to the factories of yesteryear with their constant banging and clanging!

On 12th December *Insider News* revealed that Hitachi Rail Europe had unveiled the first InterCity Express (IEP) train to be completed at the Aycliffe facility.



On 15th November HS2 Ltd announced its preferred route for the Eastern Leg from the Birmingham turn off. This will take it to a station at Toton (to serve Nottingham and Derby): then to

South Yorkshire with the line now passing to the east of Sheffield, save that there will be a direct link into the existing Sheffield station: on to Leeds station situated near the

current City station with a link to the ECML on which High Speed trains will be able to continue to the NE and Scotland. Secretary of State Chris Grayling said that “HS2 would be a game-changer”.

On 20th January *Insider News* reported that the search had begun for a company to design, build and maintain a fleet of HS trains. A total of 60 high specification trains to transport passengers at 225mph are needed. The contract is worth £2.75bn and will be awarded in 2019.

The HS2 Board has appointed Mark Thurston as its new CEO. Currently Managing Director of cCH2M’s European operations, Thurston has thirty years’ experience in the rail industry. He started his career as an apprentice with TfL and has held roles at the Nichols Group and Metronet.

Property expert Robert Stones, regional development manager at specialist lender “Together” forecasts that the journey time reductions between London and Newcastle that HS2 will bring means that Newcastle will become an even more attractive commuter hub than at present. This in turn should aid both the residential and the commercial markets. Already the city has pledged to use HS2 as an opportunity to transform Central Station so making the surrounding area cosmetically appealing. He thinks this will mean more people would want to reside in the city, be it temporarily, such as students, or permanently causing properties to be more sought after and the city an alluring centre for businesses.

Further afield he notes that Hitachi is submitting a bid to build the HS2 trains from its Aycliffe plant, and if it were to win the contract it could grow its work force by hundreds. Overall Stones foresees Newcastle and its surrounds becoming a “regional hotspot”.

Stop press: 25 April 2017. *TransportXtra* reports that Transport Minister Andrew Jones has denied a claim in the *Sun* newspaper that HS2 is to be “paused”. According to the *Sun* some Tory MP’s are pressing for the project to be “delayed for years”. The *Manchester Evening News* even suggests that the Prime Minister has been persuaded to abandon HS2 outright. Andrew Jones rebutted the suggestions and said: “HS2 is going ahead. Construction will be under way shortly”.

The Wider World of Transport



Car use among younger people has dropped: Car use among younger men has dropped significantly over the last 20 years, a new study by the Independent Transport Commission (ITC) has revealed (*TransportXtra* 8 Dec 2016). The number of miles driven by men in 17-34 age group has fallen by 47% the study found. Over the same period their use of rail has increased by 49% while there has been an 11% increase in journeys by bike and a 4% fall in journeys on foot.

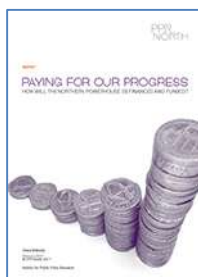
“Cars for young adults are increasingly viewed as utilitarian appliances, rather than inspirational goods” said ITC director Matthew Niblett.

Station usage: Footfall at the new Lea Bridge station in London is 30% greater over the first year than forecast reports *TransportXtra* (13 March 2017), and at the new Kirkstall Forge station in West Yorkshire the one year forecast figure was actually passed after only the first five months.

Expensive rail commuting in Newcastle: The *Journal* of 25th January reports that Newcastle is “one of the least affordable rail commuting cities in Britain”. (*Now there’s a surprise! – Ed*).

Coventry drops buses for trains: Coventry has, say *TransportXtra* (3 February 2017), abandoned plans for a bus rapid transit (BRT) scheme in favour of very light rail (VLR).

Metro extension pulls in passengers: Passenger numbers on the Midland Metro line between Wolverhampton and Birmingham have risen 30% since the route was extended across Birmingham city centre from Snow Hill to New Street station last June. Patronage in 7 months June- December 2016 was 3.63 million compared with 2.78 million in the same period of 2015.



Once again IPPR North has highlighted the massive discrepancy in the amount of cash per head allocated for transport investment in London as compared with that in the North East. In a report entitled “***Paying for our progress***” IPPR say that a Crossrail for the North is key to making Powerhouse aspirations come to fruition. It points out that at present it is quicker to travel by train from London to Paris than it is from Liverpool to

Hull, despite the latter cities being only half the distance apart. (*Insider News* 20th February 2017). Interestingly *TransportXtra* (24 January) reports that the Government has “vowed” to make transport funding levels more equal across England.

The Government’s Industrial Strategy Green Paper commits Ministers to taking account of the balance of spending per head between different regions in future transport funding allocations. The document says that “lower levels of infrastructure investment outside London has held back other towns, cities and areas”. This, it says, and a historic lack of joined-up planning coupled with strong transport institutions like Transport for London (TfL) “directly leads to lower growth and living standards”.

The NIC and Transport for the North will ensure better planning, the Document says. Ministers will in future, whilst continuing to prioritise the highest value for money projects, use infrastructure spending to re-balance the economy “as we seek to address productivity weaknesses across the country”. (*Bravo – the rhetoric is fine, but will it be implemented? – Ed*)

Less first class: Reported that DfT and Secretary of State Chris Grayling are considering reductions (or abolition in some cases) of first class seats on busy commuter lines say *TransportXtra* (15 March 2017). Aim is to make more room in standard class where there is likely to be less seating than now i.e. more standing. Ian Jack in the *Guardian* (18 March 2017) suggests that the proposal, if implemented, will make train travel less comfortable than at present. Question – will the axe eventually fall on first class on long distance trains?

Business News

“Which” magazine wants a fairer ticketing system: The “Which” organisation has campaigned over many months for fairer and less complex ticketing system. It hosted a meeting on 1st February with Rail Minister Paul Maynard. Already some experimental changes are being trialled by a couple of TOC’s. And the Minister has committed to putting pressure on the rail industry to flag up the cheapest available fares more prominently than now.

Housing at stations: A Housing White paper (February 2017) says railway stations are top priority for increasing home building. The government wants to encourage high density

housing projects close to (especially city) stations. Proposals include releasing redundant railway land as well as demolishing such as empty warehouses and under-used car parks.

House of Commons
Transport
Committee

**Rail franchising
Ninth Report of
Session 2016–17**

Franchising has failed – MP’s: Rail franchising has failed to provide the benefits stated in the 1990’s of increasing efficiency, reducing tax payer subsidy and lower fares. Without reform the system is “unsustainable” according to the cross-party transport select committee.

The MP’s say there is no incentive in franchises to improve efficiency given the low level of financial risk in operating them and recommends franchises covering smaller geographical areas so that they “present less risk to the tax payer, are not unnecessarily complex and are focussed on the market they serve”. Meanwhile, they say open access could provide greater competition on the inter-city long distance routes but cautions that operational risks need to be better understood.



The Northern Powerhouse: *Insider News* (30th March 2017) quotes Greg Hands, the International Trade Minister. When asked about next steps for moving the Northern Powerhouse from being just a concept or slogan Mr Hands said: “A significant part of this is about transport infrastructure.

Although the flagship scheme is HS2, the HS3 scheme is also really important for connectivity across the north, improving journey times – particularly from Leeds and Manchester”.

“About Chester-le-Track

Welcome to the real railway station at Chester-le-Street in Co. Durham, England, the town where the Bible was first translated into English.”

[Extracted from their wonderful (Ed) website]

Chester-le-Track: Boss Alex Nelson took a spectacular four-page advert in the *Durham Advertiser* of 18th February. All aspects of the business both at Chester-le-Street and Eaglescliffe are spelt out together with graphic displays of the Chester-le-Street timetables. Congratulations to Alex on compiling this bold and imaginative advertisement which quite literally puts the railway on the front page.

Go-Ahead Group hit by GTR woe: Newcastle headquartered Go-Ahead Group has lowered its full year expectations after enduring difficulties with its Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) operation. For the six months to 31st December 2016 Go-Ahead reported revenue of £1.72bn compared to £1.67bn the previous twelve months. However, pre-tax profits were down from £75.9m to £67m. (*Insider News* 1st March 2017).

David Brown, Go-Ahead Chief Executive said the company's overall performance had been "significantly impacted by a reduction in rail profitability due to losses from its GTR franchise as a result of ongoing industrial action".

The Air that we breathe..



Air Pollution: Government to back extension of "toxicity" charge on cars across England: According to the *Sunday Times* (2 April 2017) the Environment Secretary, Andrea Leadsom, is set to oblige councils in cities most affected by air pollution to take action that is likely to lead to similar charges on diesel vehicles as planned in London.

The claim that Leadsom will back a toxicity charge in cities such as Birmingham, Leeds, Southampton, Nottingham and Derby on cars as well as older lorries, coaches and taxis comes as the think-tank "Bright Blue" recommends that English cities have more powers to ban certain cars to protect children from illegal levels of air pollution.

Help Needed: The North Tyneside Model Railway Exhibition is being held at John Spence Community High School in North Shields on Saturday 29th July We have been offered a free stand to promote the work of *RailFuture*. If we are to take up this offer we need to have some volunteers. If you could spare half a day, or even a whole day, to help us it would be much appreciated. Please contact Trevor Watson (trevor.watson3510@hotmail.com) if you can help.

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Our websites: www.railfuture.org.uk, www.railfuturescotland.org.uk, www.railfuturewales.org.uk and www.railwatch.org.uk. Follow us on Twitter @Railfuture @Railwatch

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