

## Branch Bulletin – May 2018

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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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### From the Editor's Chair



Welcome to the **May 2018** edition of our twice-yearly Branch Bulletin. The railway “scene” in the NE (and nationally) these past six months has proved to be a real “mixed bag”.

Let's start with some positives. We've got new trains arriving soon for Trans Pennine Express (p.10), Northern (p.11) and the new “Azuma” IEPs are seen regularly on the ECML as they continue with their test programme. Tyne and Wear Metro have the money to buy their new fleet (p.14).

Whilst, as the *Railtalk* feature in *Modern Railways*, May 2018, notes, these new trains are but a pittance compared with the wholesale fleet replenishments now occurring in the South East, nevertheless the greater comfort they will offer, together with some relief to overcrowding, will be warmly welcomed by north of England travellers.

We've seen the completion of works at both Durham and Middlesbrough stations as well as essential track works just outside Newcastle Central.

Vivarail, the special enterprise founded by former Chiltern boss Adrian Shooter, which majors on the conversion of former London Tube stock for branch line running, has announced the creation of a small production facility at the Spectrum Business Park in Seaham (Co Durham) where it will manufacture parts for these trains. Currently six people are employed there, but this could grow to thirty over the next three years depending on the securing of orders.

Campaign group ‘*Living Streets*’ promoted a “walk to school” week in May which was predicated on the urgent need to help improve air quality,

particularly in school neighbourhoods. A short, hard hitting video around the theme “cities are for people not for cars”, together with media contact, ensured that the project received good publicity. Well done *Living Streets!*

Now for the ‘less good’ News. The VTEC franchise got into such large difficulties that they are handing back the keys on June 24<sup>th</sup> (p.9) There are concerns about the financial health of both the *TPE* and *Northern* franchises. On top of these problems there have been a whole raft of service cancellations nationally following the introduction of the May timetable and continuing industrial action on *Northern Rail*. We’ve also seen the demise of two rail related organisations in the North East: Chester le Track and NECTAR.

We must be careful, however, not to talk ourselves into a depression. There is much that is good about our railways and thanks to the sterling efforts of thousands of railway men and women the majority of passengers and freight customers experience an effective, and often enjoyable, service. Your editor, for example, recently travelled from Durham to Avignon (in France) and back. The VTEC trains, the Eurostars and the TGV’s were all comfortable, on time to the minute, and those staff encountered were courteous and helpful. This particular journey was a great advert for rail travel.

So, dear readers, be inspired to flag up the significant environmental advantages of rail, its ability to move large numbers of people efficiently in and out of busy urban centres, plus of course its excellent safety record. In reality the railway has many advantages over both its road and air competitors. In spite of the not inconsiderable challenges faced by the industry, and the uncertainty (and sometimes the ineptitude) of political decision making in Westminster, rail has a tremendous future.

**railfuture**

**NE Branch News**

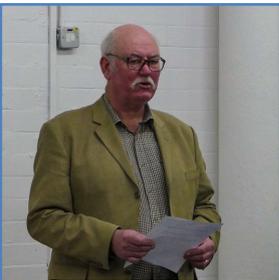
**We have a new Branch Chair!**

With unanimous acclaim from some thirty attenders at the Branch AGM on 17<sup>th</sup> March our new Branch Chair, Keith Simpson, stepped into the “hot” seat. He succeeds Trevor Watson who



had decided to stand down from the role after six years in post. Keith is well known in North East rail circles. He has been a regular participant in the life of our Branch for a long time – he was already vice-Chair, a member of our Committee and of the work group organising the *Railfuture* national summer conference to be held in Darlington on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2019. But besides all this he is also currently Chair of the Saltburn Line Users’ Group (SLUG).

Keith has a fund of knowledge about NE area train timetables and keeps himself well- informed about both *Northern* and *TPE*, so he is ideally equipped to take the job of Chair at this time. We wish him well in his new post.



Our previous chair, Trevor Watson, became Branch Chair in February 2012 at a time of considerable uncertainty for the Branch. He quickly got on with the job of guiding the branch through a period of hard work which included organising the *Railfuture* National AGM at Durham in May 2013 and engaging in various consultation processes concerning new franchises for *East Coast*, *Northern* and *TPE*. Besides the franchise renewals, Trevor also oversaw our involvement in contributing views about the creation of new umbrella organisations as part of the government’s devolution policy – primarily Rail North and Transport for the North.

During the second part of his tenure Trevor helped the Committee agree five specific NE infrastructure projects to be flagged up by way of a ‘campaign’ effort to try and persuade the powers that be that they were worth pursuing. These were subsequently submitted via NECTAR in February 2017 for consideration by the National Infrastructure Commission with Trevor having prepared the material in respect of one of our nominated projects, namely a new station at Ferryhill. More recently, this time under the *Railfuture* banner,

the Branch has submitted a response to a Network Rail consultation about future investment choices for the ECML.

Before he retired Trevor was a track engineer with Network Rail. With his extensive knowledge about the realities of infrastructure maintenance, renewals and enhancements, he was able to advise branch members accordingly to ensure we didn't make cranky suggestions either in our written submissions or at discussion sessions with train operators or Network Rail.

A secret rugby addict, Trevor used his sense of humour to good effect within branch gatherings. His willingness to represent us at numerous meetings both in the region and beyond was greatly appreciated by committee members.

So, thank you Trevor for stepping up to take the Chair when you did, thank you for sharing your professional 'know how' with us and thank you for your friendship. We wish you a good recovery from your hip operation and are delighted to know that you will continue to serve on the Branch committee.

## **Officers and Committee 2018**

Branch President: Martin Murphy

Branch Chair: Keith Simpson

Vice-Chair: VACANT

Secretary: Ian Walker

Press officer: Dennis Fancett

Treasurer: Damian Bell

*Railwatch* correspondent: Peter Walker

Other members of the Branch Committee are Trevor Watson, Dave Shaw, Peter Kenyon, Peter Wood and Tony Walker. Alison Cosgrove, Chair of *Railfuture Scotland*, attends as a rep of *Railfuture's* national Board of Directors.

***Please note - Keith Simpson extends an invitation to any interested branch member to attend a committee meeting in an observer capacity. Next one is scheduled for Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> June, venue Shakespeare Hall (Community Association), 71 North Road, Durham commencing at 1800 hrs.***

Your branch committee has met on three occasions since the last Bulletin was published. Dates were 28 November 2017, 23 January 2018 and 25 April 2018. Business, not reported elsewhere in this Newsletter, included:

- Branch web-site: aspiration to establish this with prominence to be given to our five “campaign” infrastructure projects.
- Collation of on-going information about these projects together with an identified key person for each one who could be contacted for publicity purposes.
- Future branch meetings - style/venues/topics/possible guest speakers.
- Ways of increasing branch membership.
- Branch representation at stakeholder and other meetings.
- The Great North Rail Project.

TfN Strategic Rail Plan – noted that NECTAR and Coastliners RUG had submitted responses.

### **The AGM – Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> March 2018 at Newcastle Arts Centre**



**Guest speaker at the AGM was Ian Coe, Principal Transport Planner with North East Combined Authority (NECA).**

Titled “Transport Plan for the North East” Ian’s address emphasised there was a government requirement for Combined Authorities to produce a plan setting out a strategic vision for transport developments within the Authority’s area.

He explained that in 2016 NECA had started to design a “transport manifesto”, one for *Metro* and local rail, and another for national rail.

The local one called for integrated ticketing with provision for smart payment: the withdrawal of Pacers: development of a regional express network: faster trains: more electrification: new local stations: reopening of disused lines: more Park and Ride facilities: and the upgrade of rail provision for movement of freight.

The national manifesto highlighted increased capacity and better reliability on the ECML: an improvement in long distance connections from market towns in the region: more and faster trains to Leeds.

Likely the plan would spurn some daughter documents such as ones concerning walking, cycling and buses. Timescale for the plan is yet to be agreed.

On finishing his talk Ian opened a question and discussion session. ***A synopsis of that session is appended to this bulletin.*** One matter raised with Ian, more than once, concerned the difficulty of knowing which organisation within the fragmented field of transport might be approached so as to get action on a specific issue. Ian conceded this was problematical.

Whilst our branch can happily endorse the content of the NECA manifestos, we do have to ask just how feasible achievement of the various aspirations within them might be? *(I was hoping for some clarity about the relationships between the various bodies now involved in organising transport provision in the North East. But in I was, in fact, left with a sense of uncertainty and a suspicion that transport planning and decision making was in danger of becoming bogged down in a bureaucratic and administrative quagmire! But at least Ian acquainted his audience with the reality and complexity of the contemporary transport situation in our part of the world. Ed.)*

### **Branch meeting – Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> April 2018, Shakespeare Hall, Durham**

Ray Brewis, Project manager for DCC, ran a session that had been designed to set out the historical context of the Horden Station project and then to acquaint members with the up-to-date position.



Ray alluded to some of the struggles he faced with Network Rail in the early stages including issues of cost. Fortunately, as a former construction engineer, Ray was “on the ball” where building and planning matters were concerned and was able to stand his ground with Network Rail officials. As together they worked through a seemingly endless procession of problems, they came to respect one another and now, according to Ray, enjoy a good working partnership.

The station is to be located at South East View in Horden on the Durham Coast Line between Seaham and Hartlepool. It will be the responsibility of the relevant franchise holder, currently Arriva Trains North. It is anticipated there

will be at least an hourly service in each direction, with an estimated 71,000 originating passenger journeys per annum.



There will be two unstaffed platforms with waiting shelters, benches, help points and CCTV plus a car park with at least 150 spaces and with taxi, drop off and bus route access. A new access road, footpath and cycleway are to be installed. The planned opening date is spring 2020.

It looks as though the necessary finance, something in the order of £10.8m has been secured via grants from the Local Growth Fund, Dft's New Stations Fund (which is putting up £4.4m) and matched funding from Durham County Council.

Some concern was expressed at the meeting about the likelihood of trains (probably only two carriages long) being full by the time they reached Horden, especially those going north. Ray promised to raise this with train company officials. He could not say if Grand Central were proposing to stop any of its trains at the new station.

This was an informative and encouraging session with Ray bringing home to us the complexities involved in bringing even a simple station halt such as Horden to completion.

**railfuture**

**National News**

**Railfuture National Summer Conference – 22 June 2019. Venue – Dolphin Centre, Darlington**

The Branch has accepted a request from the Board of *Railfuture* to mount the national Summer Conference for 2019. A special work

group comprising Keith Simpson, Peter Walker, Dave Shaw and Ian Walker has been formed to oversee arrangements.

Conference theme is to be “Rebirth of the Railways” with key-note speakers highlighting particular aspects of the “rebirth” process and detailing the resultant economic and social impacts both here in the NE and elsewhere.

Since railway history really starts in Darlington what better place to celebrate contemporary rebirth?

**May 2018**

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***Put the date (22<sup>nd</sup> June 2019) in your diary – Chair Keith Simpson is hoping for a big turn out from our branch for what promises to be a super event!***

***By the way, this year's Summer Conference takes place on Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2018 at the Hallmark Hotel, Court Square, Carlisle, CA1 1QY beginning at 10 45am. (Registration from 10am).***

***The event is free, but advance registration is required. Please email:- [carlisle2018@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:carlisle2018@railfuture.org.uk) to reserve a place.***

***Conference theme is: "The North West's crucial role in national rail connectivity". The Settle-Carlisle line and Borders Rail amongst the featured routes.***

We know already of at least five branch members who have booked. Travel along the beautiful Tyne Valley line to get there. Incidentally, the hotel is right next to Carlisle Citadel Station!

### **The Railfuture AGM at Edinburgh, Saturday 12 May 2018.**

*Report by Trevor Watson.*

First speaker John Finnie, MSP, explained how the Scottish Parliament worked with reference to transport issues and in particular rail schemes. He lamented the disparity between road and rail investment. He advocated a much more positive approach to developing freight by rail.



He was followed by Alex Hynes, Managing Director of the Scotrail Alliance. Alex is responsible for 5000 Scotrail and 2500 Network Rail persons. He is in charge of decision making and pointed out that ScotRail is the most punctual operator in the UK. He had banned skip stopping in

Scotland! Electrification of present projects would be complete by March 2019 and no planned scheme had been scrapped. Future electrification was suggested to Perth, East Kilbride and the Edinburgh suburban lines.

Currently ScotRail have 800 carriages, increasing to 1000 by end of next year when there will be 200 extra services and 40% more seats available.

Replacement windscreens are under test for the new Hitachi fleet and should

be in service by this July. Glasgow Queen Street Station improvements costing £100m are on time. Borders Railway passenger growth was accelerating, and it was planned to run three car 170 class trains on all off peak services. Alex also wanted the line extending to Carlisle. Twenty-six HST trains were to ply daily between Scotland's seven cities.

On a less positive note, rail freight carriage in Scotland was down 80% largely the result of the loss of coal traffic. New freight customers were being sought.

Final speakers were Fraser McDonald and Norman McNab from the Friends of the West Highlands Line. The organisation had started life in 1983 and has helped secure, for example, provision of seating on sleeper trains and the cutting down of certain groups of trees to restore views at strategic locations.

In the business section after lunch the Board was empowered to create new membership types, and reduce fees if they felt it necessary, previously a decision that could only be made at a members' meeting

## **Around the TOC's**

### **Virgin Trains East Coast**



One of the biggest rail stories over the past few months is the demise of the East Coast franchise held by the joint Stagecoach/Virgin company known as VTEC. Our last Bulletin (November 2017) contained news that the company's CEO, David Horne, had admitted VTEC was "currently loss making" with an £87m deficit predicted for 2017/18. But Horne said he "believed" the company would return to profit in 2019. Wishful thinking it turns out!

Both the railway and mainstream media have chronicled details of the franchise breakdown (the third to afflict East Coast in the space of some eighteen years), suffice to say that VTEC will officially terminate its contract with DfTon 24 June. On that date management of the East Coast services will pass to an organisation of "last resort" which, it is stated, will have temporary responsibility until some sort of "partnership" arrangement with private sector involvement can be devised. Incidentally the *Journal* (11<sup>th</sup> January) reported

that Virgin/Stagecoach would have to pay the Treasury £165 million for walking away from the franchise.

Following the failure of National Express in 2009, responsibility for East Coast operations was assumed by Directly Operated Railways (DOR), a special unit controlled by the Department for Transport (DfT) with four or five senior Executives actually “managing”. This time DOR as such no longer exists and it appears that the organisation replacing it comprises in fact three private sector consultancies – Arup, Ernst Young and SNC–Lavelin, each no doubt with their own hierarchical management structures. Quite how this equates with “passing responsibility to the public sector” (to quote Chris Grayling) is difficult to comprehend.

The new organisation of “last resort” is to be known as “London North Eastern Railway” (LNER). In his announcement about this to the House of Commons on 15th May, Mr Grayling attached considerable importance to the fact he was resurrecting an “iconic” piece of railway history. But, in his lack of attention to detail, he omitted the word “and” from the LNER title. The original “iconic” company was in fact the “L & NER” clearly signifying that it provided a link between the capital and the North East of England. Chris Grayling’s newly constituted outfit sounds very much as if it might be a London area train company with a terminus at Enfield! Will the missing “and” be restored you may ask?

In other news about VTEC *The Northern Echo* (12 February) reports that from May VTEC intended removing first class “quiet” coaches. Testing of the new Class 800 Hitachi IEP trains (known as *Azumas*) for East Coast Main Line services continues whilst some (all bi-mode versions) are already in commercial service on the Great Western.

## **TransPennine Express**



Gwyn Topham (Transport expert at the Guardian) reports that when First Group’s *TPE* won the Franchise in December 2015 it promised to pay the government premiums of £313m over seven

years. Contrast with the third-place bidder who said it would require a **subsidy** of £410m to operate the service over the same period! To make the franchise pay, First Group needs passenger numbers to grow rapidly, but in fact over the

first two years of the franchise, ridership has remained static. ***[LATEST NEWS: First Group have announced a provision in their accounts of £106m to pay for the losses that they now expect to make on the TPE Franchise. Their profits have taken a hit and the Managing Director has departed. It doesn't look like they plan to walk away from the franchise any time soon]***

As extensively reported in the railway press, production of the new CAF “Nova 3” loco-hauled carriages for Transpennine Express (TPE) is on schedule. Entry into service is expected by this December. The locos will be Class 68’s hired in from DRS and the trains made up in push-pull formation. They will serve the Liverpool-Scarborough and Manchester Airport- Middlesbrough routes.

Meanwhile we understand that construction of nineteen “Nova 1” trains (Hitachi five car bi-modes) for Liverpool-Newcastle services and twelve “Nova 2” Siemens class 397 five car EMU’s for Manchester – Scotland routes are under way.

The timetable changes operated from 20<sup>th</sup> May include:

- Faster timings between Manchester Victoria and Liverpool. Scarborough to Liverpool services to run via Manchester Victoria and thence to Liverpool via Newton-le-Willows.
- Two fast TPE services every hour between Newcastle and Manchester calling at York, Leeds and Huddersfield.
- More services on Sundays from Middlesbrough and Hull.
- Earlier/later weekday services from Scarborough and Middlesbrough.

### **Arriva Rail North**

*Northern* was just one of many TOC’s which were due to implement major timetable changes on 20<sup>th</sup> May to provide more services. In January, however, *Northern* learnt that Network Rail would be unable to deliver completion of the Manchester to Preston

electrification scheme in time for that date due to unexpected engineering problems. This meant that the DMU’s that had been expected to become available from that route for use elsewhere had to remain in situ. Result was that *Northern* was left short of rolling stock required for the planned timetable upgrade.

Because timetable planning requires a long lead in period, it was not possible for *Northern* to make all the necessary contingency arrangements to cover for the DMU shortfall. Some train crew rosters were not ready and not all arrangements for replacing trains (with buses for instance) or for redrawing schedules where there were simply not enough trains to go around, had been completed in time. The result: a significant number of services, particularly in the North West region, were in a mess on 20<sup>th</sup> May, more particularly so on the next day, a busy Monday. The position was made worse because of a refusal by ASLEF drivers to operate the established rest day work procedures which then gave the appearance of there being a driver shortage. Problems persisted over the following weeks.

Media reports painted quite a negative picture of the company. There were also some suggestions from RMT union that train staff had begun to experience verbal abuse from passengers who were venting their anger and frustration on 'front line' personnel who were in effect, the union said, protecting 'hidden' managers.

Gwyn Topham, the *Guardian's* Transport Correspondent, writing on 19<sup>th</sup> May, reveals that *Northern's* franchise agreement includes a Government subsidy of £1.4bn over nine years. Apparently, this is some £800m less than was requested by the third placed short-listed franchise bidder. Whilst *Arriva's* parent company *Deutsche Bahn* is well endowed financially, nevertheless *Northern's* services have been beset by the strikes over the future of guards, complaints about delays, cancellations and overcrowding. And just as this Bulletin was being prepared the Mayor of Manchester, Andy Burnham, is demanding an investigation into *Northern's* "unacceptably poor" service. Some MP's have come out in support of Burnham.

There was further woe on 21<sup>st</sup> May, the first 'ordinary' weekday of the new timetable, when numerous cancellations and delays occurred especially in the North West, a situation compounded by an apparent shortage of drivers. Inevitably the *Journal* dubbed the day 'Meltdown Monday'. And if all this wasn't enough, we understand that *Northern's* ridership dipped in the most recent reporting quarter. Thus, at the very time the company needs to maximise revenue, events are conspiring which may pose a threat to its financial stability.

The one-day strikes involving guards in the RMT union have persisted. The latest occurred on 24<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> May, the latter being the Saturday of the bank holiday weekend.

RMT have been more strident recently in presenting the case for the retention of guards on *Northern* trains. Union officials have been emphasising that the dispute is not about who opens/closes doors, rather it is about passenger safety. Meantime passengers have continued to endure the inconvenience (and frustration) each strike day brings. So where to next? It seems common knowledge that the franchise was let on the basis that a move to driver-only train operation was a key part of the contract between *DfT* and *Northern*. Thus, there are financial implications for *Northern* if its directors fail to abide by that arrangement. What is evident, however, is that *DfT* (i.e. the government) takes an anti-union stance in the matter, the inference being that *DfT* is determined to win (!) at any cost.

But for observers of industrial disputes over the years there is a realisation that in the end some sort of compromise has to be reached for a workable settlement to be achieved and staff and passenger goodwill restored.

At the moment, though, the reality seems to be that *Northern*, by virtue of the franchise agreement, is tied absolutely to the coat tails of *DfT* and is not able therefore to negotiate as a free agent with RMT. Not a very promising outlook! Maybe the time is approaching when the *Northern* board, together with the boards of the Go-Via TOC's, the other companies caught up in the same dispute, have to go to the Minister collectively and put to him in clear terms the need for them to be allowed to open genuine talks with their guards. It is imperative, surely, for the Minister, to understand the futility of allowing the present impasse to continue.

Despite this deluge of bad news some, but not enough, progress seems to be being made with both timetables and rolling stock: Indications are that the first of *Northern's* new "Civity" Class 195's (being built at CAF in Spain) are now being tested, with some expected in service by December, probably in the Leeds area.

From December (2017) the Sunday service to Whitby operates year-round, whilst from the same month additional Sunday services were introduced between Newcastle and Morpeth

**Tyne and  
Wear  
Metro**

Confirmation of a Treasury grant of £337million (not £373m as quoted in our November 2017 Branch Bulletin) towards the cost of constructing a new fleet for Tyne and Wear *Metro*, means that the long process of

planning and procurement can begin.

Thanks to a new agreement between NEXUS and Cross-Country Trains, through bookings from Cross Country services to Newcastle Airport became possible from 20<sup>th</sup> May. (North East Branch has been actively advocating such an arrangement over recent months!)

NEXUS, the public body which owns and manages *Metro* is to build an £8.4m railway skills centre in South Shields town centre.

It will be a state-of-the-art bespoke training facility delivering a wide range of infrastructure and operations training to the more than 1000 staff who work on *Metro*.

The new facility will include a 70 metre stretch of dual track including points, signalling and overhead line, plus a computerised driver training simulator. Also included is a mocked-up *Metro* station complete with a full-length platform, ticket gates, PA system, CCTV and Help Point. Work on the centre is scheduled for completion in Spring 2019.

Half of *Metro* passengers no longer use cash to buy their tickets. In 2017 there were 9 million transactions at *Metro* ticket machines two thirds of which were cashless. (*Journal*, 6 January 2018).

*TransportXtra* magazine reported on 17<sup>th</sup> March that Toby Hughes, the *Metro* boss, had “set his sights on a rail revolution in the North East”. Having secured funding for the new train fleet, Hughes now wants to turn to planning for both *Metro* and main line expansion. Gateshead *Metro* Centre and Washington both seem to be on his “to do” list. (*All power to your elbow Toby – Ed*).

NEXUS is to carry out major refurbishment works at three historic *Metro* stations in North Tyneside. The £700,000 project which was due to commence at the end of February, is earmarked for Cullercoats, Monkseaton and West Monkseaton with the trio undergoing modernisation to improve accessibility, security and energy efficiency.



“Convert under used rail lines into roads”, so says Lord Andrew Adonis, a former Minister of Transport, according to a report in *TransportXtra* dated 5<sup>th</sup> January 2018. Apparently, the noble gentleman had been musing about the day when driverless HGV’s take to the highways, an event he felt would put an end to freight by rail. QED – more roads would be needed!

Contrast with the sane (and upbeat) writings of a couple of contributors to the December 2017 bulletin of the Rail Freight Group (RFG). One by David Spavin, a correspondent who covers Scotland, setting out cogent reasons for enlarging capacity between Strathclyde and the north (longer freight loops needed as well as an increase in loading gauges). A key branch line re-opening at Levenmouth to better serve the bottling, grain and spirits trades, and a new inter-modal depot at Bathgate to tap into the big freight potential there are among his suggestions. The message from Spavin is that if the necessary infrastructure upgrades are forthcoming, then the contribution by rail freight to the Scottish economy will become all the greater.

Secondly from Julian Worth, Chair of the Rail Freight Forum, a call for the industry to be bold and think positively. “Coal is history” he says. The here and now success story is about the movement of construction and agricultural materials and inter-modal traffic, which are each growing year on year. He asserts that there is a huge opportunity for rail to tap into the transport of frozen foods. Road traffic congestion in the Midlands and the South East lessen the efficiency of road haulage in those regions thus creating opportunity for rail to step in.

“Rail freight can cut NOx and save lives” claims the Campaign for Better Transport (CBT). Transferring 2000 lorries a day to rail on each of four major corridors would cut nitrogen oxides by 10%, particulates by 7% and save eighteen lives a year. (Reported in *TransportXtra*, 19 January 2018).

According to the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT), the new HGV market declined 2.6% in 2017 following two years of strong growth. 45045 heavy trucks were registered in the year.

But light vans are definitely on the “up”. The RAC Foundation suggests vans are the fastest growing traffic segment in the UK with 70% growth in road miles over the last twenty years compared to 12% for cars and 5.5% for lorries. The growth is forecast to continue. But at a cost, since vans are contributing significantly to congestion that in places is both acute and chronic and costing billions of pounds annually. (*TransportXtra* 12<sup>th</sup> February 2018).

*Insider News* (15<sup>th</sup> March 2018) contains a piece about the new Forrest Park Business development at Newton Aycliffe. This suggests that the possibility of accommodating a rail freight inter-change may not be dead after all. Information that came to RFNE in May 2017 and reported in a previous branch bulletin had indicated that the rail freight part of the project would not be proceeding. Case of wait and see, but it is to be hoped good sense and a visionary approach will prevail!

## **Mainline Infrastructure**



### **East Coast Main Line (ECML) Route Study**

Last Autumn Network Rail (NR) published a paper containing a series of possibilities for improving the ECML and services using it. These were identified as being “near” term or “longer” term choices. Some were also classified as “step” changes or, major projects.

For ease of reference, the ECML was divided into sections from south to north. The Branch Committee agreed that we should make a submission in respect of

the York to Newcastle and the Newcastle to Berwick sections. Drafts of the proposed submissions were first circulated amongst the Committee and cognizance taken of the comments made.

Our stance basically was to applaud NR for those listed possibilities which we concluded made good sense and would help improve the economy of the ECML's catchment area. The theme of economic enhancement was a strong element in the paper.

An underlying assumption was that future passenger growth would be significant and it was likely that the number of long distance passenger trains traversing ECML between York and Newcastle would grow from the present 5 per hour to nine per hour.

Amongst possibilities listed were a power upgrade north of Doncaster, junction alterations at York Station to enhance capacity, a line speed increase to 140mph between York and Northallerton, a significant upgrade of Darlington Station including two additional platforms, alterations at Newcastle Central to make provision for longer trains and the construction of some new freight loops between York and Berwick, though the paper was not specific about locations of these or about precise timescales. Incidentally, the changes proposed at Darlington Station were predicated on the assumption that this is the primary gateway to the Tees Valley area.

Our submissions were substantial – electronic copies can be obtained from Branch Secretary Ian Walker on request. His email is:

[ian.walker2@googlemail.com](mailto:ian.walker2@googlemail.com)

In our comments to NR we voiced concerns about the overall timidity of its suggestions and also about a sense of a lack of urgency in driving them forward. Upgrading of the Stillington route for passenger use let alone reinstatement of the Leamside Line, plus commencement of a passenger service over the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne were all possibilities basically kicked into the “long grass”. The issue of local stopping train provision north of Newcastle was not adequately addressed nor were any new stations mooted.

We also challenged NR about its apparent lack of concern for those who live in the Middlesbrough/Stockton conurbation, some half million of them. Whilst it is correct to describe Darlington Station as a “gateway” facility for Tees Valley,

it is not correct to assume it should be the only one, or indeed the major one. We posited the idea that ECML should be viewed as a four line route between Northallerton and Ferryhill by upgrading the route from Northallerton, via Eaglescliffe, Stockton and the Stillington (freight only) line back to ECML at Tursdale with the creation of a decent railhead at Stockton to serve as a gateway station (or hub) for the old Teesside area.

Our submission included significant chunks from our earlier (February 2017) submission to the National Infrastructure Commission detailing our five suggested NE infrastructure projects for implementation which included new stations at Ferryhill and Team Valley.

**HS2**

A new report – “HS2: Getting the best out of Britain” claims HS2 will encourage collaboration in the NE, in particular across the software technology, gaming and creative businesses based in Newcastle and the growing number of software companies in Sunderland and Digital

City on Teesside. It also suggested that HS2 could make it easier for businesses across the region to connect, both to each other, the manufacturing plants, suppliers, universities and research centres in York, Nottingham, Derby and Birmingham, and sources of finance in London. HS2 services will join the existing rail network near York with trains continuing to serve Darlington, Durham and Newcastle. (*Insider News* 1<sup>st</sup> December 2017).

Lancashire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) are advocating extensive modernisation of Preston Station to turn it into a quality transport hub ready to cater for increased passenger numbers particularly when HS2 services begin in 2026. The LEP says the present shoddy state of the station gives a poor first impression of Preston. (*TransportXtra* 16<sup>th</sup> January 2018)

In the East Midlands Local Authorities and business groups are urging Network Rail (and DfT) to proceed with the construction of the new hub station at Toton well in advance of the planned arrival of HS2 there in 2033 so as to stimulate the area economy. (*TransportXtra* 17<sup>th</sup> January 2018)

Architects, designers and engineers have been selected by HS2 Ltd to modernise Euston station, and to design new stations at Birmingham, Solihull and Old oak Common (north west London) (*TransportXtra* 6<sup>th</sup> February 2018)

It is understood that DfT have given assurances that the collapse of the construction giant Carillion will not damage the HS2 building programme.

“It’s time for a brave decision Mr Grayling”, so writes one Roger Davies Kendal in the 11<sup>th</sup> May edition of *TransportXtra*. Kendal calls upon the Minister to cancel HS2 due to serious cost escalations. (*One estimate I noted recently quoted £51b as the now likely cost of HS2 – phase 1 -Ed*). Members of *Railfuture*, however, will be familiar by now with these periodic outbursts from supporters of the “Stop HS2” movement.

Elsewhere on the infrastructure front – not a lot to report. The extension to the south platform at Durham is finished whilst on 9<sup>th</sup> April the £3m “makeover” at Middlesbrough station was officially declared “complete” at a ceremony outside the main entrance in the presence of the Mayor, the Shadow Minister of Transport Andy McDonald and Mike Drewery of *TPE*.

During an engineering possession in January lasting several days some key rail switches in and around Newcastle Central were renewed.

## **Transport for the North**



Our new super transport body for the north of England *TfN* published its draft Strategic Transport Plan in December 2017. A plethora of explanation sessions were held across the north including at the Centre for Life, Newcastle, on 26<sup>th</sup> February which was attended by your Editor.

The full version of the draft plan can be found at: <http://transportforthenorth.com/stp/>

It identifies seven strategic corridors within which a series of proposals are set out. The North East is located in an East-West corridor described as embracing the “energy” coasts of Durham, Northumberland, Cumbria and North West Lancashire. Other relevant corridors are the East Coast to Scotland and the Central Pennines.

Space does not permit inclusion of any further details suffice to say first impressions suggest a bias towards road schemes. A specific criticism voiced is that the plan places too much emphasis on transport developments in the

connecting corridors themselves, but too little on developments within the cities and towns actually located in the corridor areas. Gateshead Council has made exactly this point saying that improving inter-city links will be of little value if travellers then come up against inadequate local provision.

Northern business and LA leaders have broadly welcomed the plan and talked of it as marking a “watershed” moment for the North. But we do well to remember that *TfN* is primarily, certainly at this stage, an advisory body with control of finance for new projects resting with the Treasury. (*TransportXtra* 14<sup>th</sup> April). Translated that means Whitehall will, like now, continue to have final say over what can and cannot happen.

*TfN*'s new CEO took up post on 10 January. He is Barry White, formerly CEO for Scottish Futures Trust where he led the organisation in improving plans and carrying out infrastructure investment in Scotland. He is said to have “a wealth of experience in implementing major investment programmes”.

And whither *Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR)*? Presumably it will be (or has been) subsumed into *TfN*? We await further information. Incidentally, Tim Wood was made permanent director of NPR in February. He is said to have “a wealth of experience in taking forward big infrastructure projects”. One recent ‘Powerhouse’ proposal has suggested that the primary Cross Pennine line between Leeds and Manchester might in future be routed through Bradford where a super new inter-change station would be created.



Campaign for better Transport (CBT) hopes the government may have now decided to end fare rises based on the **Retail Price Index (RPI)**. It advocates instead in future using the **Consumers’ Price Index (CPI)**.

An independent body to monitor the imposition of **penalty fares** has been recommended.

A “root and branch” **review of rail ticketing** is to be conducted by the Rail Delivery Group (RDG) in partnership with Transport Focus. RDG says it recognises that “the present system is too complicated”. A public consultation is to be launched in June, with a report promised for “the Autumn”.

The number of **bus passengers** in England and Wales has dropped to its lowest level in a decade. Figures from the Local Government Association (LGA) show passenger journeys in 2016/17 dropped to 4.44 billion, seventy million fewer journeys than in the previous year.

Buses in England travelled 1.1% fewer miles in the same period largely due to councils being forced to cut funding for local services.

Problems of **air pollution and congestion** impact negatively on key aspects of the public's health: namely cardiovascular disease, lung cancer and respiratory diseases along with rising obesity levels. All this is consequent upon the lack of physical activity due to car dominated lifestyles and road safety fears. Many transport academics and practitioners are asking if some form of road pricing is necessary in order to reduce traffic volumes and so help fix these challenges. (*TransportXtra* 13 January 2018).

Same theme – Nick Cohen and Hugh Muir in two separate pieces in the *Guardian* of 29<sup>th</sup> January suggest that if we really want to save the NHS we will have to give up our cars (Cohen), whilst Muir says, “the problem with cars is not parking – it's that too much motoring is killing us!”

Kings Cross station, the internal revamp of which was completed in 2012, has been awarded a prize in the **London Planning Awards** event held in January last. Network Rail scooped the top award in the section entitled “Project – five years on”. The iconic new roof structure over the passenger concourse has drawn wide acclaim whilst the public satisfaction rating has been universally high. (*TransportXtra* 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2018).

In a filmed interview with Phil Wilson, MP for Sedgefield, at Durham Station shown on *Look North* on 2<sup>nd</sup> February, Lord Andrew Adonis (him again!) said, quote: “**The Leamside Line** should have reopened ten years ago”. This visit to the North East, incidentally, followed closely upon his resignation as Chair of the National Infrastructure Commission due, he said, to his dismay at the handling of the VTEC franchise breakdown by Chris Grayling.

Health and air quality once more: some German cities are considering the introduction of **free public transport in an effort to reduce air pollution**. (*Guardian* 14<sup>th</sup> February 2018).

Andrew Haines, currently CEO of the Civil Aviation Authority, is to take over as CEO of Network Rail from this Autumn. He will succeed Mark Carne.

**Chester-le-Track**

In February came the news that Alex Nelson was having to close his ticket agencies at both Chester-le-Street and



Eaglescliffe Stations. Chester-le-Track, the company he founded in 1999 at Chester-le-Street with a branch at Eaglescliffe opening in 2011, was now sustaining heavy losses at both sites. Margins had always been low, but recently company directors had had to provide large sums of money simply to keep the enterprise afloat. Alex had concluded that the position was unsustainable and advised that the company would cease trading from 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018. The posts of all eight members of Alex’s team became redundant on that day.

Alex blamed the company’s demise on the rapid development of ‘smart’ ticketing together with rail passengers increasingly using the internet to make their train bookings. Incidentally, he pointed out that smart ticketing has led to the closure of every ticket office on the London Underground.

This particular closure is “sad”, because when Alex started he was way ahead of his time in pioneering new ways of accessing railway booking systems. In addition, he transformed the station at Chester-le-Street. Previously it had been an unstaffed halt for many years. His team became renowned for their helpful and friendly service and together with Alex helped to cultivate an atmosphere of welcome at the station itself as well as in their many telephone dealings with passengers.

We understand, incidentally, that *Northern* were intending to maintain some level of booking personnel at Chester, and Grand Central similarly at Eaglescliffe.

**NECTAR**

A second sadness to report is that the North East Combined Transport Activists’ Roundtable – NECTAR – is to cease operating, at least in its present form. The decision was taken in principle at a meeting of the organisation’s Executive group on 10<sup>th</sup> February this year and confirmed at a further meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> April.

Set up in 2001, NECTAR is one of a handful of Transport Activists' Roundtables which are committed to the promotion of an ethos of sustainable transport on land, sea and in the air. NECTAR was able to engage with issues which included road building, airport expansion, public transport provision- train, tram and bus, walking, cycling, air quality, urban and rural planning policies, freight transit and the well-being of our National Parks.

Nic Best, from CPRE, was one of the founder members of NECTAR along with Peter Walker and Martin Murphy from Railfuture. Besides *CPRE* and *Railfuture*, other affiliated groups included *Living Streets*, *Coastliners Rail Users' Group*, *Saltburn Line Users' Group*, *Tyne Valley Community Rail Partnership*, *Cycling UK*, *Friends of the Earth*, *Go North East Buses*, *Blue Kyak planning consultancy* and *Chester-le-Track*.

NECTAR gained access to a wide range of forums and was able to exert influence on such as the North East Chamber of Commerce, Newcastle Airport, the think tank IPPR, Highways England, Transport for the North, NECA, North East Freight Partnership, Northumberland and Durham County Councils and the Tees Valley Authority.

Throughout its seventeen years NECTAR has maintained a close association with us since rail has obvious sustainability hallmarks. It has made numerous written submissions such as in response to official consultations, to various House of Commons Select Committees and to Local Authorities by way of responses to area plans. NECTAR reps have also contributed to a number of official enquiries in public and at other formal gatherings where it has been possible to convey the sustainable transport message.

So why is NECTAR closing? Essentially because its key members, including its officers, are ageing and newcomers have largely failed to appear, not an uncommon situation of course in many contemporary special interest groups.

Members of the NECTAR Executive will try and maintain some limited on-going communication with each other through email and Facebook so that ideas and strategic thinking about the very broad transport issues with which NECTAR has tangled during its lifetime are kept alive and passed on to other interested organisations.

NECTAR has made an important contribution to transport debates and thinking in the North East, and sometimes at national level as well. That it is unable to continue is unfortunate. Unless, of course, if any one reading this bulletin is interested in helping to maintain NECTAR in its corporate form, or would like to be involved in designing and administering a web site, then please get in touch with us.

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**And finally.....**

**We hope you enjoyed reading this Branch Bulletin. If you have anything to say about the content or have suggestions to make about future editions please contact the Editor, Tony Walker [anthony.walker@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:anthony.walker@railfuture.org.uk)**

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