



March 2020

Welcome to the Rail User Express.

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With the collapse of regional airline Flybe, and a growing awareness of the environmental impact of air travel, the railway industry has to step up to the plate. Several train operating companies (TOCs) set the tone with the offer of free travel to Flybe staff and customers until 8 March, but there needs to be a concerted effort to improve both the resilience and the capability of long-distance rail travel.

Roger Smith

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

Friends of the West Highland Lines

The West Highland Lines have the highest growth rate on the Scotrail network, but Fort William - Mallaig has the lowest train frequency. A totally new timetable with faster and more frequent trains at regular intervals is needed, but may require an infrastructure upgrade at Corrour on Rannoch Moor. Initial journey times could be Oban-Glasgow in 2h50m, and Fort William - Glasgow in 3h25m.

The winter timetable sees a new Sunday service between Fort William and Mallaig, and an additional Sunday service each way between Glasgow and Fort William. However, the strengthened timetable is not a franchise obligation, so could be withdrawn if take-up is poor. Use it or lose it!

Scotrail is transforming its single-car Class 153 units to carry 20 bicycles, with racks tailored for sporting equipment and large items of luggage, and additional seating. It will add them to its existing services, starting this summer on the Oban line. But although the carriages are meant to form part of a 'scenic train', the table seats do not appear to line up with the windows!

Work to remove loose vegetation and install rock netting will protect 14 cuttings from potential landslips and rock falls over a 2.5mile stretch of the Mallaig - Fort William line around the iconic Glenfinnan viaduct.

Levenmouth Rail Campaign

On BBC Scotland, LMRC Chair, Eugene Clarke cited the Campaign's determination, its excellent community support, and consensus backing by elected representatives as key factors in driving its success. The decision to reinstate the rail service has changed the mood music around Levenmouth from one of despair to a more optimistic one, which can ultimately be game changing in terms of expectations and opportunities for young people. The Campaign and the community need to be fully engaged in influencing the final outcome.

However, LMRC is only learning of developments and delays via the press or Parliament. It understands that Fife Council is advertising the post of Levenmouth Blueprint Manager for the third time, and awaits an update from NR regarding the apparently delayed appointment of a Liaison Officer.

But visible signs of activity on the disused line do offer some encouragement. Trees have been cleared, perhaps to facilitate Atkin's GRIP Stage 3 design process due to report by June, GRIP 4 Single Option Development, and GRIP 5 Detailed design (involving ground testing etc). Surely it is downhill from there to GRIP 6 Construction, test and commission, GRIP 7 Scheme hand-back, and GRIP 8 Project close out.

Ribble Valley Rail

In 1999 Ribble Valley Rail News reported a high profile event at which the great and the good celebrated the opening of the Clitheroe Integrated Transport Facility. However, since early 2010 successive governments have chosen to strangle local authorities of funding across the board. Bus subsidies were cut, many routes withdrawn, and interchange facilities in places like Burscough Bridge, Carnforth and Nelson closed, as Lancashire County Council was unwilling to cover running costs. Public anger delayed closure of the Clitheroe Interchange, and every effort was made to find another operator, but sad to say it closed its doors on 5 February.

When Stuart and Gayle Dean popped into the Hellifield station cafe for some quick refreshment, its owner Steve Goodall said that they would probably be his last customers as he was due to retire that day. Within a few days, the Deans had agreed to take over the café, now known as Shed24H, after an old engine shed. The couple have since been surprised by how busy it has been. On Steam Train days additional parking is available, and the enthusiasts flock to the café. It is also a stopping off point for cycling and walking groups. A Railway Heritage room has been opened, with some items available to purchase, and an additional room is available for meetings.

Northern Weekly Salvo (Paul Salvesson)

Paul cites the North of England, particularly the 'metropolitan belt' from the Mersey to the Humber, as a prototype for a '[railway for the common good](#)': part of the economic and social fabric, big enough to achieve economies of scale, but focussed on key regional markets that have suffered historic neglect but are experiencing (in part) regeneration. Lancashire and Yorkshire Railways – constituted as a mutual business, and with a closer relationship between operations and infrastructure – would form the basis of the modern railway that the North sorely needs, and offer long-term stability.

To align with that of the new railway company, NR's regional structure should also embrace the whole of the North of England. The current structure based on the East and West Coast Main Lines is London-centric and deeply unhelpful, with split responsibilities and lack of focus on the needs of the North as a whole. NR(North) would assume most functions currently provided by the two regions, whilst retaining a smaller 'system operator' for critical oversight of the network as a whole.

Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester lines (STORM)

RUX congratulates STORM Matters and its editor Frank Salt on reaching its 500th edition on 28 February.

Frank and another STORM member awaited a Castleton train only to witness the dreaded X mins late, then XX mins late, and the inevitable Cancelled. Having reached Manchester Victoria via car to Rochdale, they waited to see which platform they needed for the 1113 Kirby train. At 1100 it was shown as on Platform –, so they moved to the overbridge to await enlightenment. When a late running train made announcements inaudible, and with Platform – still up, Frank suggested Platform 5, only for platform staff to advise Platform 6 - when Platform 5 it turned out to be! "I cannot believe this; it always uses 6" opined another member of staff. It cannot be stressed enough: if two long travelling regulars who fully understand the vagaries of rail travel are put through this platform roulette, how do infrequent train travellers feel?

Driver training on Northern Rail's bimode Class 769s - converted Class 319s - was ongoing until the unit broke down in Southport. The two three-car Class 150 units that Northern is gaining from GWR should come in useful when it loses its Class 153 single-car units to Scotrail this year.

Ten years ago, STORM responded to a Northern Rail Utilisation Study. Ten years on, and Rochdale still has no connectivity to Piccadilly and the south, while Littleborough and Smithy Bridge services are abandoned whenever it floods at Walsden.

Platforms 13 and 14 at Manchester Piccadilly are now being treated like 'a station within a station' to improve peak time travel for passengers. Up to 40,000 people use the two through platforms each day - equal to all of Nottingham's seven platforms combined. The changes include:

- A dedicated team of 12 new customer relations staff and four supervisors, with staff information screens on the platforms
- An airport style satellite lounge with new customer information screens, charging points, extra seating, free water points and free toilet facilities
- More safe waiting space along the platforms and behind the red line
- Windbreaks to protect passengers from bad weather.

The satellite waiting room now works like an airport departure gate during peak times, encouraging passengers to go down to the platforms only when their train is about to arrive.

North Cheshire Rail Users Group

Upgrade of the Castlefield Corridor, including Manchester Piccadilly and Oxford Rd stations, was shelved in favour of signalling improvements that provide only marginal benefits. It is too late to incorporate cuts in May, so expect late running to continue pending service reductions in December. Currently, up to 20 movements/day from Trafford Park Freight Terminal (to the west of the city) use the Corridor to access the WCML. A westerly route could reach it at Newton-le-Willows/Earlestown on the Chat Moss line via the old Great Central Glazebrook-Wigan/St Helens line. The alignment is largely intact, although a section now forms the Culcheth Linear Park. The cost of providing a west-facing link from the Freight Terminal weighed against an earlier study being taken forward, but with Castlefield congestion becoming more acute, such a route would certainly mitigate the problem.

There is good news regarding Northern services in the North Cheshire area: the new 100mph Class 195s serve all diagrams, and the May timetable will cut 5mins off the journey from Chester to Manchester Victoria, with additional peak time stops at Frodsham, Helsby and Runcorn East. Some very attractive promotional fares are on offer too: Ellesmere Port and Chester to Leeds can be had for under £15.00.

NCRUG won the Mayor of Frodsham's award for 'Best Community Group', while the 'John Hobbs' award officially recognised its 30 years hard work saving and preserving the Halton Curve for future rail use. The Chester to Liverpool Lime Street service was withdrawn in May 1975. In 1990 NCRUG was formed to prevent the final closure of the Halton Curve. The group twice succeeded in stopping the line from being ripped up, and the trackbed sold to the local highways to extend the adjacent road. In October 2014, George Osborne awarded £10m to redevelop the line. The project took 4 years to complete, and the final cost topped £20m. Passenger services resumed on 19 May 2019 after a gap of 45 years.

English Regional Transport Association

Across the English Regions, old railway trackbeds and routes have no protection in the face of laissez-faire planning and development pressures, leading to massive encroachment. Unless land is set aside for realigning railway routes it is lost, and compulsory purchase is both costly and contentious. HMG should designate at least some of these key corridors as potential national assets, strengthen the hand of those wishing to protect former rail routes and realignment spaces where blockages have occurred, and make it a mandatory policy of planning consideration and practice.

The Wey & Arun Canal Trust has submitted a planning application for its canal to encroach on the Downs Link between Rushett Common and Bramley. Currently a footpath and bridleway, it utilises the trackbeds of the railway lines that once linked Horsham with Guildford and Shoreham respectively. Objections citing [WA/2020/0004](https://www.planning.waverley.gov.uk/consultation/2020/0004) can be sent to consultation.planning@waverley.gov.uk by 31 March.

Chesham & District Transport Users' Group

In her general election leaflet Cheryl Gillan MP said that she would campaign for fast local trains, which "were critical to local businesses and commuters". Accordingly, the Group agreed to write to her in an effort to restore the fast off-peak services from Chesham.

Step Free Access at Amersham is expected this month or next, but at Harrow-on-the-Hill it has slipped to June or July.

Metropolitan Line services still suffer delays and cancellations resulting from the introduction of new automatic signalling in the Baker Street / Finchley Road area. The biggest problem is 'slip and slide', which occurs when the train is moving but wheels are not turning. Baker Street staff offer inconsistent excuses, while the indicators at Harrow-on-the-Hill and Baker Street often display incorrect information. Up Chesham trains often terminate at Harrow-on-the-Hill, and start back at Wembley Park without any information being made available to passengers.

The next signalling migration from Euston Square to Stepney Green and Monument needs two consecutive weekend 'possessions'. These are available this year only in May and September, around other engineering work. Each migration requires modified software, and each change 12 weeks testing. If a migration is aborted, the old system can be re-instated late on Sunday. After three days this needs a day's stoppage to change the signals, as all the old components have to be re-tested.

Rail and Bus for Herefordshire

The Marches Rail Users Alliance (MRUA) dialogue with the operator is clarifying the respective roles of Transport for Wales (TfW) (the Welsh Government side) and TfW Rail (Keolis-Amey, the private side): TfW draws up the timetable, allocates staff and rolling stock, and deals with user groups including MRUA; TfWR operates the service, and deals with community groups.

The three services between Holyhead and Cardiff in under 4h30m all omit the stops previously served at Craven Arms and Church Stretton. This appears to breach the franchise agreement by favouring Welsh over English stations, and the MRUA Chair has contacted the DfT on this matter. Meanwhile, TfW is running a bus from Shrewsbury to Ludlow that, in theory, replaces the missing stops. RBfH considers that this routine use of bus replacement renders the timetable non-compliant.

During a time of rapid change and growing concern for the environment, both RBfH and Sustainable Transport Herefordshire (STH) are pleased to see a Council that is making a significant shift to a balanced transport plan for both Hereford City and Herefordshire. STH has long campaigned for integrated transport, so it is encouraging to hear words that indicate a move away from an overemphasis on car use with its inherent environmental and health problems.

Cotswold Line Promotion Group

A North Cotswold Line Task Force proposal to the DfT to invest £200m in the Cotswold Line would enable a core frequency of two trains per hour each way between Oxford and Worcester, with most services extended to and from Great Malvern, Hereford or Kidderminster. Alternate trains would skip some intermediate stations, to maintain a balance between service frequency and journey times, and to fit in with the half-hourly express services between Oxford and London Paddington. Additional double track would be needed between Evesham and Pershore, and Oxford and Hanborough. The business case claims that the investment would generate £4.46 in enhanced economic activity and employment for every £1 invested, with almost 400,000 extra rail journeys each year. The Task Force has asked the DfT to add the project to its Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline list, and contribute towards the £3m cost of further development, with a view to completing the necessary work as soon as possible, and providing the additional services by 2024-25.

Tarka Rail Association

Barnstaple-Exeter now has an hourly service, and Sunday services are doubled. However, an earlier Sunday service arriving in Exeter at around 0940 would help people get to work, and also facilitate journeys further afield. TRA would also like to see earlier and later trains on Monday-Saturday, as well as direct trains to London or the North - the requirements of GWR's new Direct Award (DA3) from 1 April are still not to hand. The three-car Class 158 trains that replaced the Pacers have been well received, although a fourth carriage is desperately needed on trains from Barnstaple in the morning peak.

The Dartmoor Railway Community Interest Company entered administration on 7 February. No trains are running, and Sampford Courtenay, Okehampton and Meldon Viaduct stations are closed to the public. The Dartmoor Railway Supporters' Association maintains a presence on Okehampton Station, and fully supports DfT's remit to GWR to provide a regular Exeter-Okehampton train service "as soon as practicable".

RAILFUTURE

Rf welcomes new members, both individual and groups: the more we are, the more effective our campaigns. Join [here](#). From the "Membership Types" menu top right, select either the appropriate category of individual or, to affiliate, select "RUG or similar". Read the latest from Rf and its Campaigns by clicking on [News and views](#), [Press releases](#), [Railfuture in the news](#), and [Railfuture consultation responses](#).



There was a very healthy response to the 2020 Annual RUG Awards, which will be presented at the National AGM in Birmingham on 27 June. Over 20 nominations were received, covering all six award categories, spread across nine of the 14 branches, and including all three nations of Britain. A Rf Vice-President from the Judging Panel will visit each nominee during the coming three months. Nominees could also think about how they would use their 5-minute slot to enthuse and inspire fellow rail users to greater things! Caution: that is still just 5 minutes per nominee, even if nominated in more than one category! The Branches and Groups Day this year will be on 24 October, also in Birmingham.

Rf Chairman Chris Page has [welcomed](#) the go-ahead for Phases 1 and 2A of HS2: "We're delighted that the Prime Minister has recognised the contribution that investment in our railways can make in addressing economic development, social imbalance and environmental concerns across Britain. To get maximum benefits, the full scheme including Phase 2B must be completed as a single programme, delivered in increments, and designed to maximise capacity available on the national rail network. Cost control is important, but any descoping must not be allowed to reduce the capacity of HS2, given its essential role in supplementing existing main line routes, including the West Coast, Midland and East Coast Lines, as well as urban rail capacity in Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds."

However, HS2 Chief Executive Mark Thurston told the Public Accounts Committee that HS2 could hit planning problems if Crossrail 2 doesn't get the go-ahead, as it would be needed to cope with an influx of HS2 passengers at its [Euston St Pancras station](#).

Rf Policy Director Ian Brown CBE reviews the [Prospects for light rail](#) in Britain, and concludes that they are bright for all seven existing systems, as well as the Docklands Light Railway and the Tyne and Wear Metro. 2020 will see the Welsh Valley Lines transferred to local control, with expansion and electrification blurring the distinction between light and main line rail. A light rail ring around London may be a long way off, but the true test will be new starts in other British cities, such as Leeds, Bristol and Cambridge.

RAILFUTURE EAST ANGLIA

As well as discussing the two big announcements regarding East West Rail (EWR), the latest edition of [Rail East](#) has interesting articles on the potential for on-train technology, and the planning factors to inform the decision on a new Cambridge South station. Phil Smart speculates on what East Anglia can look forward to in the next ten years.

RAILFUTURE WEST MIDLANDS

RFWM welcomes the WM Mayor's 20-year plan to improve rail connectivity. It would see 21 new stations, including re-opening the Sutton Park Line starting with Aldridge station, re-opening Pelsall and Brownhills stations, and with a new one at Tettenhall. There would be new Coventry stations at Coundon Road, Foleshill, Coventry South and Binley/Willenhall, and in Birmingham at Balsall Heath and Dudley Road. The total cost of around £15 billion, or £750 million/year for the next 20 years, would be met by additional funding from central Government, contributions from housing and commercial developers, and borrowing against the future income from ticket sales on the Metro.

Buses still replace train calls at Ludlow and Craven Arms. Despite the Marches Line achieving significant passenger revenues in Herefordshire, Shropshire and Cheshire, TfW appears to prioritise services to Welsh stations, possibly in breach of the agreement between the DfT and the Welsh Assembly.

RFWM was invited to a West Midlands Railway (WMR) Round Table Conference to review the challenges of recent months and plan for 2020. WMR announced a five-point Improvement Plan: simplify the May 19 timetable; hire more train crew to improve availability; improve the way they maintain trains; reset services at lunchtime, so that delays in the morning don't disrupt evening journeys; and work with NR both to reduce congestion at Euston, and increase line speeds at New Street.

ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIPS

Following the success of the historical posters designed by the Leeds-Morecambe CRP for Bentham, Wennington and the closed stations served by the old 'Little North Western' Railway, new artwork panels have been created for Clapham, Giggleswick, Long Preston, Hellifield, Gargrave and Skipton stations.

The CRP is now looking to create similar panels for the western end of the line between Carnforth and Heysham Port, including Lancaster and Morecambe. This part of the line was famous for pioneering electric services, with overhead cables brought into use in 1908. Converted to 25,000 volts in 1953, and in use until 1966, it was a test bed for the eventual electrification of the West Coast Main Line.

CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT

A significant win for CBT: the Government has announced £5bn to improve bus services and cycling in England. Small towns sorely need better public transport: some that lost their train service in the Beeching cuts are now losing the replacement bus services. The funding announced for buses and rail re-openings must include action to reconnect these '[transport deserts](#)'.

TRANSPORT FOCUS

TF and London TravelWatch (LTW) have entered a formal partnership. Anthony Smith is now CEO of both organisations, and LTW has a new director, Emma Gibson. Together they will look at ways to maximise the difference they can make for transport users.

As key stakeholders, TF and LTW have jointly reviewed the Office of Rail and Road's Accessible Travel Policies to ensure they are welcoming, informative and clear for passengers. They hope that the policies can be more uniform and consistent. Every train company participates in the Passenger Assist system, but their policies and leaflets often make it seem as if each has a different system. Whereas the Disabled Persons Protection Policies had to be updated annually, the new policies will typically need to be updated only where there is evidence to suggest they are not being implemented appropriately, or where ORR considers a material change has been made without approval.

ENGLAND'S ECONOMIC HEARTLAND

EEH will launch its Transport Strategy for consultation at its annual conference in July (see Events). Meanwhile, a summary engagement report of its Outline Strategy is available [here](#).

Recent EWR announcements demonstrate the momentum behind the scheme. Mayor Dave Hodgson, Chair of the Strategic Transport Forum (STF), said: "EWR will have a transformational impact on our economy, and do so in a way that offers an attractive alternative to the car...there's a huge appetite amongst our residents and businesses for the scheme – as demonstrated by the unprecedented success of the section between Oxford and Bicester since it opened in 2016".

EEH welcomed some of the proposals set out in the East Midlands Railway timetable consultation, but warned that failing to provide direct services from the region to the Midlands and beyond will see economic opportunities left unrealised. The STF is concerned that the key driver for the timetable appears to be faster journey times to London to the detriment of intermediate stations. It wants EEH to help EMR use the flexibility in its franchise to develop proposals to maintain direct services between key centres of activity and the East Midlands.

...and now the rest of the news...

HMG's operator of last resort took over the Northern network on 1 March. MD of Northern Trains is Nick Donovan, who also chairs the Rail Delivery Group's independent Network Performance Board. A new panel led by OLR Chairman Richard George will advise on Northern services, together with the Mayor of Greater Manchester, the Leader of Leeds City Council, and other regional leaders, industry leaders and passenger representatives. However, Rf North East is annoyed that virtually every area across the Northern railway network is represented, apart from those managed by the North East Joint Transport Committee.

Representative bodies covering business, passengers, freight, and community groups have called on Transport Secretary Grant Shapps to kick-start an ambitious "rolling programme" of rail electrification, if the Government is to deliver on its aim of decarbonising UK rail by 2040. Once the Midland Main Line is electrified to Market Harborough, there will be no more construction-ready schemes in the pipeline, leading to a loss of capability and skills, a key factor in cost increases. Further electrification cannot wait until the next rail funding cycle in 2024; a ring-fenced fund is needed now to allow work to continue.

The HS2 Ltd submission under the Schedule 17 of the HS2 Act that sets out the planning rules has unveiled the design of Old Oak Common Station. Six 450m long high-speed platforms situated underground will connect directly with eight conventional train platforms at ground level served by the Elizabeth Line (Crossrail) between Reading, Heathrow and Central London, and trains to Wales and the West of England. A decision on the planning application is expected this summer.

DfT's £500m '[Restoring Your Railway Fund](#)' will support projects at three different phases of development:

- An ideas fund, to support proposals sponsored by MPs working with local authorities and community groups
- Funding to speed the development and delivery of schemes with an existing business case through the GRIP process, and those needing further support to progress to an outline business case
- A further £20 million round of the New Station Fund, subject to at least 25% match funding secured at the time of the bid.

Dan Jarvis MP, Mayor of the Sheffield City Region, has challenged the new Chancellor to support the region's ambitions and reduce inequalities through sustained investment and devolution of powers. To better connect communities and businesses of South Yorkshire to the other towns and cities across the North and the UK, he must commit to deliver:

- The £300m+ scheme to connect Doncaster Sheffield Airport (DSA) to regional and national rail networks within the next 5 years. The Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline should formally adopt the project, and allocate resources to further develop its business case.
- A full HS2 and the Northern Powerhouse Rail programme, including a new Dearne Valley Parkway Station at Goldthorpe, east of Barnsley, a new mainline rail station in Rotherham, and the extension of tram-train services across South Yorkshire.

And right on cue, the Sheffield City Region, Doncaster Council and the Peel Group (owners of DSA) have submitted an outline business case to the DfT for the DSA rail connection. With just 4.5 miles of new track, and a 22:1 return on a £300m investment, the GatewayEast Growth Hub Rail scheme would alleviate congestion on the East Coast Mainline (ECML), and almost quadruple the 2.4 million people living within a 90-minute rail journey.

Not to be outdone, Sub-national Transport Body Midlands Connect is urging the Chancellor to fund [Midlands Engine Rail](#), a £3.5 billion package of upgrades with the potential to add 736 services to the rail network each day, make the most of capacity released by HS2, and introduce services that would bring high speed trains into Nottingham and Leicester city centres.

With the outline business case to reinstate passenger services between Ashington and Newcastle from 2023 complete, a further £10 million has been committed for work on the detailed design stage. Subject to funding, the first phase would see four stations at Northumberland Park, Newsham, Bedlington and Ashington, with those at Seaton Delaval and Blyth Bebside opening over the next two years.

Worcestershire Parkway station opened on 23 February. It is fully accessible with lifts to all three platforms, and serves both the Worcester – London Paddington and the Cardiff – Derby and Nottingham lines.

Planning applications have been submitted to Walsall Council to reopen Darlaston and Willenhall stations. The project to restore Walsall to Wolverhampton passenger services is led by Transport for West Midlands (TfWM), part of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), and the West Midlands Rail Executive (WMRE), in collaboration with the DfT, NR, WMR, Walsall Council and Wolverhampton City Council.

A new NR report estimates the cost of work associated with upgrading Ely North junction has increased 20-fold to £500m. The wide range of interventions includes remodelling Ely station and Queen Adelaide junction, a new bridge, and upgrading more than 100 level crossings.

The Mayor of Watford has urged the Prime Minister to help revive the Metropolitan Line Extension (MLX) from Croxley to Watford Junction via Vicarage Road, which failed when the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, withdrew his support. The scheme is "shovel ready", although its Transport & Works Act Order has expired, so Parliament would need to pass this legislation again for the scheme to proceed.

Edinburgh City Council has granted permission for a visitor attraction on the Forth Bridge. Up to three groups an hour of 12 - 15 people will don safety harnesses, before being led to a viewing point at the top of the south cantilever. Each tour is expected to last around two and a half hours. Longer-term plans for visitor facilities at the north cantilever could offer access to the top via a lift.

In just two months, December 2019 and January 2020, no fewer than 1372 fare dodgers on Greater Anglia paid on average £286 in fines, court fees and restitution. Only those who travel with no intention of buying a ticket are taken to court. A further 4-6,000 people were given a penalty fare for using the wrong ticket, such as an adult travelling on a child's ticket, or using a railcard discount without a railcard. As well as uniformed Revenue Protection Inspectors, Fraud Investigation Officers in plain clothes use the latest technology and systems to detect fraudulent activity such as delay repay fraud rings.

The four ringleaders of a counterfeit train ticket scam have been jailed for a total of 24 years. Sold at half the regular price, the tickets worked on ticket barriers, and covered weekly and monthly rail travel between London Zones one and six. Between 2016 and 2019 the scam cost rail operators an estimated £8million.

NR has opened a STEM learning facility at its national centre in Milton Keynes, to inspire young students to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering and maths, to close vital skills gaps. Schoolchildren and community groups can engage in a range of STEM-based activities, including a virtual reality cube, which provides a 3-D experience of travelling in a train cab.

The [46th edition](#) of Barry Doe's rail franchise map shows the change of operator from Northern Rail to DfT OLR Northern Trains. It is the last version to be designed by Image Circle, which has produced all 46 editions, so Barry is now seeking another designer, who can use the relevant artwork and software.

Stop Press: [Rf Kent](#) has a link to the illustrative brochure on [Planning for Growth on the Hoo Peninsula](#). There are two public drop-in events on 19 March, and a consultation open until 17 April (see below).

,,,and finally

Tens of thousands of people booked journeys across the North of England and Scotland in TransPennine Express' flash £1 sale - but you had to be quick: it sold out within two days.

It's the end of the line for the [Weymouth Harbour tramway](#) that opened in 1865 to serve the Channel Island ferry service, but last saw a train in 1999. The rails now serve no purpose other than nostalgia, but are a hazard to cyclists, particularly in the wet. DfT will put £1.1m towards the expected cost of £1.5m.

CONSULTATIONS

- Mole Valley District Council: [Draft Local Plan](#), closes 23 March.
- Hertfordshire County Council: [Draft Rail Strategy](#), closes 30 March.
- Scottish Environment Protection Agency: [The Leven Programme - Connectivity Project](#), closes 3 April.
- Network Rail: [Reigate Station Upgrade](#), closes 6 April.
- Network Rail: [Huddersfield – Westtown Upgrade \(2\)](#), opens 16 March, closes 10 April.
- Medway Council: [Planning for growth on the Hoo Peninsula](#), closes 17 April.
- DfT: [Closure of Newhaven Marine Rail Station](#), closes 19 April.

Please advise [Roger Blake](#) of any other consultation, eg that of a local transport authority.

EVENTS

Do please keep your events coming, both to me and to [Roger Blake \(Railfuture\)](#), who maintains a [List of Events](#) and a [List of Key Dates](#) for consultations, franchise changes, CP6 planning, service alterations for major rail projects etc. As a Calendar of Events embedded in a document may be discarded, a stand-alone list would be very helpful.

Blob colour indicates the various types of event:

- Rf events (RUGs are cordially invited).
- National & regional rail events.
- Local Group events.

March

- Saturday 14. English Regional Transport Association, The Red Well, 16 Silver Street, **Wellingborough**, Northants, NN8 1BD, 1500
- Thursday 19. The Rail Reform Group, The Waldorf, Gore Street, **Manchester**, 1800.
- Saturday 21. Ribble Valley Rail AGM, Trinity Church Hall, Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, 1400 (Also 7 April, 5 May, 2 June at the New Inn, Clitheroe).
- Tuesday 31. Levenmouth Rail Campaign, Fife Renewables Innovation Centre, Ajax Way, **Methil Docks**, KY8 3RS, 1830 (and the last Tuesday of every month).
- Tuesday 31. Chesham & District Transport User Group, Town Hall, **Chesham**, 1930 (and 12 May).

April

- Wednesday 1. Rugby Rail Users Group, Claremont Centre, 43 Clifton Road, **Rugby**, 1930.
- Thursday 2. Rf London & South East, Sussex and Coastway Division, Toy Museum, **Brighton**, 1800 (also the first Thursday of each month (except August) at various venues).
- Saturday 4. Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Rail Passengers Association, Wharf Station, Talyllyn Rly, **Tywyn**, 1145 (Also 16 May, Royal Naval Club, Market Street, **Aberystwyth**, 1215, and 6 June, White Lion, **Machynlleth** 1115.)
- Saturday 4. Rf North West / Yorkshire, Brian Jackson House, 2 New North Parade, **Huddersfield**, HD1 5JP, 1300. (Also 13 June in Bromborough and 5 September).
- Saturday 4. Mid-Anglia Rail Passenger Association AGM, Friends Meeting House, St John's Street, **Bury St Edmunds** IP33 1SJ, 1400.
- Saturday 18. Rf Scotland AGM, PS Maid of the Loch, **Balloch**, 1400.
- Saturday 18. Rf Wessex AGM, Mayflower Village pub, Commercial Rd, **Southampton**, 1100.
- Saturday 18. Rf Wales AGM, **Shrewsbury** Station ground floor meeting room, 1400. Guest speaker Lee Robinson, Development Director Rail, Transport for Wales
- Saturday 25. Rf West Midlands AGM, Priory Rooms, Bull Street, **Birmingham**.
- Saturday 25. Rf North East AGM, Newcastle Arts Centre, Westgate Road, **Newcastle**, 1400.
- Saturday 25. English Regional Transport Association Conference, The Courthouse, Church Lane, **Berkhamsted**, HP4 2AX, 1400.

Further Ahead

- 2 May. Peterborough-Ely-Norwich Rail Users AGM, **Thetford**, 1030.
- 13 May. Rf London & South East, Eastern Division, St. John's Church, Stratford Broadway, **London**, E15 1NG, 1830 (and second Wednesday of every alternate month.)
- 29 May. Friends of the West Highland Line AGM, Alexandra Hotel, **Fort William**, 1230.
- 19 June. Friends of the Far North Line AGM and Conference, Ross County FC, **Dingwall**.
- 27 June. Rf AGM and RUG Awards, Quaker Meeting House, 40 Bull Street, **Birmingham**, B4 6AF.
- 14 July. England's Economic Heartland Conference, Venue 360 - The Riverside, 20 Gipsy Lane, **Luton**, LU1 3JH.

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